

## BRASS in perfect harmony

By Graeme Morton, Your City



Calgary's BRASS barbershop singing quartet includes, clockwise from top left, Doug Marwood, Terry Crowe, Don Craig, and Len Lang.

BRASS wouldn't blow their own horn, so their peers in the barbershop singing fraternity did that for them.

The Calgary-based quartet was inducted into the Evergreen District Hall of Fame at the association's weekend convention in Burnaby. They're only the fourth quartet and the lone non-competitive troupe to be awarded such an honour. The Evergreen district covers Alberta, B.C., and the US Pacific Northwest, involving more than 2000 singers.

Brass was honoured for their untiring efforts in coaching and encouraging other barbershop troupes across the west as well as a music education program in a city elementary school.

"BRASS has been in operation for about 20 years and we've had the same four fellows for the last 12 years," says Len Lang, the group's bass vocalizer.

"We get into family feuds like any close organization, but we also have a lot of fun," says Lang, who's been singing barbershop for almost 50 years.

Doug Marwood is the group's tenor. Terry Crowe sings the baritone line while Don Craig is the lead (melody) singer. Lang is 71 while the others are in the 60's.

"We try to work a lot of light comedy into our performances. We sing a lot of classics but the audience always loves it when you can make them laugh too," says Lang. "Plus, performing as many times

a year as we do keeps you in pretty good physical shape."

Lang says a group favorite is a metric version of the old classic Five Foot Two Eyes of Blue. "There's a line that goes ... 'She's a centimeter shorter than a meter an a quartet,'" grins Lang. "We looked up in our metric conversion charts for every term we could use like grams and gigajoules. They love it when we sing it in the States, although I don't think they know what it means."

For the last four years, BRASS members have been teaching a weekly 'music club' class for Grade 3 students at Alex Munro Elementary in the city's northeast. The children participate in round singing, learning to play the ukulele and some line dancing.

"We had the students' group perform at a seniors' complex last year and after the concert, the kids and the old folks hugged each other. There were plenty of tears," recalls Lang.

Lang and Crowe are retired while Marwood and Craig have their own businesses which allow them to maintain a busy performance schedule. They've played an average of 70 dates for the past couple of years. They perform at seniors' homes, the Stampede, Heritage Park, for Spruce Meadows functions and at trade shows.

"We keep saying every year that we've got to cut back; that we're getting too old to keep up this pace. But it's tough to say no when so many people ask us back year after year," says Lang.

Barbershop singing is experiencing lean times attracting new recruits. "Sadly, there's not a lot of young people getting involved," says Lang. "That's why we're so committed to the music club at Alex Munro. If we can encourage one or two kids out a class of 30 to start singing or pick up a musical instrument, then that's one small, positive step."

BRASS will be performing on the October 19-20 weekend at the Rosebud Dinner Theatre, near Drumheller.

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BRASS stands for: Bow River Authentic Singing Society