

Four Freshmen Society PAST PRESIDENTS

Edd Townsend, John Bangs, Ted Driscoll, Don Follett, Tom Purvis, Dick Baldwin,
Mel Myers, Neil Lantz and Donna Gallaway.

VOLUNTEERING By Past President, Neil Lantz

I began my experience as a VOLUNTEER while working as a teacher and later as an administrator in the Fort Wayne Community School District. I've lived all my life in Indiana and am proud to be from the same state as The Four Freshmen. In fact, despite the age difference between the original Freshmen and me, all of us began our higher education at Butler University in Indianapolis. I was a decade after The Four Freshmen, but the only ones of us to graduate from Butler were Ross and Bob who received honorary degrees several years ago. Clearly, my home state should be justly proud of claiming The Freshmen for the last 77 years! I lasted only three months at Butler before contracting the 1957 "Asian Flu" while at the same time experiencing an emergency appendectomy. After a week in the hospital, I was directed to go home to Fort Wayne to recover completely...so much for my education at Butler.



When healthy enough to return to college, I had decided to transfer to Indiana University in Bloomington where I earned both undergraduate and graduate degrees over the next few years. Years earlier, The Freshmen had also dropped out of Butler and met Stan Kenton who introduced them to Capitol Records. I mention Kenton because I was a big fan of his band but had little interest in The Four Freshmen, however

popular they were becoming across the country. In those same years, I was also busy — led a west coast-style jazz octet at IU, met and married Sara Lou, and became an administrator in the university system.

Along the way, my interest and appreciation of The Freshmen vocal harmony increased, and I became a fan. I especially enjoyed their instrumentation along with their singing. I can't remember how long ago I first began seriously or attending one of their gigs, resulting in becoming a big fan and supporting the FF Society.

Meanwhile, I continued my work as a university administrator and also began my VOLUNTEER

experience with the Society, ultimately serving as President of the Board. Over those same years, I also VOLUNTEERED for the United Way and served as a Disaster Duty VOLUNTEER and later as a Board Officer of the Indianapolis Area Red Cross.

Much of my VOLUNTEERISM had begun when our son was old enough to play baseball and I was his Pee Wee League coach. An opposing coach also was responsible in Indianapolis for recruiting someone to chair a committee that would host the baseball competition of the 1982 multi-sport National Sports Festival featuring the top national collegiate athletes from around the country under the United States Olympic Committee. That VOLUNTEER work connected me with the USBF, later renamed USA Baseball. I was recruited to chair the baseball committee the following year when the festival was played in Colorado Springs. Over the next few years, I continued as a VOLUNTEER and was



elected to be President of the USA Baseball Board of Directors. This proved to be a great opportunity as it afforded me to attend and serve on a number of international committees over the years, including the Pan American Games, Baseball World Championships, and the Olympic Games in Spain and in Australia.

After our team won the 2000 Olympics, I decided to cut back somewhat on VOLUNTEER activity. That decision held until 2008 when Sara Lou and I agreed to VOLUNTEER as Co-Chairs of the organizing committee for the Four Freshmen Society celebration of the 60th year of The Four Freshmen "Back Home Again in Indiana". She and I also co-chaired the committee for the 2016 convention in Louisville. Along the way, I had been elected to the Society Board and served as President until I "again" retired in 2020. I was subsequently named as a Member Emeritus of the Board of Directors.

In my VOLUNTEER life, I had the opportunity and pleasure in both USA Baseball and the Four Freshmen Society to meet many new friends and their families. I remain ever so thankful for those friendships and will always remember and value the opportunities and experiences to serve as a VOLUNTEER for two major interests in my life, baseball and music.

Batter Up!
Neil Lantz

