

## FOUNDER RECAPS FRESHMEN YEARS

### Q & A: BOB FLANIGAN

By Jerry Fink

In a world where fame often is fleeting, this is the 60th year the Four Freshmen have been harmonizing their smooth jazz and pop melodies.

The quartet launches its anniversary tour at the South Point in Las Vegas.

Although the Four Freshmen have undergone several incarnations since the original four vocalists came together in 1948, the sound has remained constant - complex and sophisticated harmonies by singers who accompany themselves with instruments.

The jazz combo, whose fan base included such legends as Stan Kenton, Dizzy Gillespie and Woody Herman, traces its roots to Butler University in Indianapolis. The original members were brothers Don and Ross Barbour, cousin Bob Flanigan and Hal Kratzsch, all of them music majors. Since then dozens have been counted among the four. The current lineup includes Bob Ferriera (a Freshman for 15 years), Brian Eichenberger (11 years), Vince Johnson (eight years) and Curtis Calderon (six years). Flanigan, now 81 and a resident of Las Vegas, was with the group the longest - almost 45 years before retiring in 1991. He still owns the group's name and was on hand to introduce the Four Freshmen at the South Point Show in January. The former vocalist/trombonist recently talked to the [Las Vegas Sun](#) about his life and his group.

#### **Q: Why did you decide to move to Las Vegas after you retired?**

**A:** We were living in San Fernando Valley, up in the Granada Hills. I just decided I didn't like it there anymore. There were too many people. I said I've got to go someplace where there's still a small-town atmosphere. So we moved to Las Vegas. The rest is history. But I love the desert. And we enjoy Las Vegas.

#### **Q: What made you decide to retire?**

**A:** I always said as long as I could sing the part I would stay, but the minute I feel like I'm not doing it I'm going to quit. And I did. I didn't want to embarrass the group or myself. I still believe in what the group does. It's still worthwhile. It's musical. I stayed until I thought I should leave.

#### **Q: You, personally, were on the road for almost 45 years. Was it difficult?**

**A:** I don't mind the road. That's the thing that got to most of the people who were with the group and ended up quitting. Three of the biggest road rats in the world - Stan Kenton, Duke Ellington and Woody Herman - all three said I was the worst road rat they ever saw. The road never bothered me.

#### **Q: How did the group first get together?**

**A:** We were in college together, studying to be music teachers, and that's where we started singing together. We all grew up singing harmony parts in our families. Don and Ross were singing barbershop. I wasn't involved in that. When they decided they wanted to do something else, I went in with the group. I had a high tenor voice. We started off copying things that Mel Tormé and His Meltones (formed in 1947) - and Artie Shaw and Stan Kenton. We did all the arrangements by ear until 1953. We started off singing a cappella, but all of us also played instruments, so on the road we started playing as well as singing.

#### **Q: Initially, what were your plans?**

**A:** We envisioned ourselves just singing in college, having a good time doing it, and then we decided we had something worthwhile and decided to go on the road, which we did. We were only going to go on the road for a year and then go back to school but we started doing some business and said, "OK, one more year." Then