

# JOHN BANGS: FFS LEGEND REMEMBERED

*(Note: author Wayne Corey and FFS Wisconsin state representative Michael McCoy were signed up as FFAS members at the same concert in Madison in 1991. Wayne & Mike represented the Four Freshmen Society at the memorial luncheon for John in May.)*

John Bangs touched our lives. John was president of the Four Freshmen Society –then called the Four Freshmen Appreciation Society -- from 1990-through 1996. He took charge of a struggling fan club shortly after its founding. He ran the Music Mart from its inception until 2002. But there is much more to the story.

John passed away April 26<sup>th</sup> at age 87. Even in death John Bangs continues to have a significant impact on the lives of every Four Freshmen fan. John helped found the FFS because he believed preserving the Four Freshmen was important. He knew that the Freshmen have a unique sound with a core group of strong fans. He was determined to expand that base. He succeeded. Former FFS president Dick Baldwin said it perfectly: “John took it seriously and made us all pay attention.”

Yas Ichiura, FFS Japan representative, met him in the early days and recognized John’s role in keeping both the society and the Freshmen alive. “The FF couldn’t have survived without his passion and effort to support the group. He was such a nice and generous person,” Yas said.

Everyone reading this loves the Four Freshmen. The Four Freshmen Society lives, the Four Freshmen are still singing, most of us own lots of Four Freshmen CDs and many of us have made enduring friendships. Much of this is because of John Bangs, the lovable crew-cut curmudgeon from Oshkosh, Wisconsin who kept the society alive. Leading like-minded Freshmen lovers, John nursed the FFS to robust health.

Freshman Bob Ferreira met John when Bob joined the group in 1992. “John worked tirelessly to make the FFS what it is today. His gruff, no-nonsense demeanor was as endearing as his passion for the Freshmen sound.” Added FFS historian Christian Rank, “He was very instrumental in making the FFS the world class organization that it is today.”



**John Bangs, FFS president  
1990-1996**

John Bangs WAS the FFS Music Mart for many years. And the Music Mart, together with memberships, financed the society and its growth. A fortunate few got to visit the physical presence of the Music Mart in John’s basement. Yas Ichiura was there in 1992. Yas visited John in Oshkosh before riding to the Columbus, Ohio convention with John & Doloros. “It was so interesting to see various materials of The Four Freshmen, besides hundreds of beer cans from all over the world around the wall,” Yas said. Stacks of Four Freshmen CDs and cassettes were surrounded by John’s massive collection of beer cans. Yes, two of John’s passions were on display in one room.

John chaired five of the first dozen conventions held by the society. Three of those gatherings – 1991, 1994 & 1999 – were held in John’s hometown, Oshkosh. The conventions weren’t held in Oshkosh because the modest Wisconsin city is an entertainment and hospitality mecca. It

isn’t. The conventions were held in Oshkosh because John Bangs lived there and, by golly, if no one else would host a convention John and Oshkosh would provide a hearty welcome for us. So we had three conventions in Oshkosh and we had wonderful times. In 1991 attendees even got to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary of John & Doloros.

Telling John Bangs stories can’t begin to capture his personality and the passion for the Freshmen that saw him help save the society and then lead its growth. John’s obituary included a favorite quote: “I spent most of my life hunting & drinking beer. The rest of the time I wasted.” Well, not all of it. John spent an immense amount of time devoted to the Four Freshmen and the Four Freshmen Society. All of our lives have been enriched by John’s dedication. Moreover, for many of us our lives have been made better by knowing John. As we said when we lost John’s good friend Chick Trafford, “It’s a blue world without you.”

