

...Conference Hosts

by Linda Harrison

Dave Blackwell (continued from page 10)

When he was ten years old, his mother took him to see "The Benny Goodman Story." As they left the theater, he said, "I want to play clarinet like Benny Goodman." The next day his mother bought him a clarinet and arranged for a teacher, and David Blackwell's musical career was on its way. At Four Freshmen Society (FFS) conventions, we see him leading and playing at Jam Sessions and Wannabee gatherings, but we don't know the road his life has taken to get him to that point.

Dave's father was an electrical engineer who had many important jobs. Because of this the family moved several times in Dave's early years -- Indiana, Wisconsin, New York -- so the clarinet got lost in the shuffle for a while. When Dave's family moved to New Jersey, he started playing again. Eventually the family moved back to Fort Wayne where he developed his skills in earnest.

Dave recalls: "I joined the wonderful high school band at Northside High School in Fort Wayne where they were playing opera overtures and all kinds of difficult music, and I thought, 'Wow -- this is something else!'" He started taking lessons from Carl Bartlett, an outstanding clarinet teacher who helped him develop his clarinet skills.

"I started writing arrangements for the Blackwell Family Band who just performed in our living room for our own enjoyment when I was about 15 years old," said Dave. "My mother was on piano, my dad on drums, my brother on tenor sax and I was on clarinet and alto sax. There weren't any arrangements available, so it was a good introduction for me on how to write them."

Dave continues: "What dawned on me while I was writing these arrangements down is that I could clearly hear in my head what I was writing on paper. That was when I made up my mind I was going to be a high school band director instead of my original direction of becoming an artist."

Dave went to music school at Indiana University in Bloomington. He recalls, "That was a wonderful time for me because the IU School of Music was a world-class school and I had to work very hard to improve my playing, conducting and teaching skills." He completed his student teaching in Fort Wayne and graduated with a Bachelor of Music Education degree, then spent three years teaching band and choir music to high school and elementary students at three schools every day of the week in Ridge Farm, Illinois.

At age 25, Dave was invited to become the music teacher and band director for Syracuse Junior High. During this time, he received his Master of

Science in Education degree. Four years later, Dave took over the high school band and continued teaching in the Wawasee School Corporation for a total of 35 years. His years there were filled with concerts, contests, marching and jazz bands and Broadway musicals. Dave had a reputation for being tough, but he wanted to get the job done right, which led to many first-place awards over the years. He gained the respect of a great many students who have become music teachers, professional musicians and just friends. Dave finished his career by retiring in 2003 after 38 years in the classroom.

While Dave was still teaching, he began to perform more often. Kim Lobsiger, Marlene's son, invited him to join The Music Express, a six-piece dance band, with Marlene's husband as vocalist, Marlene and Dona Longbons on keyboards, Kim on trumpet and flugelhorn and Mike Shively on drums. They needed a clarinet/sax player so Dave joined them and often wrote arrangements for the band.

At the same time, he joined the Fort Wayne Area Community Band and soon became the conductor, a position he currently holds. Shortly after retirement, he began to play in senior communities, which has continued to the present. Currently Marlene, Dave and Ron Orman, a member of FFS, still perform for parties, special events and in senior communities under the name The Music Express.

Dave has spent his entire career conducting, performing, and writing arrangements for various music groups, and one of his favorite kinds of music to play is Dixieland.

In 2007, Dave and Marlene went to a jazz festival in Marshall, Michigan, where they rediscovered The Four Freshmen. The following year they attended their first Four Freshmen Society convention in Indianapolis. For the last 15 years they have been supporting the Freshmen by attending their performances and hosting the 65th Anniversary Convention and now the 75th. Since that time Dave has served as Grant Director on the Board of the Four Freshman Music Foundation.

Dave organizes the Thursday night Jam Session for the conventions by having the performers send the name and key of each song in advance for the back-up group to be ready. Each person can then perform in a pre-determined order to ensure a program that flows. For the Jam Session finale each year, he arranges a true jam song that represents the location of the convention. Surely this year, the choice should be "Back Home in Indiana."

