

# Youth continuing barbershop music's tradition

By Aldrich M. Tan  
of *The Northwestern*

Thirty-two teenage boys gathered Tuesday afternoon in the Oshkosh West High School choir room to prepare for their next performance.

But the school choir director was nowhere to be found. Instead, 18-year-old Jacob Oxley instructed his peers to "sing more like leads."

Oxley directs the Oshkosh West Barbershop Chorus. The boys are learning brand new music for the annual barbershop show on March 24 at the Alberta Kimball auditorium. They sing strict barbershop music, which is always four part harmonies and always acappella, Oxley said.

They also caught the national eye. The chorus will be part of a high school barbershop chorus feature in an upcoming edition of *The Harmonizer* by the North American Barbershop Harmony Society.

"They are the epitome of what we are looking to form more of around the country," said James Estes, student activities coordinator for the Barbershop Harmony Society. "From a musical standpoint, they are completely student-run. That helps the kids discover barbershop in the safety of their peers."

Jacob said his brother, Joshua Oxley, started the chorus in 2002. Both Jacob and Joshua are members of the Winnebago Land Barbershop Chorus and are third-generation of barbershop performers.

The chorus first started with 16 people, Oxley said. Currently, the barbershop chorus has 46 members. Members include choir singers, band members and other students who aren't in music programs, Oxley said. The group sees a steady growth of 10 members per year.

The group practices after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays, Oxley said. The biggest challenge is to keep participants involved.



Jacob Oxley, left, director of the Oshkosh West High School Barbershop Choir, has a group practice with the bass singers when they learn the song "That Railroad Rag" Tuesday in the West choir room. The choir will be featured on the cover of the *Harmonizer*, the magazine of the Barbershop Society.  
*Northwestern Photo by Shu-Ling Zhou*

Bass singer Cullen Dunn, 17, of Oshkosh, said he had to choose between barbershop chorus and wrestling this winter.

"I just like singing a lot more than I like sweating and rolling around on a mat," Dunn said.

Assistant director Seth Boyte, 17, said the music that the guys sing is very challenging. He has been singing with the chorus for three years.

"It give us a sense of pride learning music that middle-aged and older guys and big choirs are singing," Boyte said. "We work extra hard so that we can do it."

A high-spirited promotions department, namely the students who enthusiastically enjoy barbershop, and Oxley's energy and enthusiasm keep the practices lively, and sometimes rowdy.

"It's a bunch of high school guys and we get a long pretty well," Oxley said. "We can have up to 20 minutes of constant jokes and laughter."

Warren Steinert, treasurer and bass singer of the Winnebago Land Barbershop Chorus, said it is important for the chorus to encourage more local teens to participate.

"We hope that they can keep this art form alive," Steinert said. "The barbershop society is getting older and our only hope of keeping this alive is to keep youth involved."