

# **THE BIRMINGHAM CHIFF** **...off the old blockflute**



## **Birmingham Chapter of The American Guild of Organists July 2011 Summer Edition**



**Jamie McLemore, Dean**

Hello Everyone! I hope everyone is enjoying the summer and is soon headed to a cooler locale! It really has been miserable these past few weeks. The afternoon showers have given us a little respite but not much.

We have never had a summer edition of our newsletter and I wanted the entire guild to know how successful our POE was this June.

Sunday afternoon, June 12 saw the arrival of 16 boys and 6 girls to the campus of Samford University. The boys were housed in the Sigma Nu dorm with the girls in the AO Pi dorm. This was a great location for the week. Following check in, we met with the parents in Reid Chapel for the overview of the week. The students were introduced to faculty during this time and had the opportunity to talk with them. Our wonderful meals for the week began with dinner in the cafeteria. Many thought they were in heaven with all the choices of hamburgers, pizza, chicken fingers, salad bar items, and the regular dinner items

PLUS dessert. We were bused to the Alabama Theatre where the students were entertained by Mr. Ken Double, president of the ATOS. The students were able to tour the chambers and play the organ.

Monday saw the first day of organ lessons. Laura Ellis, from the University of Florida in Gainesville, gave an informative lecture on practice techniques. She informed the students that you need to practice the piano just as much as the organ. Monday night saw us at St. Luke's Episcopal Church for a recital by Weston Jennings, a rising junior at Eastman School of Music. His recital (completely from memory!!) included pieces by Vivaldi, Mendelssohn and Dupre.

Following morning lessons on Tuesday, the afternoon was spent in Hodges chapel with a workshop on improvisation by Herb Buffington. Herb had all the students around the organ console doing a "question and answer" type hands on demonstration. This proved invaluable to so many of the students. Scott Elsholz presented a workshop on hymn playing and registration. His funny comments and many stories had both the students and faculty laughing. A swim party and cookout concluded the night.

Wednesday morning began very early with a bus trip to Tuscaloosa to visit the School of Music on the UA campus. Faythe Freese played a wonderful recital on the Holtkamp Organ in Moody Music Hall.

After returning to campus, students were once sent to lessons and practice time. Wednesday night was the organ recital of our guest recitalist, Dr. Bradley Welch at St. Mary's on the Highlands. Bradley's recital was one of the best recitals I have heard in quite some time.

Thursday found the students once again in lessons and arranging practice time in Hodges for the final recital Friday, Thursday evening we motored to East Lake UMC where Barry Norris gave them an overview of the organ in the church. Scott Elsholz and Weston Jennings played a duet on the "Star Wars" theme and Herb Buffington wowed the entire gathering with his improvisation on the National Anthem.

Friday arrived much too quickly for some of us. Almost every student played on the final recital and did a superb job. It was very exciting to hear some very, very talented students – many who have not studied organ for very long. The week was very bittersweet to end – completely with a huge rain storm so this made clearing out the dorm even more exciting.

What did we accomplish this week? We made lasting friendships with so many teachers and chaperones. We all ate entirely too much and were exhausted when the week was over. However, did we accomplish everything we intended to do? I say, **YES!!!** Many of the faculty had taught at previous POE's and said that this one was the best they had ever been associated with. The kids....well.....they are the lifeline of our profession.

Many parents emailed me saying that their children had a fabulous week. One student, who will be a freshman this year at St. Olaf, said that this was "the best POE I have ever attended and I've been to

5!" Samford University was a perfect venue for this.

Many thanks go to Sherelyn Breland, Greg Roberson, Josh Coble and Bill Richardson who spent the Friday and Saturday before the POE began to help prepare the dorms and were there every day to help chaperone the students. We could not have made the evening activities without the help of the church buses from Trinity UMC. A big thank-you goes to Scott Robertson for heading this up and driving. We all had a fabulous week and got quite emotional when saying good bye. The best part of the week was seeing the students arrive on campus not knowing anyone and leaving with life-long friends. As many of you know, this week was not possible without the generosity of so many. We look forward to hosting another POE in the near future. Pictures of the week are available at [poe2011.birminghamago.org](http://poe2011.birminghamago.org), and a group photograph is on the next page.

Both the Cathedral Church of the Advent and Independent Presbyterian Choirs were on tour this summer. We will have a report on these tours in upcoming editions of "The Chiff."

Our first meeting is Monday, September 12. I will have more information for you soon about the upcoming season. We have an exciting year ahead.

On a sad note - We extend our deepest sympathy to Idabelle Gay on the death of her great grandson last week. The funeral was held last Tuesday. Please remember her entire family during this time.

*Jamie*

