

The Buckeye Backcheck

Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

Volume 38 Issue 1 January 2013



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



I really enjoyed our last meeting at Graves Piano. Thanks to Paul Graves for hosting the meeting. Good to see all those who attended. Kim did an outstanding job presenting her “life and times as a piano technician” talk for our technical. I think she gave very good suggestions on promoting her business and how to deal with customers. Ben followed with his history as a piano technician, how he restarted the Columbus chapter in 1958, and his association with Ben McKlveen during his early years as a technician. It was very interesting to me that Ben McKlveen had an article in the November Journal on page 36 about his 64 years as a piano technician the same month that Ben Wiant gave his talk at our meeting. Good planning on my part. Right! Thank you Kim and Ben for very good presentations. Our next meeting will be at the Worthington Inn 649 High Street Worthington, Ohio, for our winter party on Saturday January 19th at 6:30PM. Please contact Mark Ritchie to let him know you plan to attend. Our meeting in February will be back at Graves Piano with Mark Ritchie and Victor Wolfe presenting their “life and times as a piano technician” talks for our technical. We did videotape Kim and Ben’s talk and Chris said it turned out well. So, we will do the same with Mark and Victor’s talk in February. Maybe we can put a DVD in the chapter library of these historic talks. Also, we had a new member Tim Thompson at the meeting. Good to see you again Tim! Hey, I got the “presidents “box of stuff” last meeting so I now have a PTG membership application to send to Tim. This year has gone by so fast for me. I hope this finds you all well. Have a blessed Christmas and New Year. Hope to see you at our next meeting.

John F. Schmoll RPT

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Chapter Meeting Minutes November 20, 2012

The meeting was held at Graves Piano & Organ Co.

Attendance:

John Schmoll, Bryan Hartzler, Chris Burget, Ron & Beth Kenreich, Chris Altenburg, Kim Hoessly, Mark Ritchie, Keith Scheffel, David Stang, Tim Thompson, Ben Wiant, Victor Wolfe.

Treasurer's Report:

The Chapter has \$3076.89 in checking.

Old Business:

Locations suggested for the annual Winter Party in January.

The chapter Bylaws were discussed. We have no plans to change them.

New Business:

The next meeting will be at Graves Pianos, Tuesday February 19. The topic will be a continuation of "The life and times of a piano technician" (by one or more of our distinguished members).

Mike Masters RPT has transferred his membership from the Cleveland Chapter to our Chapter.

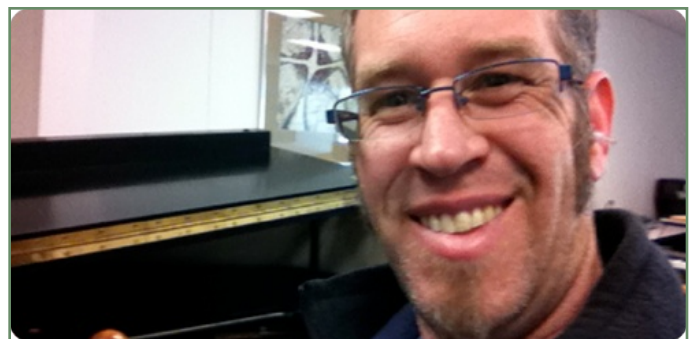
The PTG Survey was briefly discussed.

Butts & Flanges

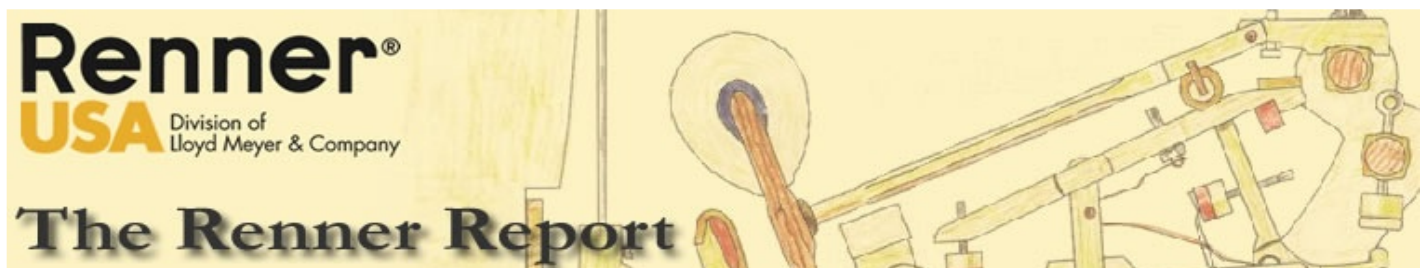
Kim Hoessly said she had to replace a dozen or more hammer butt flange cords on a Yamaha vertical. She used a small saw she got from Spurlock Specialties to cut out the old broken cords. Then she replaced them with dacron fishing line cut in segments to fit and glued them into place with Titebond.

David Stang related a rather unfortunate situation involving castor cups. It seems that after watering the plants in his house some of the water spilled onto the floor and pooled up a bit around the feet of his piano. It was sitting on castor cups to protect the floor and they were felted on the bottom. It seems, however, that hide glue, or some other water-soluble adhesive, was used to secure the felt which, in turn, the water un-secured from the castor cups, making a mess on his floor.

The Columbus Chapter would like to extend a warm welcome to our newest member, Mike Masters RPT.



Renner Action Marks 130th Year Anniversary



<http://hosted.verticalresponse.com/577660/2b4f98c95f/281900909/50d4199629/>

(via Mark Ritchie)

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The Life & Times Of A Piano Technician

The November meeting was a little different than most meetings in that instead of a technical presentation, a couple of Chapter members got up and related their experiences as piano technicians. They started out by giving a little background as to how they got started and also offered some advice on running a piano service. This may be a running feature for at least a couple of meetings. So, this could be considered the first installment. This evening featured Kim Hoessly and Ben Wiant sharing their experiences. Here are just a few of the highlights of what each had to say.



Kim Hoessly wanted to be a band director from a very early age. She went to Otterbein College and majored in Music Education and Bassoon. Even though she knew how to play piano as well, Kim credits playing a wind instrument like the bassoon in helping develop her ear in a way that she would benefit from in her later endeavors as a piano technician. However, as Kim neared graduation she realized that, perhaps, she didn't want to be a band director after all. It was about this time that a part broke in her home piano and a local tuner helped her replace a broken jack spring. She was rather fascinated by the workings of the piano, so upon some research she ended up enrolling in a piano technology program at Western Iowa Tech.

The program was a year long and there she learned the basics. Afterwards, she started working at Schmidt Piano in Omaha, Nebraska doing floor and warranty tunings. She also joined the Nebraska PTG and passed her RPT exams.

Eventually she moved back to Ohio and sent out resumes to various shops and technicians, including Ben Wiant, among others. She did some work for Coyle Music for the "premium" fee of \$12 per floor tuning. It was around this time that Mark Ritchie hired her to work in his shop in addition to beginning to work at Otterbein. During this period she put in a lot of hours between the two, which, though exhausting, gave her a wealth of experience. She was fascinated by the rebuilding aspect of the business that she was exposed to in Mark's shop, and she learned a lot from the "triage" nature of institutional piano work at Otterbein. She says that she learned much about how to work on pianos from Mark, but she learned how to work in the piano service business from Marilyn, Mark's wife. She still models some of her business practices such as scheduling, among other things, after what she learned there.

Kim then fielded questions and offered bits of advice. Kim was asked if it was hard for her to learn to hear beats. She said it was difficult the first few weeks and she was worried that she may have made a huge mistake by taking on this endeavor, but she finally "got it" when a fellow classmate helped her out. She rewarded him with a huge pan of lasagna! She also said that it took about a year before she could do an acceptable tuning. She also felt that she made great strides while working at the Aspen Music Festival. She also told how her first tunings would take four hours and how she learned to keep trimming that time down and how to "do the best job you can do and just live with it" and to learn what details not to agonize over. She also advocated reaching out to, or referring, other technicians when encountered with a problem that is too big or over one's head. You're not losing a customer as much as you are saving your reputation.

She also answered questions on various customer related issues. Kim always tells a customer about any problems with a piano as they are encountered so as to avoid the "It wasn't doing that before you worked on it" scenario. It takes a little more time but may prevent many headaches later on. Checking pedals is a must if any work was done in the piano. It's too easy to forget to replace a damper dowel rod only to get a call-back that the sustain isn't working. She also told of how she has sent reminder cards then, later on, newsletters to clients twice a year in order to retain them. Sometimes a little extra time is left open when dealing with elderly clients. Many don't often see many other people and the human element of our business is an important one and may make all the difference.

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Ben Wiant's background in piano tuning began with his father, who, as a youngster, worked at the O.S. Kelly piano plate foundry in Springfield, Ohio. It was there his father picked up some tuning knowledge and it was he who maintained the family piano. His father later went to China for missionary work and he was one of only two people in all of Beijing who could tune a piano. So, early on the interest was sparked in Ben.



His first practical experiences in tuning came as a student at Ohio Wesleyan. They had an interesting assortment of American pianos as well as a harpsichord that no one wanted to play, or tune. Since he wanted to play it, he started to tune it. He then went to grad school in Cincinnati to further his piano performance education. There he bought a Baldwin Hamilton. Upon watching the tuner perform the warranty tuning, and after discovering the expense of regular tuning, Ben's interest in the process was furthered. Ben also learned that he would eventually have to get a good quality grand piano if he was going to continue in his performance studies. He eventually ended up in the doctoral program at the University of Michigan.

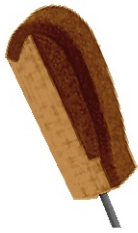
While searching for this grand piano, Ben came to know Ben McKlveen, oboist and well-known piano technician in the Cincinnati area. He took an interest in young Ben's endeavors and even paid him to help with tunings around the area. The friendship lasted many years and he says he is still learning from him to this day.

Like many techs, his path in the industry was a circuitous one which took him many places. One being the Wisconsin State College where he was the only piano faculty member who had any knowledge of piano technology, So, needless to say, he was the piano tech during his tenure there. He eventually ended up teaching in Sedona, Arizona for six years where he was the only person with any piano service understanding for a radius of eighty, or so, miles. After that, he ended up here in Columbus at OSU in the Ph.D. program for Music Education. While there he also did some work for some of the local piano stores including the Kimball, Bosendorfer and Wurlitzer dealers. It was beneficial in that he was able to use shop space for repair work. He put in a lot of hours during this time, honing his craft and learning things like the twenty-minute pitch raise, and generally building his reputation in the area as a skilled tuner and performer. He, later on, worked as the piano tech at OSU for two years. It was his time there that eventually led OSU to include the position of piano technician as a line item in the school's budget. Until that time the school didn't heavily invest in good instruments or give much thought to properly maintaining them. Ben's tenure there changed some of that.

He eventually started working with the Columbus Symphony Orchestra and many famous concert artists, some of whom would use Ben's personal pianos to practice on. He also worked on the Grand Teton Music Festival for twenty-six years. Concert service has been a passion and the learning experience invaluable because concert performers can be very specific about what they want and you learn how to give it to them. On the other hand, he cautions, just because someone isn't a professional doesn't mean they may not have a sensitivity about tone. One must learn to put aside their own personal preferences and give the clients what they want.

Ben then related how he was a founding member of the reorganized Columbus Chapter of the PTG, holding meetings on Bryden Rd. He also told of organizing the first Ohio Piano Technicians Seminar with Mark Ritchie. Ben was also employed by Graves Piano as their European purchasing agent.

He also talked about some of his early business practices including offering two tunings, the second one being six weeks or more later and offering the second for half price, as long as two tunings were agreed to. He again advised that because someone isn't a concert pianist that doesn't mean they don't have good perception about instruments and tone. Some people do test by playing in pianissimo which says something of their sensibility. He also stressed the importance of maintaining a good reputation because, "You are lucky if people are calling you based on reputation!"



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www.ptgcolumbus.org

Steinway Unveils New Selection Room Suite

Honors Beloved Technician Dirk Dickten

Aug 23, 1958-Aug 10, 2012



<http://www.steinway.com/news/articles/steinway-unveils-new-selection-room-suite-honors-beloved-technician/>

Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

President John Schmoll, RPT
Vice-President Bryan Hartzler, RPT
Treasurer Ron Kenreich
Secretary Christopher Burget

*Contributions and pictures for
the Buckeye Backcheck and the
web page are always welcome,
(even if they are only
peripherally related to pianos)!
- Chris Burget*

Upcoming Events

Post Holiday Dinner
Saturday, January 19, 2013,
6:30 pm

The Worthington Inn
649 High Street
Worthington, Ohio 43085

www.worthingtoninn.com

Map Link:

<http://goo.gl/maps/VAXyk>

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Comments, articles, and advertising requests may be sent to the editor:

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