



# Detroit Theater Organ Society

March 2011 Newsletter

Volume 50, Issue 2

## R ON RESEIGH IN CONCERT

Redford Theatre

Sunday, March 13, 2011 3:00 p.m.

The Detroit Theater Organ Society is proud to present Ron Reseigh at the Redford Theatre on Sunday afternoon, March 13th.

Ron is no stranger to the Detroit Theatre Organ Society, or the Redford Theatre's Barton theatre pipe organ. It all started back in the 1970s, with Ron's mother Mary volunteering at the Redford Theatre selling tickets, and Ron's father, Gary, playing the organ at several locations throughout the Metro Detroit area. After Gary and Mary married, they relocated to Grand Rapids where Gary became a staff organist at the new "Roaring Twenties" restaurant there, and Mary also worked there as a waitress while she was pregnant.

Ron was born in Grand Rapids and grew up going to area schools and often listened to his father, Gary, and Charlie Balogh play the large Wurlitzer organ at the Roaring Twenties Pizza parlor. He started playing the organ while in grade school. When he was fifteen, his parents would occasionally



drive him back to the Redford Theatre so he could gain experience playing some overtures and intermissions on the Barton organ.

*Continued on the next page*

## RON RESEIGH IN CONCERT ... *continued from the first page*

Ron has had the opportunity to play several of the large organ installations in the Detroit area including the Senate Theater and the famed Detroit Fox Theatre Wurlitzer.

In 1997, Ron entered the Motor City Theatre Organ Society's Young Organist Competition and placed first in the Hobbyist Division. He then entered the American Theatre Organ Society (ATOS) National Young Organist Competition and placed first in the Intermediate Division. That took him to San Francisco to the 1998 ATOS national convention where he won the Overall Division in the National Finalist Competition. As a result, Ron was invited to London, England, where he played a concert for the 1999 ATOS national convention and was the only American organist on the bill. Since that time, he has been featured at several ATOS regional and national conventions.

Ron has become one of the most sought after

concert artists on the international theatre organ circuit. He has an amazing musical memory, playing toe-tapping ragtime pieces, jazz, standards, ballads, and current popular music. He is currently the featured organist at the Organ Piper Music Palace near Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The doors and box office to the theatre open at 2:00p.m.. The concert will start at 3:00p.m.. Show your membership card at the box office to receive your free ticket. Your membership card is also good for up to three more complimentary admissions. Normal ticket price is \$12.00. Discounts are available for members of the American Guild of Organists (AGO) and the Motor City Theatre Organ Society (MCTOS). Show your membership card to receive the discount.

Be sure not to miss this exciting concert from this talented musician!



## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S BENCH

Dick Leichtamer

President, Detroit Theatre Organ Society

I certainly hope everyone likes February. Isn't it wonderful? If you like the beauty and winter activities I guess it is. However, at the Senate Theater, we keep moving along working to get ready for our re-opening in May. There is a lot to get cleaned and fixed up before that May concert and you can help if you are able. We have had quite a few members working already on several Saturdays and some week days. The good work is starting to show.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and myself I wish to thank all who have worked so far. I would especially like to thank Connie Masserant for being the driving force behind getting the Senate ready. It is wonderful to see a lot of people working again.

Please, if you have extra time to give, call Connie Masserant at 734-379-6645 and say, "Connie, what can I do to help?" We need you!

Your DTOS President, Dick Leichtamer

# THEATER RENOVATION UPDATE

Connie Masserant  
DTOS Board of Directors

Saturday, February 12 began our series of work sessions getting the Senate ready for reopening in May. Much was accomplished, mixed with a little fun. We were able to complete cleaning and organizing the projection room making way for the painters to come in next.

A special *THANKS* to “The Muscles” in the group, Lance Luce and Steven Warner, who were able to put the Christmas decorations to rest in the loft for another year.

The inner lobby is looking much better with things taken down and others put away.

Some members were able to work in the morning with afternoon commitments while others worked in the afternoon. Then there were those who were able to donate their time for the full day. Hot soups and sandwiches were provided for lunch to spur us on for the afternoon. A fun time was had by all, as you can see from the photos.

A big *THANK YOU* goes to Fred Brufloft, Dick Leichtamer, Lance Luce, Connie Masserant, Fr. Andrew Rogers, Bob Weil, Dick Dalley, George Orbits, and Steven Warner who gave of their time and themselves for our great organization.

We are planning another work day for Saturday, March 5 from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. There is still much to do and enough tasks to fit anyone’s capabilities. You need not stay the whole day. A couple of hours can accomplish a lot, so please come and get involved with your club and have a little fun while doing it.

We will be doing more cleaning and putting things away, getting ready for the painters. We do have a need for a very small amount of simple carpentry work, so if anyone has those skills, we sure could use your help.

Needs: Painting supplies such as paint brushes, paint rollers, paint pans. Cleaning supplies such as Mr. Clean, CLR, and anything else

you may want to donate. You can bring these items to the Senate during our work session on Saturday.

If Saturdays don’t work for you, my contact information is below. I am willing to meet anyone there who wants to come in and donate a couple of hours or more during the week.

Look forward to the next update – it should be a BIG one!

Connie Masserant

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# Senate Work Day



Steven Warner has the spot light back in the projection booth. Now what to do with all of those knobs and switches on that thing!

Fr. Andrew Rogers is putting one of several boxes of light bulbs on shelves up in the projection booth. Every type of light bulb seems to be up there. With his help, they are now neatly labeled and in boxes!



The Three Amigos—Fred Brufloft, Dick Leichtamer and George Orbits. Many items were down in the back of the theatre and are now going to their proper home. The Pick-Axe is still somewhat unnerving. Just *where* is George looking for gold?





The fearless leader of the Senate restoration, Connie Masserant. Here she is back up in the projection booth with what was once a full bottle of Mr. Clean. The projection booth got a complete makeover, and many old (OLD) items that are no longer in use have been “retired” from being up there. The booth looks like a whole new room thanks to Connie and her “Mr. Clean” friend.

Lance Luce and Steven Warner up at the spotlight in the projection booth. Lance has decided to “phone a friend” to see how the spotlight works. Even went “old school” and used the rotary dial phone!



Connie Masserant and Lance Luce helping clean the back of the theatre. Not sure if this was what this picture was for, but let’s try it out everybody ... join in ...

“Green Acres is the place to be ...”



# M EMBERSHIP

Gary Grzebienik  
DTOS Board of Directors

“Good” news and “bad” (but it doesn’t have to be) news. For those of you who have renewed your DTOS membership for 2011, your new membership card will be showing up in your mailbox in the next few days along with our thanks for your support. It’s your admission ticket to all of our concerts and events throughout the year.

Unfortunately, for those of you who haven’t sent in your renewal yet, this may be your last news-

letter. Don’t let that happen! Renew your membership today! Don’t miss out on a great season of outstanding concerts and special events beginning this month as well as our return to the Senate in May. Take advantage of our installment payment plan if that works best for you but don’t put it off any longer. Join your long-time friends and fellow theater organ enthusiasts and renew your membership today!



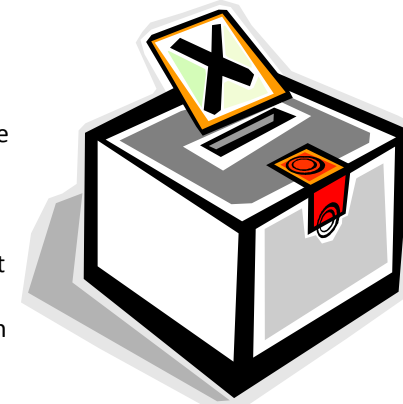
# D TOS ELECTIONS COMING SOON

Dick Leichtamer  
President, Detroit Theatre Organ Society

Elections for the Board of Directors will be coming up very soon.

There are six seats to be elected this year. Only playing members in good standing (dues paid) are eligible to run for the board.

Those wishing to have their name on the ballot should write a short bio on themselves and e-mail it to Glenn Rank at: [grank@comcast.net](mailto:grank@comcast.net) no later than March 31, 2011. Ballots will go out on April 10 and are due back by no



later than April 25.

There is also one Organ Trustee position that will be on the same ballot as the Board of Directors. As with the Board of Directors, to be eligible for this position, you must be a playing member in good standing.

Associate and Playing Members will be mailed a ballot in order to vote. Look for it in the mail soon.

Please consider stepping up and putting your name on the ballot!

# NOTES FROM THE NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Dave Calendine  
DTOS Board of Directors

Greetings and thank you for your continued support of the Detroit Theatre Organ Society!

With the last Newsletter and this Newsletter, you will notice the change in format for the Newsletter. I hope that you enjoy this new format, and also enjoy the new addition of full color to the Newsletter. Connie and Dave Masserant donated a large color laser printer to the organization for the publication of the Newsletter. This will enable me to do the Newsletter in-house and not at a copy store, where color copies would run as high as twenty-five cents each!

The outer paper on this Newsletter is being copied on a heavier-weight paper to help with the mailing. Hopefully this will enable it to be processed through the postal service without having pages ripped apart.

Please let me know what you think about the new format of the Newsletter. If you have any recommendations with it, please let me know as well. I want this Newsletter to be the best publication as possible for our organization, and your input is very important to me.

Once again, Scott Smith has another outstanding segment of his series, *From the Bench*. Enjoy reading about the history of our famed Wurlitzer!



We start our 2011 season of concerts with a great artist, Ron Reseigh. Ron "cut his teeth" on the Redford and Senate organs. He will put on a show that is not to be missed, so be sure to make every effort you can to be at the Redford Theatre on March 13th!

The Senate is well on its way to welcoming people again to the May concert. A lot has been done, but there is still PLENTY to do, so please read Connie's article earlier in this Newsletter about what you can do to help get the Senate ready to open in just three months!

Be on the lookout soon for your ballot for the DTOS Board of Directors. Six positions are up for vote on the ballot when it will be mailed. Please take the time to go over the candidates and then vote for those you wish to see on the Board.

Speaking of the Board, we have our meetings on the last Tuesday of every month at 7:00 p.m. at the Senate Theater. Everyone is welcome. Parking is available in our parking lot, and security is provided as well.

A lot is happening at the Senate. Please consider being a part of the excitement as we get ready to reopen the doors for concerts starting in May. Until then, see you at the Redford Theatre for Ron Reseigh's concert!

This is something that most people never get to see in our organ—the percussion chamber.

The percussion chamber is up high above the relay room. Inside are such things as a xylophone, glockenspiel, tuned sleigh bells (all of those round things at the bottom of the picture), snare drum, cymbals, sound effects, and more.

*From the editor—the following article is just the second part of a whole series of articles being written by Scott Smith regarding our Wurlitzer organ. Each newsletter will have another installment of the series, which will help you understand more about the history of our one-of-a-kind Wurlitzer theater pipe organ. Enjoy!*

## FROM THE BENCH

Scott Smith  
Unraveling A Mayan Mystery, Part Two

Regular viewers of the PBS program "NOVA" may remember the 2008 documentary titled "Cracking The Mayan Code." It revealed that the Mayans, while sophisticated in culture and art, weren't particularly nice people, especially to outsiders, who were more often than not sacrificed to the gods in brutal rituals. Nonetheless, the informative program took us on a detailed journey through the past century or so of some major archeological discoveries of the Mayan villages, whose inhabitants lived between 100 B.C. and about 1500 A.D. Most importantly, it enlightened the audience as to the somewhat recent reinterpretation of Mayan symbols and calendar dates, thus the "cracking of the code."

If, as you've wandered by the console of the Fisher organ, you've ever wondered about the authenticity of the hieroglyphic carvings, wonder no more. Because of Sylvanus Morley's authentication, we know they're representations of actual Mayan symbols, as is the "Aztec Gentleman" on both sides of the console, so dubbed by organist Billy Nalle on his first visit to perform for DTOS in 1968. The figure is replete with leering eyes, headdress and carefully filed teeth. Dental mutilation was a common practice amongst the ruling classes of the Mayans beginning centuries ago and carried out right up until the European intrusions of the sixteenth century. It came at a price. According to dental experts, aside from a rather lengthy and painful carving process, the resulting disfigurement of the incisors would make the tooth thereafter sensitive to hot and cold and any sort of sweets. Ahh, the price we pay for vanity.

Looking at the photos of the interior of the Fisher Theatre in its heyday, it's apparent that the Wurlitzer console melded in perfectly with the melange of Maya. That surely didn't happen by chance. Architects Graven

& Mayger undoubtedly had a great deal to do with the basic carving designs and choice of paint colors. Luckily, Wurlitzer employed expert carvers that could execute even the most intricate of designs. Perhaps one of the most intriguing questions that will likely remain unanswered for the ages is: why the French style caps, cascading down the sides of the Mayan console? Why not a mirror image of the temple block designs that act as brackets flanking the undersides of the keydesk? To organ buffs, the caps seem familiar, but oddly out of place here. Looking at copies of Wurlitzer's preliminary drawings for Radio City Music Hall, the twin consoles are shown as plain boxes with the French style caps. It is apparent that a final design had not been determined at that time. Perhaps Graven & Mayger left the caps at the Fisher, thinking this was an important design element in acknowledgement to Wurlitzer, or, more likely, it could be as simple as accommodating the shape of the blue and green headdress of the "Aztec Gentleman." Wurlitzer may have even weighed in on the final design, or possibly even the Fishers. Possibly both. It's anyone's guess. We'll never know for certain.

The horseshoe shaped stoprails plus flat backrails contain 281 stop tablets. There's not much room for more, but we have to ask how Wurlitzer accomplished this feat. If you've been around it at all, you've noticed that the Fisher console is unique in more ways than just the Aztec carvings and the odd stop layout. The stoprail is a rarity, but not a complete anomaly. Too big to be a Style 285/Publix #1 console (which holds 201 stop tablets), and too small to be a Fox rail (which contains 346). Well...it is and it isn't. Utilizing no more sophisticated tool than a tape measure, fellow member John Lauter was able to prove a long-held theory that the Fisher stoprail is no more than a truncated Fox stoprail

with roughly 3-1/2" chopped off the front, and the same follows for the rest of the front end of the console. Similar modifications were used for the consoles in the St. Louis Ambassador Theatre and the New York Paramount Studio. The four-manual Fox-box was also used as a shell for the three five-manual consoles built by Wurlitzer. To the best of our knowledge, a total of only fourteen of the large Fox-box consoles were ever built, and three of those came to Detroit (Michigan, Fox and Fisher consoles). Only New York City had more.

Strange as it may seem today, in the early days of the club, a rather small, but vocal controversy brewed about the painted Mayanesque music rack cover. At that time, one rather outspoken member in particular felt that it was wrong to identify the organ with the Fisher Theatre, and that the club should put it behind in the dim and dusty past along with the "old" Fisher. Visually, the connection with the Fisher seems inescapable to anyone with working eyes. Nonetheless, this individual persisted in his protest that the cover was not a part of the organ, but a part of the theatre instead and should be removed. Talk about splitting hairs! For those who wonder, the music rack cover was a part of the console back in the early days of the Fisher, as historic photos will prove. We can only speculate that it was put on there shortly after installation to eliminate spotlight glare from the glass music rack. Yet another unique aspect of the Fisher Wurlitzer.

Perhaps the single most unusual part of the Fisher Wurlitzer is the odd stop layout on the console. Ordinarily, stop tablets on a Wurlitzer organ are laid out first in order of pitch, then in order of volume from left to right, with the loudest being furthest to the left. The Fisher organ has the stops laid out in a similar manner, but divided into chambers first on each manual. While this has been the bane of existence to every organist who has graced its bench since creation, sooner or later, everyone eventually manages to get around it all right. This was undoubtedly done in order to lean more in the direction of a legitimate concert organ, at least visually, and somewhat ergonomically. Obviously, few, if any really liked the idea from the beginning, as there was never another Wurlitzer theatre organ built in this manner. Over the years, this unusual layout has given

rise to an urban myth that the Fisher organ is not only a fine theatre organ, but a church organ as well. Nothing could be further from the truth, as you will see as you read on. As I like to think, just because the stops are divided into chambers on each manual does not make it a church or concert organ. In kind, just because one turns the tremolos off to play classical music does not make it a church or concert organ, either. It is a given that a talented organist can play the notes and create certain sounds on the Wurlitzer to trick the ear into briefly thinking so, but just because we can drive on the sidewalk doesn't make it a street.

Here's a little tidbit to further confuse the reader: stop for stop, and control for control, the four-manual, twenty-six rank Wurlitzer church organs at Our Lady Of Victory in Lackawanna, New York (1926) and Our Lady Of Guadalupe in Mexico City, Mexico (1931) were completely identical in every way. Every way but one, that is. Our Lady Of Victory was laid out with the standard stoprail as one would find on a Wurlitzer theatre organ in order of volume at each pitch, but Our Lady Of Guadalupe was laid out first by chamber, just like the Fisher Wurlitzer. We can only speculate as to why.

So what exactly is the difference between church organs, concert organs and theatre organs? The way I like to describe it is that the theatre organ was designed to emulate the theatre orchestra, with orchestral-sounding stops alongside real percussion instruments and traps. The church organ is essentially a group of tones and balances that have been developed over the centuries to accompany choirs and congregational singing, in addition to music written specifically for it. The pure concept of the concert organ lived for such a short time, it's difficult to come up with a finite definition. Here's what George Ashdown Audsley, author of many books about the organ said about it in 1905: "...the Concert-room Organ has a threefold office to fulfil, and that to the fullest extent possible in an Organ. It must be capable of taking part, in conjunction with a full orchestra, in the accompaniment of Oratorios and other important choral works. It should be capable of accompanying such works, furnishing an able substitute for the grand orchestra, in the rendition of their full orchestral scores, when an orchestra is not provided. It

must furnish the musician...with proper tone colors, properly grouped, and properly placed under his control, for the effective interpretation of the artistic conceptions of his own and other minds, and for the effective rendition of the most complex compositions written either for the Organ or orchestra. In short, the Concert-room Organ should be a perfect organ and a full orchestra combined." At the time those words were written, some communities even hired a "municipal organist" to perform not only traditional organ works, but also transcriptions of the newest orchestral music, as most communities did not have a local orchestra equipped to perform them. Lacking radio or any other form of mass media, this was the manner in which new works were exposed to the public. Things changed pretty rapidly, but at least one rock star of the era emerged whose transcriptions are still being published and performed today, and that was Edwin Lemare, who traveled the country introducing great music to the masses via concert organs. Obviously, the theatre organ barely existed as we know it, nor would it be for almost ten years. While some would criticize these hybrid instruments as being neither-fish-nor-fowl, concert organs were basically designed to perform a wide range of literature and popular music in a concert setting, more often than not appearing in non-religious public auditoriums. Without question, the ultimate concert organ would be considered the 6/435 instrument in the Wanamaker (now Macy) department store in downtown Philadelphia, the largest fully functional pipe organ in the world. Periodically, new so-called concert organs appear in public halls, but the seminal concept unfortunately never achieved widespread acceptance. Perhaps the last of the traditional breed of concert organs was the third Kimball Hall instrument, installed in 1941 in Kimball's downtown Chicago headquarters, only months before it shut down pipe organ manufacture in 1942 due to wartime regulations. They would never resume pipe organ production again, and the rather new Kimball concert organ was sold for far less than new to a church. In 2006, a Dobson organ was installed in the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and has been dubbed as the largest "concert (hall) organ" in the United States only because it is not in a church and is designed primarily to perform standard "concert literature." It is a

far cry from the concert organs of days gone by, but like the Rosales organ in Disney Hall in Los Angeles, California, cannot be dismissed simply as a standard or even deluxe church instrument.

The Fisher Wurlitzer is one of the few theatre organs that can be absolutely traced to an individual, or in this case, a family, and a famous one, at that. This is not at all unusual in churches, where families or an individual will make a gift out of the organ, the bells, the pews, or some iconic portion of the building. In this case, we know that the Fishers particularly appreciated music, most of whom were not only organ lovers, but organ owners, as well. How influential were they in the design of the final instrument? From its golden tower down to the lowest sub-basement, it's apparent that the Fisher brothers were closely involved with the planning and execution of their beloved building. Logically, coupled with the knowledge that they were obviously interested in music and pipe organs specifically, we can safely assume that one or more of the Fisher brothers was probably involved in the purchase of the organ. Beyond the obvious potential of accompanying silent motion pictures, what did the Fishers envision? Concerts? Organ with orchestra? Occasional religious services? An instrument they could all play in their free hours? An organ that could potentially be all things for all occasions? Considering that the overall concept of the Fisher Building was one constructed to serve the people of the city in every way possible, coupled with the family's strong Catholic ethic, it stands to reason that their custom Wurlitzer pipe organ would follow through with the same philosophy.

All pipe organ sales personnel carried a guide book that helped them to custom design an organ without having to wait for the factory. Substitute this; take away that. Simple and easy. It's a very typical sales tool still used by sales personnel today. Still, no salesman could design an organ as large and complex as the Fisher Wurlitzer on the spot. Just exactly who was responsible for the peculiar design of the organ will likely remain lost to history forever. Still, we can speculate based on what we do know. As previously mentioned, we do know for a fact that at least six of the seven Fisher brothers owned pipe organs in their various residences.

Those instruments all had roll players, and would have been voiced to perform "potted palm" music. Could the soft, understated tones of those organs have influenced the softer voices found in the Fisher Wurlitzer? Chicago organist Arsene Siegel was for years rumored to have designed the organ, but reportedly denied it to his death. So was Arthur Gutow, who played it on opening night, but again, only an unsupported rumor. Detroit organist Merle Clark, amongst the first organists at the Fisher has been implied, but there is nothing directly linking him, nor is there with W. Meakin Jones, Wurlitzer's Unit Orchestra Department Manager, who for years advocated stoplists arranged by chamber, most probably for his own understanding and convenience. Much of the credit for many of the designs of stock instruments has been assigned to Farney Wurlitzer. Could it have been him? Could it have been one or more of the Fishers? Could the refined tones and oozing celestes of the church organ where the Fishers grew up have played a role in the choice of specific ranks? Could their church organist have had any say in the matter? Could it be that some or all of the Fisher brothers studied organ or piano with him or her? These are the things we don't know, and probably never will know for sure.

What we do know for certain is that the basis of the organ is essentially that of a large standard theatre model known as a Publix #4. Aside from the Fox Specials, the 4/36 Wurlitzers of which only five were built, the Publix #4 was Wurlitzer's largest standard model in the late Twenties. Proof exists of this in Judd Walton's 1973 publication "Wurlitzer," a compendium of installations, specifications and general facts about the company's output, primarily gleaned from remaining original company records and from extant, unchanged installations. Only two of this model were ever produced, only one of which remains intact today. It is the 4/28 Wurlitzer, still in its original home of the former Brooklyn (New York) Paramount since 1928. Now a part of Long Island University, the console still enters and exits via elevator up through the now-flattened orchestra level of the former theatre, which serves as the world's most elegant basketball court. The other was the Boston Metropolitan Theatre (1930), now scattered to the winds. When comparing the specifications of the Publix

#4 and the Fisher organ side by side, a remarkable number of parallels exist, alongside some surprising differences.

Aside from the elimination or addition of a few extensions in a handful of ranks, and some moving around of certain stop tablets from one manual to another, the Fisher Wurlitzer clearly contains the basic specification of a standard, off-the-shelf Publix #4. Furthermore, all twenty-six ranks of that model are represented within the Fisher organ, plus the eight additional ranks that make up its unique layout and appointments. To prove the point, we can simply do it by the numbers. The Publix #4 spec has 250 stop tablets, while the Fisher spec has 281. Comparing the two side-by-side, there are 224 stop tablets common to both on the same manuals, or roughly 80% of the overall total. Furthermore, if we subtract those tabs for the eight added ranks, plus the 32' Resultant in the Pedal, that leaves us with 258 tabs. Dividing that by the 224 tabs common to the Publix #4 spec, we arrive just a fraction short of 87%. Does anyone need more convincing? Much as we would like to cling to a romanticized notion that the instrument was custom designed by one individual, one stop at a time, the truth appears to be that while being unique, the basis of the Fisher Wurlitzer stands overwhelmingly as that of a large standard model.

*Next month: What stops make the Fisher organ unique, and who may have been involved?*



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Look for us on Facebook!

## 2011 Concert Series

### AT THE REDFORD THEATRE

March 13—Ron Reeseigh

April 10—Donnie Rankin

### AT THE SENATE THEATER

May 15—Jelani Eddington

June 12—John Lauter

July (TBA) - Open Console

September 11—Members Concert

October 9—David Wickerham

November 20—Tony O'Brien

December 11—Dave Calendine