

Augusta Chorale celebrates 30 years in fall

'Heavenly choir'

By [Charmain Brackett](#) Correspondent

Sunday, Jan. 20, 2013



MICHAEL HOLAHAN/STAFF

Futhey Babcock, one of the founders of the Augusta Chorale, said he is happy that Dr. Phyllis Anderson is now the director of the chorale. Babcock, 100, sang tenor in the group until his health prevented him from doing so.

Futhey Babcock enjoyed singing in his church choir, but he wanted a musical challenge.

"They didn't seem to want to sing those fancy songs," said the 100-year-old Babcock, a co-founder of the Augusta Chorale, which will celebrate its 30th anniversary in the fall. Babcock sang tenor in the group until health reasons prevented him from doing so. During his active years, he said nothing could keep him from attending chorale rehearsals on Monday nights at Paine College. He also worked to get others to come on board with his idea, and he recruited singers.

"I invited them, they came in and stayed," he said of many of the early members.

C.W. Francis served as the group's first director, and Ellis Johnson spent 20 years as the chorale's director. Phyllis Anderson took over in 2007.

"We were lucky to get Mr. Johnson to direct us," Babcock said.

Under Johnson's direction, membership in the group swelled from about 15 to 65. The chorale has two auditions each season, one usually held in August and one in January, which was held earlier this month. Members come from a cross section of the community. There are doctors, nurses and teachers in addition to music professionals.

Babcock said he's pleased to have Anderson at the organization's helm now. "Dr. Anderson is doing a real good job with them. I was glad to see her take it over," he said.

The chorale's repertoire includes spirituals as well as classical pieces by the masters, such as Handel's *Messiah*. The group performs two main concerts a year – at Christmas and in May, but also performs in nursing homes, at churches and other locations.

For Babcock, highlights of his time in the chorale included traveling to Charleston, S.C., to perform in the Piccolo Spoleto Festival, where the group has performed six times. Babcock said he thinks the group accomplished what its early members had hoped for.

"I'm well-pleased," he said. "It was something new for us, and something new for Augusta, too. The public enjoyed us. It's a heavenly choir."

He hopes in the future the chorale will continue to grow and add new members.

The spring concert will be at 4 p.m. May 5 at Paine College's Gilbert-Lambuth Chapel.

For more information on the Augusta Chorale, visit www.augustachorale.org or call (706) 830-0991 or (706) 836-9426.