



**PUGET SOUND  
PIPELINE**

*Happy 2021  
to all our PSTOS friends*

January – February 2021  
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# PUGET SOUND PIPELINE

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*Puget Sound Theatre Organ Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization furthering the appreciation, restoration, and use of the historic Theatre Pipe Organs of the 1920s, through education.*

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# 2021 DUES ARE DUE!

Your support is more important this year than ever before, to help ensure the survival of our organization. We all hope 2021 will see a return of concerts, social events, and programs. Be sure you're on the list to receive that important news! Please click the link below to quickly and safely renew your membership! **THANK YOU!**

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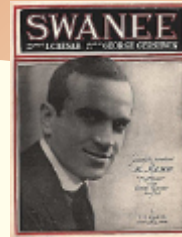
## ANNOUNCING!

**Vintage theatre organ goodies!**  
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# LETTERS

## To the Editors

We are delighted to hear from John Norton, former PSTOS board member who now resides in Vancouver, WA.

His decision to resign from the board was brought about by health issues. We miss his input and ideas.

Dear Pipeline editors:

Here are photos related to the Egyptian theatre in Coos Bay, Oregon, that might be interesting to PSTOS members. This installation is what got me interested in theatre organs; I chased ciphers there when I was a much younger and certainly more agile individual.

The organist at the time was Phil Giles, whose daughter Marilyn I went to school with. A very talented guy. He was also the projectionist, which is how it was done in small towns in those days, a mere 60 years or so ago. As I understand it the photos are current.

I would like to thank Phil for his reports on the Paramount Wurlitzer. The idea of working with him there was a big motivation for me in joining PSTOS, and it has been a great disappointment to me that such is not to be. At least not in this lifetime. Especially since we share a taste for good food and good or even maybe not quite so good Chianti.

Please say hello to everyone and tell them I miss all the PSTOS activity. I fantasize about things getting back to some semblance of normality in the outside world so I could get back up there if only briefly for a party or concert or some such. In the meantime I am a stay-at-home self-isolating guy with Karen to keep me in line.

Very best regards to all,

John Norton

**Right:** The Egyptian Theatre's 3/10 Wurlitzer, Style H "Special"

For more information on the Coos Bay Egyptian Theatre, as well as some interesting coverage about its history, visit the comprehensive PSTOS website at:

<https://www.pstos.org/instruments/or/coos-bay/egyptian.htm>



On November 19, 1925, the 770 seat Egyptian Theatre opened in Coos Bay. It was built in the Egyptian Revival architecture style that was popular following the discovery of the tomb of King Tutankhamen in 1922. It was converted from a garage and designed by Lee Arden Thomas and Albert Mercier. Thomas and Mercier also designed the McDonald Theatre in Eugene and the Bagdad Theatre in Portland.



A not-for-profit organization, the Egyptian Theatre Preservation Association, has saved many of the Egyptian themed decorations, restored the facility, and now runs it for the benefit of the community. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places May 24, 2010.



Peter Beames lives in Rostrevor, So. Australia, and attended our ATOS convention in 2010. He shares his interesting and novel plan for fitting out a former chapel to house his theatre pipe organ, AND himself.

Dear Russ and Jo Ann,  
I had some good news in 2020. After 19 months of disappointments, I bought a new home in June. I gave up on the plan to put my theatre organ in a public place and found somewhere second best that I could also live in. It is more suitable for an instrument than many home installations. I have not moved yet, the living area still needs a few little luxuries like power, water, bedroom, bathroom and kitchen, but other than that it is nearly perfect.



The building was the chapel for a Catholic Seminary built in the 1950s. It grew rapidly, but faded fast in the '70s. The upstairs will remain virtually as it is except for a chamber, and the downstairs will become my living space. I will be surrounded by 21st century boxes including 24 3-story townhouses at the back. My building is "local heritage listed" which mostly means I cannot alter the front exterior, which does not bother me. It is the reason they could not demolish it and subdivide that block as well. I have an architect working on plans. Things are likely not to happen quickly, but WILL happen, eventually.

Regards, Peter Beames



The main chapel area will be turned into pipe chambers and listening room.

**DAVE WICKERHAM, a favorite PSTOS concert artist, lost his beloved wife Rhonda Sue to a long and painful struggle with cancer. He recently sent news and photos, with permission to share with our members.**



Dave and Rhonda Sue at a Sanfilippo holiday event several years ago

December 5, 2020

It's been just a little over a month since Rhonda Sue has been gone; a month of "firsts" as many people have talked to me about. All in all, I'm doing alright but there are so many things, even little things, that we did together that are reminders... and then the "waves" still come. I'm grateful for SO MUCH ongoing support, inspiring messages and cards for me and my family as we continue forward on life's path.

## Member Annabelle Schertingzer shares her ATOS story

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Annabelle's story missed the last issue, but we're happy to include it this month. Thank you, Annabelle.*

I grew up in Indianapolis. In September 1965, my dad read an article in the Indianapolis Star Sunday newspaper about the local chapter of ATOE, as it was called then, and told my mom and me about this group that was interested in restoring and preserving theatre pipe organs. The article advertised their next meeting, which would take place the following Sunday afternoon. My folks decided to go and see what this was all about. I was in Junior High, and so I went with them, of course. The meeting was at a private home that had a pipe organ. All the people were very welcoming, and afterward we all agreed that we would start attending regularly. Meetings were held at 2:30 p.m. on the second Sunday of every month. Sometimes they were concerts, but often they were informal afternoons in

The first of the "firsts" was Thanksgiving... In most all of our years together, Thanksgiving was always a priority holiday and Rhonda Sue always began prepping and cooking for the feast a few days in advance. Everything was 'just right' and it was always AMAZING! This year, I had a small gathering of just four with lots of memories and talk, reminiscing about Rhonda Sue. It was a good afternoon and evening.

Another "first" was November 30th, which would have been Rhonda's 54th birthday. That one was rougher in different ways... anger, frustration and sadness because 54 is WAY TOO YOUNG! But her birthday turned out to be yet another "first." That was the scheduled date for my first concert (virtual) since this past March... So... potentially a good "first".

For the past 12 years or so, I have played for the Sanfilippo Foundation Christmas concert events. Rhonda would usually be along with me for at least a portion of the week. Typically, there were 5 to 7 concerts every season and we would enjoy visiting with the Sanfilippo family and friends there. We always did a little Christmas shopping in Barrington and the surrounding areas.

This year I was asked by the executive director of the Sanfilippo Foundation to present a single Christmas concert virtually. I was very excited and thankful for a concert opportunity in this Covid time.

For a small portion of this program I had an opportunity to once again work with a friend

and very talented Bass-Baritone, William Powers, who has an incredible set of "pipes!" I also enjoyed spending time and catching up with friend Zach Frame who is not only a great theatre organist but is an accredited audio engineer and videographer. He (C-2 Productions) was there to capture faithfully, both sights and sounds for the virtual show.

During my stay at the Sanfilippos this year, I've been comforted and consoled by friends and – as always – was made to feel at SO MUCH at home. I am thrilled and honored, always, to perform in such an incredible and beautiful venue.

I wish you all a MERRY CHRISTMAS, HAPPY HOLIDAYS and pray for a BETTER 2021 for ALL... God Bless You!

Dave



Dave at the Sanfilippo Wurlitzer console during the 2020 virtual Christmas concert

someone's home. Those who wanted to play the organ took turns doing that while the rest of us sat around chatting with one another and eating refreshments. As part of our family vacations, I attended the ATOE national conventions in Los Angeles in 1968 and in New York City in 1970.

Then I went off to college, got married, and moved to an obscure part of the country where there were no theatre pipe organs. My husband and I had 3 children and were busy with jobs and life, and his interest in music was limited. I lost touch with ATOS.

When my mother died in Indianapolis in October 2017, the first person to respond to her obituary was an old friend from ATOS. Wow! Then my husband drove my mom's car from Indianapolis to Washington State, and after he arrived, I looked in the armrest. There I found 2 CDs, one called "Big Band Christmas" and one of Ken Double playing the Long Center organ in Indiana, an organ that did not exist in 1970. I immediately played the Ken Double CD and began searching for information about the Central Indiana Chapter of ATOS and what had

happened during the years of my absence. I also came into contact with PSTOS.

Unsure of whether or not I could commit to adding something else to my already busy life, I waited until the Dave Wickerham concert in October 2018 to attend a PSTOS event. I bought a CD and joined PSTOS. I also began attending the Silent Movie Mondays at the Paramount. And then in December I discovered that I already had a friend in PSTOS—one of Ellen Sullivan's sons was a very good friend of my son when they were both growing up in Shoreline! Then I felt even more at home. So now you are stuck with me and with the friends that I bring along as I try to recruit more members, in my small way.

I was quite excited about attending the 2020 convention in Indianapolis, my first convention in 50 years! I had my airline ticket, my car rental reservation, and had made arrangements to stay with old friends. And then of course it was cancelled! I'm hoping that whenever it is rescheduled that I'll be able to attend.

# PAGES FROM THE PAST . . .

## Organs to Ashes — a Terrible Toll

From 1939 to 1962, fires leveled a number of roller rinks and entertainment venues in the Puget Sound area, destroying many theatre pipe organs

Photos from the Wm. Bunch archives

Unsolved fires in the greater Seattle area from the late 1930s through the 1940s and '50s, and even into the early '60s, took a terrible toll of theatre organs, as well as their venues.



The early Sunday morning fire was seen over much of north-central Seattle as the Rollerbowl was engulfed in flames



Near total destruction, only W and L remained of the landmark ROLLERBOWL sign

Let's begin with the Garden of Allah Club in Seattle, with its 2/5 Wurlitzer from the Majestic Theatre in Eugene, Oregon, destroyed by fire in 1939.

The 2/9 Wurlitzer from the Capitol Theatre in Yakima, Opus 389, 1921, had just been moved and reinstalled in 1941 when a fire destroyed everything at the Tacoma Rollerbowl.

Then in 1942, the Diamond Horseshoe Club in Seattle, along with its 2/4 Wurlitzer, burned to the ground.

The Ridge Rink in Seattle lost its 2/8 Wurlitzer in 1945 due to a very destructive fire. This Wurlitzer was from the Seattle Wintergarden Theatre. The building did survive and a replacement organ was installed, also a 2/8 Wurlitzer, made up from parts.



In May, 1951, the Seattle Rollerbowl burned with flames that shot 100 feet in the air and burned for four hours.

In 1945, a fire totally destroyed the Redondo Skating Rink, between Seattle and Tacoma, with its 4/10 Robert Morton from Warner Brothers Theatre in Los Angeles.

The Rollerland Skating Rink in Renton, along with its 4/18 Robert Morton from the Seattle Pantages/Palomar, went up in fire and smoke in 1962.

These losses were tremendous enough, but in addition there was a series of five fires, all involving large amusement facilities, in the early 1950s.

In September of 1950, the Shady Beach Dance Pavilion was totally destroyed by fire. Then three months later, on December 16<sup>th</sup>, the Palladium Ballroom was reduced to ashes. Two weeks later, on December 31<sup>st</sup>, the Aurora Stadium Speedway was a total loss. Fire again. Three weeks later, on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1951, the Redondo Amusement Centre was destroyed by fire.

# PAGES FROM THE PAST... *continued*

Three and a half months later on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1951, the most disastrous of all the amusement facility fires totally destroyed the Seattle Roller Bowl including FOUR theatre organs.

The Roller Bowl building was inspected at 5 am on the ill-fated Sunday morning by the caretaker, and all was well. A merchant patrolman shortly thereafter turned in the fire alarm at 5:45 am. The fire started in the rear living quarters of the large building and spread very rapidly. It was impossible with the fire investigative procedures in 1951 to determine the cause.

The building burned for four hours while 50 firemen and 9 fire engines struggled to put the fire out. Flames were leaping 100 feet in the air while nearby roofs were scorched and several windows exploded in the neighborhood due to the severe heat.

Damage to the Roller Bowl was total. Don Isham, the resident rink organist, was quoted as saying, "I can't begin to get it in my mind how much has been lost." Later he said wistfully, "I hope it's rebuilt." Owners of amusement facilities in the area had been warned by the fire marshal about possible arson. Yet none of these five large fires were eventually attributed to arson.



The stubborn Roller Bowl blaze was battled by 50 firemen from five volunteer departments



Four beautiful theatre organs are but a memory following this tremendous loss.

The theatre pipe organ playing for skating sessions in the Roller Bowl in May of 1951 was the 2/9 Special Wurlitzer from the Spokane Liberty Theatre. This was Wurlitzer Opus 50, shipped November 28<sup>th</sup>, 1914, only four months after the famous Seattle Liberty Wurlitzer, Opus 41, was shipped on July 29<sup>th</sup>, 1914. In 1937, the Spokane Liberty Wurlitzer was moved to the Roller Bowl and enlarged to 14 ranks, from radio station KSTP. This instrument was a total loss.

Stored in the basement of the Roller Bowl was a 3/9 Wurlitzer Special, Opus 1585, 1927. This instrument was shipped to the Bagdad Theatre, later renamed the Ballard. The organ, having been purchased and removed by Ivan Ditmar for installation in his Hollywood home, was a total loss.

Located also in the basement of the Roller Bowl was Northwest Recording Studio, and in the studio was Wurlitzer Opus 341, 1920, a

2/8 from the Weir Theatre in Aberdeen, Washington. This instrument had been enlarged to nine ranks and was being played from a beautiful ebony three-manual Kimball console from Radio Station WGN in Chicago. The only portion of this organ to survive the fire was part of the Kimball console.



The remains of one of the many blowers stands in silence

In addition to the terrible loss of organs in the Roller Bowl, there was a very complete functioning machine shop also in the basement, plus assorted organ parts including several spare organ consoles, and a large shipment for Don Isham of brand new still crated pipes from Organ Supply.

Again, all was lost.