

Meet Your Member—Jim & Donna Welty

My first memory of a band organ was when I was about ten, at Gooding’s Amusement Park in Columbus, Ohio. I sat and listened to the big “music machine” (a 1904 Ruth fair organ) in its trailer instead of riding the rides. I did not run across another organ of that size and quality till I was in college at The Citadel in Charleston, SC. Escaping the rigors of cadet life, the students often spent weekends in Myrtle Beach, SC. There I spent many hours listening to the magnificent organs on the midway and dreaming of someday owning one.



Jim and Donna Welty in front of *Rolling Thunder* at a recent rally.

It actually was my racing career in the 60’s and 70’s that allowed me to visit and meet some of the “pioneer” collectors, such as Paul and Laura Eakins, who I visited many times in Sikeston, MO after races in Springfield, IL and Northern MO. Our weekly races at Soldier Field in Chicago or Milwaukee usually allowed me a whole day to visit and learn from Al Svoboda at his Nickelodeon Tavern in Chicago Heights. Over the years I became acquainted with Erwin Heller (Gooding’s organ man), Dan Slack (organizer of the first organ rally) and Don Stinson (Master organ builder) who has been invaluable

with his help and advice in the organ rebuilding and restoration that I have done.

I finally decided I must have a band organ of my own and in 1985 purchased the Artizan A-2 which I restored, and still have today. Along the way I have had several orchestrions, large music boxes, and six other organs, most notable was the well-known *Gypsy Queen* Gasparini (a former Paul Eakins machine) and my current favorite, the 105

key Decap Dance Organ, *Rolling Thunder*. This has turned out to be my biggest project requiring three years of “spare time” to get it playing and fitted into a carnival trailer which I also had to rebuild. Tony Decap helped me set the organ up to play MIDI arrangements and it entertains the neighbors most warm evenings.

I am particularly fond of the organs, but it is the people and friends of the COAA that I enjoy seeing and visiting with at the rallies and here at home.

They are the “Happiest People on Earth” enjoying the “Happiest Music on Earth.”

2010 Organ Rally Dates*

COAA/AMICA Rally #4	Band Organ Recall/Wurlitzer Bldg. North Tonawanda, NY	Mike Walters 716-656-9583	July 10-11, 2010
COAA Rally #5	Merry-Go-Round Museum Sandusky, OH	Vicki Bout 419-626-6111	July 17-18, 2010
COAA Rally #6	“Country Carnival” Living History Farm Urbandale, IA	Jim Lester 515-233-2804	September 4-5, 2010
COAA Rally #7	“Historic Weston Street Organ Muster” Weston, MO	Gordie Davidson 913-683-3645	October 16-17, 2010

*Call the rally host for more information regarding a rally.