



STAFF PHOTOS BY JOHN RAWLSTON

Dennis Milnar of Milnar Organ Co. in Eagleville, Tenn., points out features of Memorial Auditorium's pipe organ as he leads a group from the American Institute of Organbuilders through the catwalks above the stage.

# An example to follow

Organ builders from across country visit city to view Austin pipe organ

**Online:** Watch John Wigal play the Austin pipe organ.

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**T**he American Institute of Organbuilders held its national convention in Knoxville this week. On Thursday, 40 of the delegates took a field trip to Chattanooga to see a restoration of note.

The musicians and craftsmen came to hear Memorial Auditorium's restored 1924 Austin pipe organ, then they toured the organ's pipe chambers to view the historic renovation they had read about in trade industry magazines. Among the delegates was Bon Smith of Avon, Conn., president of Austin Organ Service.

Later that day, the organ builders visited Richards, Fowkes & Co. in Ooltewah for a shop tour, then traveled to Collegedale to hear Judy Glass play Southern Adventist University's Bombaugh organ.

"The American Institute of Organbuilders holds its conventions for the express reason to learn more

about organs, view historic organs, hear lectures, take shop tours and study organ technique," said Randall Dyer of Jefferson City, Tenn., convention chairman.

"The Austin organ is a historically significant organ that's been rebuilt by one of our own members," he said, referring to Dennis Milnar of Milnar Organ Co.

The city's concert organ is unique in that it was designed by famed organist Edwin Lemare. The restoration was a 20-year project of the Chattanooga Music Club, chaired by Evelyn Gibbs. More than \$770,000 was raised through private donations, grants and city funding. The restored organ is valued at more than \$2 million. It is the only organ of its kind remaining in the Southeast.

The visitors heard John Wigal perform six pieces that demonstrated the many colors of the organ. Then they were invited to climb the 115 steps into the pipe chambers to examine the restoration work and talk shop with Mr. Milnar.



John Wigal plays the Memorial Auditorium Austin pipe organ.

## THE EXPERTS' OPINIONS

"I came because it's not often you see such a large pipe organ in an auditorium. It's a big concert organ not to be in a church. The pipe organ is the king of instruments."

— David Richards, Valencia, Pa.

"I like to see as much variety in organs as I can. The more I see gives me ideas how I should build my instruments — the old can teach the new. It is rare to see such a restoration."

— Joseph Solt, Mountaintop, Pa.

"I worked for 38 years for Austin, so I had to see how the old organ looked. The fact they got it repaired is remarkable. This restoration should set an example for other cities."

— Fred Heffner, Granby, Conn.