MENOMONIE — A Menomonie music organization in existence since 1989 has a new name, more singers and is the Mabel Tainter Center for the Arts' new resident vocal ensemble.

The Menomonie Singers, formerly known as the Menomonie Chamber Singers, decided to change their name because the definition of a chamber group is usually one that performs in small venues.

The Menomonie Chamber Singers had about 12 to 15 members, while the Menomonie Singers have grown to 23 singers.

"The group was not going to fit the chamber definition," said Juliana Schmidt of Menomonie, a founding member of the group.

Formal auditions were held in August for the Menomonie Singers.

Mabel Tainter Center for the Arts Executive Director Amy Reise invited the group to be the resident vocal ensemble, Schmidt said.

"It's right downtown. It's a community arts facility, and to have space to work in that has a stage is fantastic," Schmidt said. "We want to be the premiere vocal ensemble of Menomonie. To improve the sound we want to expand all the choral parts."

The Menomonie Singers will be performing high-quality choral music, and singers need to be able to read music, Schmidt said.

The group has a concert Sunday at Our Saviors Lutheran Church, 910 Ninth St. E, Menomonie.

When the Menomonie Chamber Singers started it had several small instrumental ensembles and choral groups, but eventually morphed into a choir known for its Christmas concert and caroling, Schmidt said.

Tim Lutz of Menomonie was also one of the original members.
Lutz, an elementary music teacher, said having more voices in the group gives it more strength. He enjoys being able to sing more technically difficult music that challenges him.

Conductor Nathan Jacobson said being the Mabel Tainter's resident vocal ensemble helps bring an audience of people who love the historic building as well as those who enjoy vocal music. It also provided a flexible rehearsal space and a performance venue.

Jacobson will conduct the Menomonie Singers in a variety of a cappella choral music, including contemporary works by Rachmaninoff, African-American spirituals, a Swahili hymn and a Cornish folk tune arranged by Gustav Holst.

Many of the songs are performed divisi, meaning rather than just four-part harmony there are six or eight parts, Jacobson said.

After the concert, some members will break into small ensembles for lighter songs including pop and showtunes in the Fellowship Room of the church. Refreshments and other items will be for sale.

Eventually the goal is to grow the Menomonie Singers to 32 or 36 members to improve the vocal strength as well as perform more concerts, Jacobson said.

The group also plans to work with the Mabel Tainter to write grants and travel to Europe in 2014 to perform in Vienna and Prague, Schmidt said.

Members now are mostly from Dunn County and range in age from 17 to senior citizens. They include people from diverse backgrounds including UW-Stout students, farmers, teachers, firefighters and nurses, Schmidt said.

"I enjoy the group effort," said Schmidt. "It's just a lot of fun."

She enjoys the challenge of the group working together to create the music with their voices.

"It's sometimes so beautiful I want to cry," she said.

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