

Talking with Richard and Eileen Bowen was music to my ears

By Karen Zach, Around the County

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Can't imagine music in Crawfordsville without these two wonderful folks and so happy to have finally met them while eating a lovely breakfast at The Breakfast Company. Wabash brought this couple to our fair city in 2001 and we've been blessed since.

Native-born Pennsylvanians, he grew-up in York County, active in music and theatre in high school (with a rich baritone voice) then on to the small, Lebanon Valley College where at age 19, he directed his first church choir. They laughed as they said people swore that they could tell what type of chocolate was being made each morning by the smell coming from the close little city of Hershey, PA. Since college, he has headed-up at least ten church choirs in various sizes, from 30 members to 3,000.

While at LVC, Richard Bowen met and dated Eileen who had grown-up in nearby Lancaster County (New Holland) where she was active in orchestra (violin) and choir, too, but they would go on to marry someone else. Richard grinned saying, "She dumped me!" After graduation, Richard spent the next eleven years teaching in New Holland after which he took a sabbatical to Munich, Germany studying music history. While there, Richard sang in a semi-pro choir and did quite a bit of travelling during 1983-84. Back in PA, he remets Eileen. Their lives seemed to have overlapped in many aspects in the world of music, friends and the like. It was meant to be; thus they married in 1987. In 1988, they moved to Cincinnati where he said he was a mid-life grad student and received his doctorate in Music History from the College-Conservatory of Music.

At Wabash, many of you may already know he was on the Music Faculty and directed the glee club. He retired in the Fall of 2017 on a very good note, since it was the 125th Anniversary of the Glee Club. He, the new director, 110 alums and the 40 glee club members all sang to over 600 visitors in a three-day event. The Glee Club dates back to 1892 with a small music department and a handful of members. Now, anywhere from 35-50 guys sing each year. Perhaps a couple each year might be music majors, but most just enjoy singing or join up as a side interest. Oddly, some may not have ever sang. For many years, there wasn't a credit it was just a club but there is credit for it now. The group is quite proactive with concerts and week-long tours. As Richard noted, "Athletes can lose, but in a music concert, everyone wins!" They took groups to Wales, England and Scotland and also to Ecuador. Hubby Jim and I enjoyed hearing especially about their Wales trip. The concerts were in Welsh then repeated in English.

Eileen was a music major as well and taught for about six years with a strings program at difference schools each day. She was home for nine years then did a variety of things. In Cincinnati she worked for the Great American Book Fairs and the University Medical Center in the pulmonary area and said it was absolutely fascinating. When they moved to Crawfordsville, she worked in Wabash's Fine Arts Department doing posters, programs and working in the box office for various groups and of course, the Glee Club as well. She retired in 2015 ... well, almost. Actually, she went back five more times as fill-in-help (maternity leaves...).

It hasn't just been Wabash music Richard and Eileen have been involved in here, either. Goodness, no! They have been extremely involved in the Crawfordsville Community Chorus (guess part of what she does? Yep, the poster and programs) she playing some and he directing from 2003-12 with about 40 singers from the area.

More music! He also is choir director at the First Christian Church with about 32 very faithful singers in the choir. "We're a close-knit group and all good friends!" He would love for anyone interested in singing to come join the group for their annual church concert with rehearsals beginning January 21st (7:00 p.m.) and the concert the last weekend of April.

Their children are Kent Stine who lives with his wife in Cincinnati and teaches music in high school. They have their two grandchildren. Joel Stine and wife returned to York County, PA where he works for a commercial door company.

Both are avid eclectic readers, he liking history, biography and cozy mysteries he said laughing, whereas she likes the darker mysteries, historical fiction, sci-fi and fantasy. His New Years' resolution is to learn calligraphy. Working on it. He also goes to the college fitness center a couple of times a week as he is determined not to be a "feeble old geezer!" Wood cutting for their wood burning stove keeps him busy, as well. She is on her 2nd three-year-term at the General Lew Wallace Museum and works with the Art League of Montgomery County. They also seem to be "owned by four cats who let us share their house."

They look forward to travelling more and particularly enjoyed going to France a year ago where his uncle who lost his life during the war is buried in an American cemetery. They went with a sister and brother-in-law who had a father in WWII, as well. Plus, Eileen's father was in the war, so it was a sort of pilgrimage for all of them.

In closing, thanks so much to the BOWENS for letting me write their story in Around The County and for coming to our community and jumping right in to spread their wealth of enthusiasm, knowledge and musical abilities with us!



Karen Zach is the editor of Montgomery Memories, our monthly magazine all about Montgomery County. Her column, Around the County, appears each Thursday in The Paper of Montgomery County.