

MARILYN DUEA, DIRECTOR OF GRAND SINGERS

Steps Down After 10 Years

By BJ Davis



Marilyn Duea is a slight woman with a quick wit, and a ready smile. She has enormous musical talent, which is on display at the two performances by the Sun City Grand singers each year since early 2005, when she first assumed the directorship of the group. You might presume from her demeanor that she would be an easygoing musical director, but that would be a mistake. She is always firmly in control, and if one of the songs being performed is a jazz or blues number you can also see that she loves the rhythm of those musical forms.

Marilyn is a native of Iowa and hails from a small farming community that could only boast a one room schoolhouse. Nevertheless, her talent was evident from an early age; her parents sacrificed a great deal to begin piano lessons for her at age 5. Marilyn soon discovered that music was more than just something that she could do and do well, but it became a way of expressing herself and discovering her true passion in life. It allowed her to overcome her innate shyness among her friends and colleagues.

As happens so often, a dedicated High School teacher told Marilyn that she had to seek a college degree,

and he was persuasive enough that she not only achieved a degree in Piano and Music Education at St. Olaf College in Minnesota, but a Masters as well from Lewis and Clark University in Portland, Oregon. One of her highlights while at Lewis and Clark was studying Jazz Piano under George Shearing.

Marilyn spent her 32 year professional career as a teacher and a choir director, ranging from elementary schools and intermediate school chorales to a community high school chorus in Bethesda, Maryland, that performed in the National Cathedral. She capped off her professional career by realizing a long term dream of playing piano professionally at some of the finer restaurants and clubs in southeastern Wisconsin.

Throughout her musical journey, her husband Bob has been a constant companion and her biggest fan. The two of them have lived in several interesting and exciting places because of Bob's job as an executive with several social service organizations. She even had the opportunity of accompanying him on several trips and assignments to Siberia and Korea, a far different environment than she was used to in the United States.

When Marilyn talks about the years she has spent as Music Director for the Grand Singers and Chorale, she can't complete any conversation without giving a great deal of credit to her Assistant Director, Donna Mills, who was her sounding board, confidant, and, ultimately, a great personal friend. She describes their relationship as "special". When she agreed to accept the job after the position became unexpectedly vacant on short notice, she agreed to do so only if the Singers operated with an open invitation to all with the theme

"Ya'll come". There are no auditions for Grand Singers; it is open to all who love to sing.

Initially when Marilyn took the job, there were only about 65 members, mostly comprised of women. The music they sang was only written for two and three parts. Soon, however, they replaced that very limited music with full four part choir music. Marilyn and Donna worked hard to bring in men to the Singers and today there are regularly 135 voices of both men and women who perform the two major concerts each year. Because of the high level of professionalism that Marilyn demands, a large number of former music professionals are now regular members.

Her years as Director haven't been without bumps in the road, including the time she toppled off the risers and chipped two front teeth. She has endured other moments that aren't remembered with such humor; the death of her parents, the battle with cancer by her husband and her own heart operation. But mostly if you ask how she will remember the years as Director, she'll tell you that it's all about the people that have been involved with the program over the years. They made her 10 year tenure special.

What's next? Marilyn will continue her love of music by both singing with The Grand Singers and accompanying specialty groups on request. She is looking forward to more travel, and spending time with her three sons and nine grandchildren in Oregon, Washington and Minnesota - nice places to visit in the summer!