



By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

One of Imperial's longest tenured instructors is moving from the community this week, but not without leaving a few things behind.

Dr. J. Gordon Christensen, who spent 40 of his 42 years in education as an elementary vocal music teacher at schools in Imperial, directed his final concert here on May 19.

It featured his K-5 classes, all singing a number of patriotic songs and each class spotlighting at least one soloist.

At two points during the program, Christensen announced some gifts he was leaving to the community.

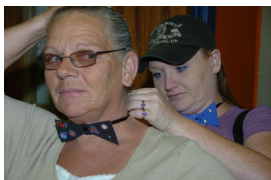
During the third grade chorus numbers, one included "723 Broadway," a song Christensen wrote for the school pageant performed in the spring, 1991, the final year K-4 students attended classes in the school building at that address.

Christensen explained how he had "drafted" high school art teacher Dick Haneline to paint an image of the K-4 building that Christensen could use on the cover of the pageant program.

He recently had the original painting matted and framed and presented it that evening to Imperial City Clerk/Administrator Jo Leyland. "Hopefully you can find a place for it, perhaps in the new fire hall" in the planning stages for the 723 Broadway location, he said.

The gift to the city also included two sconces that Christensen had retrieved from the building's exterior before it was torn down last fall.

Christensen said he would also be donating to the Chase County Historical Society his file of historic documents on the construction of the original school building.



The first song sung by the fourth grade chorus was "Are You Coming With Me?" a song Christensen and Dee Yaw, a former teacher and school board member here, wrote together for the Chase County Centennial Fair in 1985.

Christensen said he still had 14 copies of the "Are You Coming With Me?" musical score, all signed by Yaw, who is now deceased. He has given them to Nancy Weir, who chaired the Centennial Fair Committee nearly 25 years ago, and Christensen has also signed them.

His signature finale at the end of the concert last week featured the draping of a large American flag over the heads of the fourth grade chorus as they sang "The Star Spangled Banner."

As has been the case at many of his concerts, the program last week included a birthday song to Jesse McMillin, a fifth grader who turned 11 years old that day.

As has been done in his classrooms or at concerts when there's a birthday honoree present among his students, that honoree is asked to do the "hula" as the class sings Happy Birthday, followed by the musical lines that encourage "show us how you do the hula."

Young McMillin obliged, delighting the audience with a big smile and an entertaining "hula."

Several in the audience also sported handmade paper bow ties, a signature accessory of Christensen's. They were distributed by a group of parents as people arrived for the concert.

On the back of the program, Dr. C wrote the following words in his good-bye to the community:

"Thank you....for the sheer, wholesome joy of providing the opportunity for me to live and work in the Imperial and Chase County community for 41 years (he taught 40 years and took a one-year sabbatical to work on his Doctorate).

"The good people of the Chase County community are rooted in tradition, cultivate honesty, a solid sense of integrity, embrace beauty and continuously demonstrate work ethics that are passed from generation to generation.

"It has indeed been a professional and personal blessing to list Imperial, Nebraska as my address for these past four decades.

"May you continue to be a people whose goals are rooted in honesty and integrity, may you continue to support education with the same vigor you have for the past 41 years and may you always be kind to every living being, especially those living beings who are young, helpless and need your care, guidance and love."

With the help of friends, Dr. C had his belongings loaded this week and was leaving Thursday morning for Council Bluffs, Iowa, where he will be living and working.