



By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

It came as quite a surprise to Randy Hayes when he learned about two weeks ago he was chosen for the 2008 Outstanding Choral Director Award given by the Nebraska Choral Directors Association (NCDA).

The grade 7-12 vocal music director at Chase County Schools is no stranger to the Association, though, having been involved in it during the 26 years he's been in education.

"I was humbled," he said of the award, "because the list of directors selected in the past are all people I consider mentors."

Hayes received the award Nov. 22 during the Nebraska Music Educators Association (NMEA) conference and clinic in Lincoln.

It was also the weekend two of his students performed in the All-State Chorus there.

Hayes was nominated for the award by Jon Peterson, a longtime friend and a retired vocal music director at Lincoln East. He's known him since Hayes started teaching here in 1971.

"I have often thought that when I grow up, I wanted to be a director just like him," Hayes smiled.

Peterson wrote in his nomination letter, "The name of choral music in western Nebraska has been Randy Hayes. Randy has been a willing worker, tutor, mentor, friend, supporter, host and the main NCDA line west of North Platte."

He continued, "I could not count the times Randy has loaded his van with students in the middle of the night to run into Lincoln, to Allenspark, Colo., or leave Lincoln after the final NMEA convention concert and drive home."

Hayes has done all of his teaching at Chase County Schools, first hired in August, 1971, as grade 7-12 vocal director.

In 1979, he resigned from teaching to go into private business for a short time and he also pursued the ministry.

He started preaching in 1980 at the Imperial Westside Church of Christ and continued that for nine and a half years. Today, he continues to preach at Churches of Christ in Wauneta and Stratton.

But, when his former teaching position at the school opened back up in the fall of 1991, he reapplied and was hired.

He said he missed the classroom.

"I really enjoy teaching so when the opportunity arose again, I applied," he said.

He and wife Margene also had three children in college at the time, so the extra income came in handy.

He has been here ever since.

During his teaching years, he's been quite active in the NCDA. He continues to serve on the executive board and also has been the District 5 NCDA representative several years.

In that position, he's charged with promoting musical activities for all choir directors in the district.

He admits, however, that it's difficult for someone in western Nebraska to be vice president or president of the group due to distance.

Two of the things his show choirs and Chase County Schools have become associated with are the show choir festival held in Imperial and the performances at Branson, Mo.

This past February was the 15th year for the show choir festival to be held at CCS, largely due to Hayes and his willingness to organize the event that draws 18 to 19 choirs each year.

His show choirs have also performed at Branson five times, four as show openers and once in a contest there.

"It's a real plus for our students to perform there," he said.

"It gives our kids a chance to see real professionalism and meet some neat people," he added.

This past May, the 9th St. Singers opened for the Haygoods, a family group who then took time after their show to "hang out" with his choir students and answer questions.

Over the years, Hayes has seen changes in his job as vocal director, mostly with schedules.

"It's the whole schedule of the kids and school activities calendar," he said.

"There are so many things offered to students today, but the drawback is it spreads kids so thin. I'm not sure they are able to focus 100% in each area," he said.

To compensate for those packed schedules, Hayes was forced to rehearse for the fall musical during classtime this year, rather than practice in the evenings.

The positive, though, he said, is that there are so many opportunities and experiences for the students now, ones youths in the 70's never had.

He said the type of music his choirs perform today has also changed.

Today, music must be more easily arranged and able to be learned quickly. With so much entertainment surrounding them now, students aren't interested in spending six weeks learning a piece, Hayes said.

However, that doesn't stop Hayes from pulling out an "old classic" now and then for his choir to learn and perform. He said the kids really do appreciate it after all the work learning it is over.

"But, I don't do it everyday," he laughed.

He and his choirs are now working toward their Dec. 16 Christmas concert, which will feature some new and newly-arranged music, he said.

There won't be any choreography at this year's Christmas concert, because Hayes wants to concentrate on the blending and unification of the choirs' voices.

Accomplishments of Hayes' choirs

CHORUS—Consistent superior ratings at District Contest; NSAA Plaque (superiors from 3 judges)--8 consecutive years.

SHOW CHOIR—SPVA—consecutive Superior ratings last 16 years, last 12 consecutive years “Best Of Class” Trophy; NCDA Show Choir Festival—Gold Trophy last 13 consecutive years; Old-West Weekend--Scottsbluff—Gold Trophy 6 years, Silver Trophy 4 years, selected to “Best of Fest” Finals last 5 consecutive years; District Music Contest—Superior Rating last 16 consecutive years, NSAA Plaque last 12 consecutive years; Viking Cup Invitational—Omaha 3rd Place B-C Division 2005; GISH Invitational—Grand Island 1st Runner Up in Division 2006. JUNIOR HIGH CHORUS AND SHOW CHOIR—Consistent Excellent ratings at Contest; Outstanding Large Ensemble 4 years; Junior High Show Choir earned Gold Trophy at Scottsbluff and selected to “Best of Fest” Finals 2006; Junior High Show Choir earned Gold Trophy at NCDA Show Choir Festival 2008.