

Galesburg cultural offerings should be a plus for economic development

This last Saturday night was a milestone in the cultural life of Galesburg area residents. The Galesburg Community Chorus performed the Messiah, 60 years after they originally formed just for that purpose. It is said that this chorus of voluntary singers is the oldest continuously performing arts group in Galesburg.

The First Presbyterian Church was filled with music students, older citizens and every age in between, all anticipating hearing one of the most well-known and loved Christmas oratorios, written by George Frederic Handel. Custom dictates that when a familiar portion of the composition, the "Hallelujah Chorus" is sung at the end of the second part, audience members stand, in awe and respect for the thrilling music.

Community Chorus hires professional soloists to sing with the chorus, but they are often music teachers or church musical directors — talented and well-educated musicians who supplement their day jobs with what they love to do best, singing beautiful classical music. Some are full-time operatic performers. They all like to come to Galesburg and perform for our appreciative audiences.

The 70-member volunteer chorus truly sings just for the joy of singing and the quality of their performance Saturday night was superb, exciting, just about every adjective one can dream up. Having performed with the Chorus since 1997, (but not this Saturday night), I am always amazed at what we ordinary folks can do together under the direction of a professional director with the gift of pulling out not only any talent we may have, but even more. It can't always be easy to bring together a diverse group of adults, all ages and from all walks of life to perform these difficult numbers.

Tim Pahel, director of Community chorus, chairman of the music department at Carl Sandburg College, is one such person. With humor, energy and lots of patience, he enables us to soar out of our everyday lives and make beautiful music.

A Galesburg native, Tim teaches music courses at the college and private lessons, in addition to directing the college choir. During the winter and spring of 2004, he directed the Knox College Choir and Chamber singers. He is working for his doctorate in choral conducting at the University of Iowa. How lucky we are to have him stay in his hometown.

Our Zephyr editor and publisher, Norm Winick, received a call from the agent of the incredibly talented Messiah soprano soloist, Sherezade Panthaki. The agent wanted to

know if The Zephyr was going to review the performance. She also said that after viewing the community's and Zephyr websites, she was amazed at the range and quality of cultural offerings in our community. She's right on the money.

This ought to be one of the attractions to tourists, new businesses and potential residents of the area. I wonder, do our local economic development people brag about Community Chorus? our Knox Galesburg

Symphony? Prairie Players? Community Players? Civic Art Center? Carl Sandburg Children's choir? — these in addition to the continuous parade of artists who come to town and perform at The Orpheum, Knox College and Carl Sandburg College. School District #205 presents excellent musical programs, artwork and plays on all levels.

We certainly should be bragging that Knox College Music professor Laura Lane was invited to direct a choir at the famous

Carnegie Hall in New York City, and as a result, one hundred or more singers from the Knox College Choir, Galesburg Community Chorus, Carl Sandburg College Choir and other area choirs will be performing there in March of 2005. We have a gold mine of talent and culture in our town. We should be telling the world.

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