

## Nick and June Kaethler (2006)

Nick and June Kaethler have spent most of their adult lives giving their time and talents to the causes of youth, music and the arts. Beginning in 1969, the Wellington County area was the fortunate recipient of their commitment.

Nick arrived in Canada as a refugee from the Ukraine when he was still a young child. A surrogate parent figure from his Kitchener Mennonite congregation undertook to ensure that he received an education in music and he has focused his life on “giving back”.

“Music” says Nick “has opened the doors for me throughout my life.” As a result, he believes that every young person deserves: live arts experiences, life-long opportunities to sing, and opportunities to play an instrument.



As Music Consultant for Wellington County from 1980 to 1993, Nick’s goal was to “universalize music education”. By the time he left the post, there were choirs where there had been none, bands in every high school, and instruments in every senior elementary school.

Nick has taught music and conducted choirs at every level of education, beginning at the age of 19 when he was still a student. He introduced the first vocal programme in Guelph/Wellington secondary schools. He directed the University of Guelph Madrigal Singers, many university and community choirs, and founded and conducted the renowned Centennial High School Meistersingers for nearly a decade. In 1972, with Nick as director, the Meistersingers were honoured in the BBC’s international competition ‘Let the Peoples Sing’. In 1978, he produced an original children’s opera. An award-winning vocalist himself, Nick has sung professionally with the Festival Singers of Canada, directed by Elmer Eisler.

June grew up in Edmonton surrounded by music. Her father was a church organist for 40 years, both parents sang in church choirs, and June was actively involved in music from a young age. June has been a major moving force in the organization of music events in Guelph for many years. She served as fundraising Secretary and later Festival Secretary to the Kiwanis Festival, Box Office Manager for the Guelph Spring Festival, and Secretary/Administrator to the Edward Johnson Foundation for two National Vocal Competitions.

In 1981, after a hiatus of several decades, the Guelph Kiwanis Clubs revived the Kiwanis Music Festival, thanks to the impetus and leadership of Nick and June. Their persistence, organizational skills and dedication were the driving force behind the Festival for more than 20 years. In 2005, after a short respite, they returned to provide much needed revitalizing support. The current Kiwanis Music Festival of Guelph celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2006. Many of its young participants have gone on to professional music careers, and some are developing international reputations. They have June and Nick Kaethler to thank for some of their earliest opportunities to spread their musical wings.