

## Blecha directs final music concert

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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Students perform last time for long-time music teacher

“Music can change the world because it can change people,” —Bono

The annual spring concert by the Gothenburg High School varsity chorus was bittersweet Monday night.

Individuals, small groups and the entire chorus performed selections from Friday’s district music contest in Grant.

As the chorus sang together at the end, some students started to cry which carried over to a packed house in the performing arts center.

It was long-time music teacher Ernie Blecha’s last concert. He will retire at the end of the school year after 32 years in the district.

Blecha shared some thoughts about those years in a letter included in the concert program.



Excerpts are shared in the following story.

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When Blecha and his wife, Jan, moved to Gothenburg in 1982, they didn't know how attached they would become to a community and it's people.

Blecha began teaching in Dudley Elementary and was astounded by the students' abilities and motivation.

"Their excitement transferred directly to me," he said, noting the many holidays for which youngsters sang. "We've even performed programs dealing with pollution, outer space, dinosaurs, cowboys, countries...I think you get the picture."

In 2004, Blecha was asked to teach junior and high school students and worried about the change.

"I can't tell you how positive the outcome has been," he said. "By teaching secondary music, I feel I have been able to bond relationships and form musical abilities in so many outstanding students."

Opportunities to see high school students on the stage in musicals have probably been his proudest moments.

"I have been amazed with the acting and singing but mostly with the ability to come together as a group on a project and make it become the pride of the community.

"I have been honored to be part of making memories for those students that have been involved in this way."

Restoring a grand piano is another highlight as the community embraced the effort and raised \$16,000 within a month.

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“Gothenburg rose to the challenge and proved to me how much the community does support the arts and the music program,” he said.

Blecha said he was also once concerned about his ability to direct a choir and small groups that were judged every year at district music contest.

MUSICALS, SPRING PROGRAMS DIRECTED BY ERNIE BLECHA	
This list, compiled by Blecha, does not include musical programs commemorating holidays, honor choir musicals or the children's theatre productions he directed for many years with Trudy Eise.	1991: Out of this World!
<b>HIGH SCHOOL MUSICALS</b>	1992: Sing a Rainbow
2004-05: The Wizard of Oz	1993: Heartland Hoodown
2005-06: Othello!	1994: The Greatest Show on Earth
2006-07: Sound of Music	1995: Journey Through the Seasons
2007-08: Cinderella	1996: Rock n' Roll is Here to Stay!
2008-09: Back to the 80's	1997: It's a Small World
2009-10: Once Upon a Mattress	1998: Fifty Nifty United States
2010-11: Adventures of Tom Sawyer	1999: Out of this World!
2011-12: The Music Man	2000: It's Alphabetical
2012-13: 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee	2001: What's Cookin'?
2013-14: The Wizard of Oz	2002: Heartland Hoodown
<b>ELEMENTARY SPRING PROGRAMS</b>	2003: Rock n' Roll
1983: The Four Seasons	2004: Sing a Rainbow
1984: A Salute to Walt Disney	2005: Circus Circus!
1985: Gothenburg: A Part of Something Great (Commercial)	2006: Fifty Nifty United States
1986: Program unknown	2007: Make Your Own Kind of Music
1987: The Greatest Show on Earth	2008: A Salute to Walt Disney
1988: It's a Small World	2009: A Journey through the Seasons
1989: Hoopay for Hollywood	2010: It's Alphabetical
1990: A Salute to America	2011: Sing a Rainbow
	2012: Rock n' Roll is Here to Stay!
	2013: What's Cookin'?
	2014: Heartland Hoodown

“The choir has always stepped up to the challenge and reacted with tremendous enthusiasm and respect,” he said. “I have been blessed with students that are eager to excel and are determined to make a great sound and sing with expression and compassion.”

Choir members don't just sing the notes, he said, but “make music” when they sing.

Blecha also thanked accompanist Marcia Speck who has played for him and students for 10 years.

“Gothenburg has been blessed with an accompanist who can play anything,” he said.

Before the last song of the concert, “Omina Sol,” Blecha introduced his replacement—Tyler Meuret who will graduate from Hastings College in May. Meuret joined the students in singing “Omina Sol.”

As he approaches retirement, Blecha said he's finding it more difficult than he thought it might be.

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“I am so thankful for the opportunity to have taught each and every one of the students that have entered my classroom.”