

Man of the Year in Arts is Northport's maestro

Robert Krueger's gift to the community at large has spanned half a century

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In 1956, Robert Krueger, director of music education for the Northport-East Northport School District through 1982, vowed to bring music back to the village park that had fallen silent for more than a decade.

Krueger's dream of a community band took shape when a fledging group of community members and high school students rehearsed for five weeks and put on a single Sunday afternoon concert in 1959.

This past summer, the Northport Community Band — now a complete concert band featuring 75 to 85 musicians whose talent reflects the district's quality of music education — celebrated its 50th anniversary. A veritable Northport institution, the band's free July concerts draw thousands to the village park and fill Northport summer nights with the sound of music.

Although Krueger and his wife, Margie, moved to Florida in 1988, the couple returns to Long Island every summer so that the man after whom the bandstand was renamed in 1999 can continue his long-standing tradition.

Such is the allegiance to Krueger's "musical family" that band members return from "up or down the eastern seaboard" and from as far as Texas and California to play in the summer concerts, Krueger said in an interview several years ago.

In honor of the boundless musical gifts he has bestowed upon the community both as an educator and director and founder of the Northport Community Band, The Times of Northport & East Northport names Robert Krueger as Man of the Year in the Arts.

Longtime resident Jim Mahoney is among the many whose life has been touched by Krueger.



Photos by Alan Pearlman

Bob Krueger, right, and associate director Donald Sherman with County Executive Steve Levy presenting the Northport Community Band with a proclamation for its 50 years in Village Park.

"He has provided wholesome music for the community every July and brought very talented musicians together," Mahoney said of the man whom he has known for more than three decades. "He set the standard for high school music programs in this area."

Mahoney said that he finds one particular concert especially moving.

"Close to the Fourth of July there is a military medley recognizing all the veterans. He does a terrific job with that," Mahoney said.

In 1982, Krueger was joined by premier baritone player Donald Sherman, who serves as the community band's associate director. Sherman said that Krueger is part of his earliest childhood memories of visits to the park and he remembers hearing

him play as part of a trumpet trio with Ken Butterfield and Bill Baker.

It was a major thrill, therefore, when Sherman was invited to join the band.

He learned firsthand of his mentor's commitment to nurturing talent when, as a college student, he came to Krueger with some music that he had written and wanted to conduct.

"He took a chance on me and I have great memories of it. Many people have gotten a great start because of his help," Sherman said.

Krueger's generosity of spirit also finds expression in the guest conductor-podium exchange program that Krueger established with the Huntington Community Band 40 years ago.

Of the many proclamations that the band received in honor of its golden anniversary, "each one was different and special in its own way," Sherman said. "We got proclamations from the county, state, village and town, the Veterans Administration and the Huntington Arts Council."

The proclamation from the VA, acknowledging the July concert that the band has put on at the VA hospital for the last 10 years, is particularly indicative of Krueger's "humanity and desire to do things for people who need them."

Sherman also said that Krueger was particularly touched when Mayor George Doll awarded him the "key" to the village.

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— DONALD SHERMAN,
COMMUNITY BAND

"It was the first time that the mayor made that presentation," Sherman said, adding that he has always been impressed by his mentor's gift for involving others.

"He gets his energy from people and seeing them do what they do best. People feel good about their contribution. It's a model other people can follow," Sherman said.

Northport resident Sue Epstein, who manages public relations for the band, first met Krueger as a ninth-grader in 1967. He not only encouraged her to learn the French horn but also arranged for her to study with Hugh Cowden, the first French horn player from the Metropolitan Opera.

"Bob is a mentor and a very dear friend," Epstein said of the work of possibility that Krueger set in motion. "I played French horn for 27 years. I have band friends that I'll have for life. I can't tell you how many wonderful people I met as a result of having gone through the Northport music system developed by Bob."

She added, "He built Northport's fabulous music program and made it the envy of just about every school district on the planet. Quite a few students who come through the district's music program go on to be music educators themselves."

The system that Krueger developed continues to bear dividends as he inspires new generations of musicians every summer.

"When Bob drives up from Florida, he runs the band camp for Northport and a few other school districts," Epstein said.

Epstein, who played French horn for the first time in 15 years with other alumni at the final concert of the season, said she experienced "a full circle moment" at the 50th anniversary celebration that she helped plan.

"His whole family attended," she said, adding that Krueger, a 1945 graduate of Adrian High School in Michigan, was recently honored by its alumni association for his contributions to the world of music.

"I guess that if there's one way to describe Bob Krueger and how respected he is by the Northport community, it would be to refer to him as the 'Music Man of Northport.' That really says it all in a nutshell."



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