

# Stace N. Stegman and His Namesake Award

by Mark Munson

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Seventeen years have passed since we lost Stace Stegman to esophageal cancer: seventeen years of music making, seventeen years of choral conferences, and seventeen years of new choral musicians nurtured in the Central Region of ACDA. Perhaps it is time to tell Stace's story again so that the younger members of our organization will know something about the man whose memory we honor with his namesake award.

The Stace N. Stegman Award was established by the Central Region of the American Choral Directors Association in 2003 in memory of Stace N. Stegman (1946-2003), who gave tirelessly and selflessly in the service of choral music. To the many conductors, teachers and performers who knew him as a colleague and friend, Stace will always stand for what is best in our profession. He demonstrated passion, knowledge, and integrity in his work and in his relationship with the Central Region.<sup>1</sup>

Stace had a great love for choral music which may be traced to his days as a boy soprano at Grace Episcopal Church in his hometown of Sandusky, Ohio. Members "would recall the little boy's clear, bell-tone voice and his 'high c' that would occasionally soar from the choir loft at the end of a big anthem."<sup>2</sup> He continued to sing in both the church and high school choirs after his voice changed to the rich, resonant one that many of us knew. As a high school student he developed an appreciation for jazz, listening to live performances of famous artists while working as a busboy in the hotel dining room at Cedar Point.

Between 1966 and 1972 Stace was employed by The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) where he worked with space craft at Plum Brook Station, now the John H. Glenn Research Center. After his work at NASA ended as a result of funding cutbacks, he held a variety of positions including ones with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Stace married Sandra Frey in 1973 and subsequently worked in two family businesses in northwest Ohio. Stace and Sandra enjoyed adventurous travel and dining together. Stace was very supportive of Sandra while she worked as a public school teacher, when she started community choral ensembles, as she pursued a doctoral degree, and then eventually as she took positions at the University of Northern Iowa and Northern Illinois University. Although Sandra probably knew it before his passing, a cousin reminisced that she had heard Stace say that it was in making Sandra's dreams possible that he took most pleasure and joy.<sup>3</sup>

With the motto "Choral Music for the Choral Professional," Musical Resources began operating in the basement of the Stegman home in Wauseon, Ohio in 1986. Before long the Stegman's business moved to Toledo. Stace and his associate and friend, Dennis Blubaugh, were seen regularly at Musical Resources booths at regional and national ACDA conferences. Prominent choral conductors from this country and abroad promoted Musical Resources because of its commitment to high-quality literature and service. The business continues to thrive today and is a wonderful and significant part of Stace's legacy.

The diagnosis of the terminal illness came early in 2002. Although Sandra was still teaching at Northern Illinois, she was hired for a one-year visiting position at Bowling Green State University, much closer to the Stegman home in Toledo. This opportunity enabled Sandra and Stace to share time together with family and friends, and to take care of personal and business matters. Family and friends gathered on a cold, but sunny afternoon in February 2003 to celebrate Stace's life. Musician friends came together to form a choir for the beautiful and moving funeral service.

Stace Stegman was a gentle giant in the choral profession. Always unassuming, he worked and contributed generously behind the scenes. Our Central Region was but one beneficiary of his generosity. He had a wonderful sense of humor and it was always fun to talk with him during a visit to Musical Resources. One time I asked him what he did with music that he received from publishers that was of shoddy quality. "Oh, that's for lining the bird cages!" was his response.

Sandra became my colleague at BGSU in the fall of 2002 and continued to be until her retirement in 2016. Late in the summer of 2003 I received a call from her telling me that there was something in my mailbox that I should see. What I found was a copy of a new, yet unpublished piece titled "If Ever Two were One." Before his passing, Stace had commissioned Gwyneth Walker to set texts by Anne Bradstreet that speak of loving devotion, the pain of separation, and the joy of reunion. Sandra told me that Stace would often hide surprises for her and that this gift in honor of their 30<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary was true to form. It was an honor to conduct the premiere performance of this special piece just a few months later.

Perhaps no one can summarize what choral musicians know and appreciated about Stace better than Dennis Blubaugh who wrote:

To say that Stace Stegman loved choral music is a gross understatement. The success of Musical Resources was the result of this life-long love. His long association with the ACDA was his way of promoting the growth and performance of choral music. He was at his happiest at ACDA conferences where he could attend choral performances, help conductors find the exact literature they needed for a concert, and scope out the most interesting new choral music. I feel privileged to have been part of the growth of his successful business, which thrived because the customers who dealt with Stace sensed his genuine interest in them, their singers, and their choral programs.<sup>4</sup>

The list of recipients of the Stace N. Stegman Award includes the names of some worthy, high-profile individuals, three of whom have even served as national president of ACDA. It also includes the names of some folks who, like Stace, have made great contributions in quiet ways from behind the scenes. Through this award, Stace is remembered for his many contributions to choral music, especially in the Central Region of the American Choral Directors Association.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Central Region American Choral Directors Association, <https://www.acdacentral.org/>, (accessed September 20, 2019.)

<sup>2</sup>Stegman, Sandra Frey, "Our Story," unpublished, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>4</sup>Blubaugh, Dennis, message to Mark Munson, email, 2019.