

## MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: (OR HOW BEST TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN JUNIOR HIGH MALE CHORUS MEMBERS)

SUZANNE CALLAHAN



**Suzanne Callahan is Choral Director at McArthur Junior High School in Jonesboro**

Choral educators are forever battling to recruit and retain the elusive male chorus member, myself included. Although I would never assume to have all the answers, I do have suggestions and ideas that might help. I was lucky enough to have 55 junior high boys in class this year at MacArthur, which was a little less than half of my female enrollment. As the mother of sons, both of whom had wonderful choral experiences (thank you Elaine Bartee, LaJuana Warner, Fonda Lofton, and Krisie Holmes) within the Jonesboro school system, I ask that you consider the following.

### **DOES YOUR PROGRAM HAVE THE "COOL" FACTOR?**

Let's be honest, you need to recruit a jock or two. Visit with the coach, ask for his help in promoting your class! And for heaven's sake quit bashing athletics. If you make your program an "us against them" situation you will lose.

Every junior high boy (at least a good number of them) has aspirations of the NFL or the NBA. Do not laugh. Learn the language, talk the talk, actually attend the GAMES and cheer on their endeavors.

Never ever underestimate the importance of a student athlete, coach, or parent seeing you at a game. You are building relationships and relevance to the school environment.

Go the extra mile to incorporate sports into your classroom. This year I created a music theory basketball game. I emailed my parent group and asked for an inexpensive over-the-door nerf goal. What I got was a \$50 Plexiglas goal and ball. I sacrificed Friday rehearsals for a month as we played the game and the boys loved it. I made a bracket, we had a tournament and a good time (and lots of learning) was had by all. During the finals, after the winning answer and the winning goal, one boy ripped his shirt off and ran around the room as if he had scored a winning soccer goal. When is the last time your students were that pumped about the definition of tempo?

My two male chorus classes also enjoy doing football pics each Friday during college football season. It takes a little research on my part each Thursday as I print the sheet with each game. I usually find everything I need in our local Thursday newspaper. All of my boys guess the scores of the Red Wolves, Razorbacks, and Ole Miss Rebel games. The one with the closest guess to the score gets a candy bar on Monday. It's a big deal, folks. The boys love it so much that I have to post the winner and keep up with who has won the most times during the season.

My room is covered in college, high school and junior high sports posters. Yes, I'm over the top. It works. **Get the boys, the girls will follow.**

### **HAVE YOU SPENT TIME PRESENTING VIDEOS OF PROFESSIONAL MALE SINGERS?**

Even if you hate pop and country music you really must find a way to present positive examples of both genres to your class. If you think seventh-grade boys are going to be turned on by listening to opera you are sadly mistaken. Ease your students into the performing world by expanding their horizons slowly! In my classroom, every Tuesday is "YouTube Tuesday." Each week I search the Internet for appropriate video clips. One of my favorite all-time performances features the a cappella group **Home Free** performing their version of **Ring of Fire**. The boys beg to listen over and over. They love the extreme ranges and the "manliness" of the song. We also love listening to **Walk off the Earth** and **Pentatonix**. We listen, discuss, and talk about the performers and what we like about each of them. By the time CPA rolls around they are ready to listen to choral clips of performances with a more discerning ear. Celebrate their high voices and make a huge competition out of who has the highest falsetto! Make certain they hear voices like Sam Smith or Bruno Mars who have gorgeous upper ranges.

**But then there are some days I simply show a sports video or a funny clip that just makes us laugh.**

### **HAVE YOU HIGHLIGHTED YOUR INSTRUMENTALISTS?**

In my choir I have several young men who are learning to play the guitar. I have a few percussionists and a couple of pianists. Fearless Friday is the day these guys get to show off their skills. No matter their ability level, I strive to make them feel like rock stars of the universe, and they love it. I

purposely incorporate instrumentalists in as many performances as possible. The boys are impressed with each other; and the girls—well the girls are over the moon.

### LIGHTEN UP

Do you know the song “New York, New York”? I like to think the lyric applies to all middle and junior high choral educators. “If you can make it there, you’ll make it anywhere!”

This is a difficult age. The boys have left the safe confines of elementary school and are embarking on a brand new pubescent adventure. They are often loud and smelly and goofy. **Love them anyway.** Wednesday is Wacky Joke Day. Every week we try to top one another with our corny jokes, and, yes, it takes away rehearsal time. The camaraderie is worth it. Laugh with your boys and try your best to get their jokes and goofy sense of humor.

### REWARDS

**Donuts go a long way.** Last year after all-region tryouts I rewarded my young men with a pancake breakfast in the choir room. The moms did all the work (Yes!). They brought griddles, batter, syrup, and gallons of chocolate milk. We were the envy of the school. The maintenance man, however, was not so thrilled, since we blew a breaker.

### TAKE THEM SERIOUSLY

Know your students. Be perceptive. Some of them have perfect moms and dads; lots of them don’t. A young man needs

a father or mother figure (in my case a grandmother) who can tell when something isn’t quite right. Boys cry too. Let choir be that safe place where emotions are allowed and tough boys can spend a few minutes a day letting their guard down. Speak to their sensitive side. Be aware of that young man who needs to have his creativity and uniqueness celebrated. You may be the **ONLY** person who is providing him with encouragement or teaching him to tie his tie and wear black socks with black pants.

### TEACH THEM THE “DO RIGHT” LAW

It’s a tough world out there. We talk a lot these days about girls, empowerment and self-image; but who is nurturing the boys? Who is teaching them that certain behavior is not acceptable? Who is expecting them to be respectful and telling them that gentlemanliness is attractive. If you have the luxury of having a male chorus, use this precious time wisely. It’s more important now than ever. Manners, etiquette, decorum, not farting in public... there’s so much to learn at this age!

Bring in a guest speaker or conductor. This fall LaJuana Warner and I invited Clint Pianalto to work with our Jonesboro junior high guys, What a joy! Clint modeled for them great behavior, musicianship and that goofy sense of humor (no offense Clint). My boys loved every minute.

### LITERATURE

There’s more to life than sailors and pirates. Plan your program carefully. Don’t assume your boys can’t or won’t sing

with real feeling or emotion. My spring CPA music this year consisted of three love songs.

“Viva Tutti” (singing about how they love women)

“I Think My Love So Fair” (We sang about true love after we discussed the love that our grandparents have for one another—not the Kim Kardashian kind. They got it and sang the piece with passion and purpose and with no embarrassment.

“West Country Lover” (a breakup song that was a hoot because they thought breaking up was funny)

Be mindful that literature choices for males are of utmost importance. If they don’t like it or understand it they won’t sing it.

### Good Luck!

Aren’t we lucky to be in this profession? We have the opportunity to mold these young impressionable young boys into beautiful young men. Could there possibly be a more important job than ours? Best of luck in your recruiting for next year. Remember that in junior high it has to be **FUN!** **Snag’em and drag’em** into choir. Your high school director will thank you for it!



## NEW MUSIC IN WORSHIP R&S CHAIR

Hello to you, my name is Kyle Linson. I am the ArACDA R&S chair for Music in Worship. I am Director of Music and Worship Arts at First United Methodist Church in Little Rock. I have been back in the South for almost two years now and am very thankful to be here. I am interested in hearing from you as to what your needs, questions, and suggestions are regarding making music in worship even stronger in your church and in our state. I have been able to get to know many central Arkansas musicians; it would be nice to hear from the rest of the state about what is happening with your worship music. I look forward to meeting you all. Please email me at [klinson@fumclr.org](mailto:klinson@fumclr.org) with your ideas. I hope everyone has survived the Lenten and Easter seasons and is ready for summer conventions to renew and revive. Blessings to you all.

# BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

KEITH REEVES

Keith Reeves is Choir Director and Fine Arts Dept. Head at Ramsey Junior High School

Most of us are teaching today because we were inspired by one or more of our former teachers. As you read this article, please remember that person. Try to remember the qualities that made you decide to follow in his or her footsteps.

I'd like to start by telling you my story and how I came to be a teacher. My journey started at a sixth-grade church lock-in when I was a student at Cavanaugh Elementary School in Fort Smith. Gaye McClure, who happened to be working the refreshment station at the lock-in, was the choir director at Ramsey Junior High at the time. As you know, a good director is always recruiting! She asked me, as well as my group of seven or eight buddies, what junior high we would be attending the following year. Once we mentioned we were going to Ramsey she began talking to us about joining choir. At the time we believed choir was for girls and that guys didn't take choir! She promptly told us that several of the young men at Ramsey were already in choir and then reminded us that there were in fact lots of girls in choir as well, which piqued our 12-year-old interests! With a little coaxing she had gotten all of us to agree that we would give it a try.

The following year we all found ourselves in her classroom. Mrs. McClure was very strict! Singing was a ton of fun, but we realized she just wasn't going to allow us to be the clowns that were aspiring to be. We thought all we would have to do was sing! After a few days we had decided that choir just "wasn't our thing." We all agreed to bring the required notes from our parents to the counselors so that we could drop choir. For some reason I never could remember to bring my note. My dad wrote it. I kept it near my backpack but somehow it never made it to school with me. This went on for two whole weeks until at last I was STUCK in the class for remainder of the semester.

Over the course of the next few weeks choir became my absolute favorite class,

and to this day Mrs. McClure still holds her place as my favorite teacher. I begin to realize that she wasn't mean. She had a plan. She was establishing her procedures and our behavior parameters. She knew that in a few weeks those of us who were still there were there to learn; and she knew that we would take it as seriously as any junior high boy can take anything! She never accepted anything but our very best, and she pushed us beyond the typical expectations of junior high singers. It wasn't only that she pushed us; it was HOW she pushed us. She made choir fun! We didn't even realize that we were working hard because we were all enjoying the process!

I went on to sing in Winston Turpin's choir at Southside High School and then sang with Gary Morris at Arkansas Tech University. These three educators all had one thing in common. They all believed that the most important goal was to teach people through music. Music was their tool to inspire us to reach our fullest potential as people. I wasn't a fantastic student. I didn't make straight A's or even all A's and B's. School was difficult for me. When I look back on all of the classes I was successful in, the common denominator was an enthusiastic teacher with an ability to connect and build a relationship with me.

We may feel like there is no time because of all of the other requirements we must fulfill, but there is always a few extra minutes to make a connection with a student. As they enter the room, go strike up a conversation with a few of them. Work the room instead of standing at the door and giving them all a generic greeting. Plan to chat with a different group each day until you have interacted with all of them. Ask the students about themselves. What did they do the evening before? How have their other classes gone so far that day? Instead of making all work content related, give them a personal interest survey, and use information from those surveys to strike up your pre-class conversations.

Find out what activities your students are involved in and make it a point to attend those activities. Go to football and volleyball games. Attend their quiz-bowl tournaments

or cheer/drill team competitions. Go to their band and orchestra concerts. Spend a few minutes the following day complimenting the successes you witnessed while you were watching. Students need to see that we care as much about them personally as we care about how they are performing in our class.

When leading your rehearsals try not to get frustrated. Be patient and kind. Be very excited and animated as you share your passion with them! Put a little twinkle in your eye. When writing your lesson plans try to think of personal situations that relate to the lesson topic and plan to engage them through story. Kids love stories. Entertain them!

The students we teach go through things every day at home that we know nothing about. Consider all of the variables that could be affecting their attitude and participation levels before reacting to a situation in class, and remember—it's just a bad day, not a bad life! Retired choir director Dennis Burton once told me that the kids don't want to have a bad day any more than we do. If Monday is a rough day then go home at the end of the day and shake it off. On Tuesday, go in beaming with enthusiasm and act as if nothing happened the day before. The kids will pick up on your graciousness and will almost always be thankful for your ability to forgive and forget. They may not mention it right then but they notice.

Remember to relate your subject matter to real life experiences as often as possible. Find a way to show them why what we teach is important for **LIFE**, not just to earn a grade. Don't worry! They hear what we say, even though we don't realize it. They may be 20 years old before it sinks in, but they are listening! Don't allow yourself to feel defeated because they aren't "getting it" right now. I run into many students after graduation who thank me for the life lessons I attempted to teach them. Others make apologies for terrible attitudes or behaviors that they displayed while they were in my class. They **KNOW**.

(continued on page 4)

("Beyond the Classroom"—continued from page 3)

Just remember—the days of students showing up to class and giving their best effort just because “we are the teachers and we said so” are a thing of the past. They must buy into us as people and they must see that we are truly passionate about what we are sharing with them. They must feel loved, appreciated, and valued if we want them to give 100%. Have a great year. Go out there and inspire someone!!

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# DOING SOMETHING DIFFERENT AT THE U OF A:

STEPHEN CALDWELL

Stephen Caldwell is Director of Choral Activities at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville

Every few concert cycles it is vital to the life of my own conducting to learn something fresh and new. Not just one piece, but a total immersion into a musical culture about which I know nothing. This year at the University of Arkansas, we broke with the tradition of the “standard” spring masterwork (Mozart *Requiem*, etc) and chose to pursue instead the musical traditions of India. Why India? Because I knew nothing about its music, and it forced me to study. It forced me to study the most basic things. I researched the very nature of a “choir” in India and how it differs from our own perception of what a choir is. I learned about *om* chants, Carnatic songs, Bhajan, Shlokams, and Ragas. I learned how their musical tradition developed over the last thousand years from *om* chants to modern Indian pop. I researched the “post-Slumdog Millionaire” effect on our own music. I studied traditional choral music that was inspired by Indian culture (like the *Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda* by Gustav Holst) and I found new choral music based on Indian poetry (Sametz *Me to tere paas me*, for example). Most importantly, I found a new musical tradition about which I knew nothing, but which existed in front of us this whole time. The Mozart *Requiem* will have to wait until next year, because there is a world of unknown beautiful music right in front of us.

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I am so honored to be able to invite you to the 2015 Summer Reading Conference at the Austin Hotel in lovely downtown Hot Springs, July 27-29. We have a host of great presenters and session leaders and new choral music and resources from J&B Music Sales all lined up to provide what I hope will be a wonderful few days of music, learning, and camaraderie as we grow together in our Arkansas choral community.

There are two fantastic headliners for this year's conference: Gretchen Harrison and Dr. Charlotte Mizener. On July 27 and 28 Gretchen will lead our secondary teachers in a series of sessions focusing on Finding Excellence in Teaching and Rehearsing, exploring resources for new choir teachers as well as experienced teachers. She will also speak on the importance of Finding Excellence in the Middle. This session will cover the unique rehearsal, management, planning, and literature selection process for middle school choirs.

On Wednesday, July 29, we will have a track specifically designed to meet the needs of the elementary teachers. We are offering a single-day registration price for that day that is only available to teachers who are attending these sessions. Dr. Charlotte Mizener is a professor of music education at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas, where she teaches undergraduate and graduate music education courses and applied harp. Dr. Mizener will lead our elementary teachers in three sessions aimed at using music to help teach across the curriculum. Her sessions are titled Managing for an Effective, Efficient, and Fun Classroom, Getting to the Core of English Language Arts Through Music, and Singing Counts! Songs and Activities that Reinforce Common Core Standards in Mathematics.

I sincerely hope you can come and be a part of this year's conference!

Mark Langley, NBCT, ArACDA President

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## ELEMENTARY SESSIONS PRESENTER



**Charlotte Mizener**

Charlotte Mizener is a professor of music education at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas, where she teaches undergraduate and graduate music education courses and applied harp. She also serves as the coordinator of music education and the graduate advisor. She previously taught elementary music in grades kindergarten through six. She received the Bachelor of Music Education degree and Master of Music in harp performance degree from the University of North Texas and the Ph.D. in music education from the University of Texas at Austin.

Dr. Mizener's research interests include the elementary school-aged singer and children's attitudes toward music and singing as well as music educator preparation. She has presented research in these areas at music education conferences at the state, regional, and national levels. Her work has been published in the *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *General Music Today*, *Texas Music Education Research*, and the *Texas Music Educators Conference Connection*. She is the chair of the research division of the *Texas Music Educators Conference*.

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## CONFERENCE HEADLINE PRESENTER



**Gretchen Harrison**

Gretchen Harrison has been teaching middle school or junior high choral music since 1987. She is currently responsible for the vibrant choral program at Frontier Trail Middle School in Olathe, Kansas, which serves students in grades 6-8. In addition to her work in the public schools, she also is an Assistant Director in the Allegro Community Children's Choir program based in Overland Park, Kansas. Harrison considers her commitment to students of primary importance, followed closely by her commitment to serving colleagues and developing leaders in the choral music profession. She has served as ML Choral Chairperson for Kansas Music Educators, KCDA Chairperson for Repertoire and Standards for JH/MS, and (currently)

the National Chairperson for American Choral Directors Association Repertoire and Standards for Junior High and Middle School Choir. She has been recognized by *Who's Who Among American Teachers* and has twice received the Outstanding Middle Level Music Educator Award presented by her KMEA district. Her choirs consistently earn top ratings at festivals and have appeared at KMEA. Harrison earned her BME from Wichita State University and her MME from the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She is an active clinician, presenter, and adjudicator. A child of excellent choral and keyboard musicians, she and her high school band director husband are the parents of two very musical children.

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## HONOR CHOIR DIRECTOR



**Elizabeth McFarland**

Elizabeth Hogan McFarland is Deputy Director of the St. Louis Children's Choirs. The Children's Choirs was recently awarded a Social Impact Grant from the St. Louis Regional Arts Commission to implement a new program called Music Made Together, which seeks to connect students and teachers in underserved areas of St. Louis with resources in choral music.

Elizabeth earned her M.M. from Michigan State University in Choral Conducting, her BS in Education from the University of Missouri, and her Artist Teacher Certificate through the Choral Music Experience Institute. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Learning, Teaching and Curriculum with emphases on choral conducting and vocal pedagogy at the University of Missouri. Ms. McFarland taught vocal and general music in Parkway and Lindbergh School

Districts. She previously taught courses in the areas of music and education and supervised student teachers at the University of Missouri, Webster University and the University of Missouri-St. Louis. At the University of Missouri, Ms. McFarland directed the MU Women's Chorale.

An active singer, clinician, adjudicator and coach, Ms. McFarland brings a passion for helping people discover beauty in themselves and the world around them through the study of music. She has conducted honor choirs in Missouri and Arkansas, and she serves as the SWACDA Repertoire and Standards Chairperson for Youth and Student Activities. Her research interests include school and community partnerships involving choral music middle school and junior high singers, and choral music for women's voices.

# HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ARACDA CONFERENCE

HOT SPRINGS, AUSTIN HOTEL, JULY 27-29

SUBJECT TO CHANGE

CONFERENCE AND REGISTRATION INFORMATION IS AT [WWW.ARACDA.ORG](http://WWW.ARACDA.ORG)

Monday, July 27

- 10:30am New Directors Meeting (Tom Street)
- 10:30am ArkCDA Interest Session
- 12:45pm Opening Session (Mark Langley)
- 1:00pm Reading Session: SATB/SAB 1 (Dr. Stephen Caldwell)
- 2:00pm "Challenge Issued: Find your best "Excellent" in Teaching" (Gretchen Harrison)
- 4:00pm R&S Roundtable Sessions (R&S Chairs)
- 9:00pm Soiree (J&B Music)

Tuesday, July 28

- 8:30am ArkCDA Region Meetings (ArkCDA Region Chairs)
- 10:00am "Finding Excellence in the Middle" (Gretchen Harrison)
- 1:30pm Reading Session: Treble Voices (Carrie Taylor)
- 2:30pm "Effective Warm-ups and Rehearsal Techniques" (Ryan Fox)
- 3:30pm Reading Session: Christmas/Holiday (David Willard)
- 4:30pm R&S Roundtable Session (R&S Chairs)
- 6:30p Honor Choir Concert (Elizabeth McFarland)

Wednesday, July 29

- 8:30am ACDA General Business Meeting (Mark Langley)
- 9:00am Reading Session: Unison/2-part (Suzanne Callahan)
- 10:00am "Building the Basics with Beginning Singers (Keith Reeves)
- 11:00am Reading Session: SATB/SAB 2 (Gaye McClure)
- 1:30pm Break-Out Interest Sessions
- 2:30pm Reading Session: Male Voices (Matt Foy)
- 3:30pm ArkCDA General Business Meeting (Carrie Taylor, ArkCDA President)

ELEMENTARY SESSIONS - with Dr. Charlotte Mizener

Wednesday, July 29

- 10:00am Elementary Roundtable (Christine Graham)
- 11:00am Reading Session: ArkMEA
- 1:30pm "Managing for an Effectice, Efficient, and Fun Classroom"
- 2:50pm "Getting to the Core of English Language Arts Through Music"
- 4:10pm "Singing Counts! Songs and Activities that Reinforce Common Core Standards for Mathematics"

# ARACDA SCHOLARSHIP FOR GRADUATE CHORAL STUDIES

## Application form

ArACDA is awarding a \$500 scholarship for graduate study in choral music. Applicants must be members of ArACDA (with at least 12 months of past membership), be employed as a choral teacher in an Arkansas church or school, have a cumulative GPA of 3.0 on a 4.0 system, and be enrolled in an Arkansas college or university pursuing a degree in music.

Full name \_\_\_\_\_

Home address \_\_\_\_\_

email \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

School in which you are enrolled or enrolling \_\_\_\_\_

Degree you are seeking \_\_\_\_\_

Please enclosed the following items with this application form:

1. A letter of application (typed or printed) describing your qualifications and personal goals;
2. Two sealed letters of recommendation, one from an administrator and one from an active ArACDA member;
3. A copy of your current transcript;
4. A summary of your professional experience.

Please submit to  
Mark Langley  
Lakeside High School  
2871 Malvern Ave  
Hot Springs, AR 71901

The ArACDA board will make the decision as to which applicant will receive the scholarship.

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Arkansas **accent** is the newsletter of the Arkansas chapter of ACDA

**In this issue:**

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