

Four Freshmen Society PAST PRESIDENTS

Edd Townsend, John Bangs, Ted Driscoll, Don Follett, Tom Purvis, Dick Baldwin,
Mel Myers, Neil Lantz and Donna Gallaway.

The Many Lives of Donna Gallaway, FFS President

There is that familiar saying, “If you want something done and done right, give it to a busy person.” One could say this about Donna Gallaway, the current President of the Four Freshmen Society. Donna was exposed to the Freshmen sound in her youth because her parents were fans. Later she married Tom, a musician who played the euphonium and had a very extensive LP collection, including many by the Freshmen.

In 1990, Tom and Donna attended a Four Freshmen concert. They picked up an application form to join the Four Freshmen Appreciation Society. Finally, they filled out the application, which asked questions about the extent of their musical interest, and sent it to John Bangs in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

John Bangs called to invite them to a 2-day private event for which the Freshmen were engaged. Tom and Donna decided to go and were happy to meet a lot of other fans, including the Freshmen: Bob Flanigan, Autie Goodman, Greg Stegeman, and Mike Beisner.

The next year, 1992, they went to Columbus, Ohio in conjunction with a Senior Expo to hear the Freshmen. Donna continues, “The plan was to order pizza and have everyone pitch in \$10-15, so they asked me if I would collect the money.” This was the year that young Bob Ferreira, who was only 19 years old at the time, joined the group.

Later, Donna and Tom went back to Oshkosh (second time in three years). John Bangs asked if Donna would take minutes of the meeting, so for more than 25 years, she served as Secretary. She comments, “My husband was rather shy and didn’t like big crowds, but he would go to these conventions because he knew there were people there who would speak his language.”

Donna’s husband was a dentist. They lived in Washington DC for four years while he was in the army and then moved into a partnership dental practice in Ohio. Tom wanted to be on his own, so they found a location in Leipsic, Ohio, and he asked Donna to come in and help him set it up. Donna thought, “OK, I can do a year or two to get things rolling.” It ended up being 28 years.

Tom passed away in 2007 from a rare bacterial infection, but Donna stayed on as secretary of the Four Freshmen Society. She continues to go to all the conventions by herself and says, “I knew enough

people by that time that I was comfortable to go on my own.”

In 2020, Donna became President of the Four Freshmen Society. It was a challenging year to try to have a convention because of Covid. Contracts needed to be canceled and rescheduled. Finally, the convention was held in Bay City, Michigan – a smaller attendance but a successful meeting.

She continues her interest in getting this music to younger people who will love it once they are exposed to it. And she is very proud of the current members of The Four Freshmen. They all have degrees in music, some from

very prestigious institutions, so they are well prepared to succeed in music.

In other aspects of her life, Donna serves her local Methodist Church in many capacities. She has been trained as a Certified Lay Speaker and is qualified to fill in for her Pastor as well as to preach in other churches in the area. She also leads a weekly women’s Bible study and is Chairperson of the Staff /Pastors Relations Team. With a degree in Education, she substitutes in the Pre-school. She says, “It’s tiring to keep up with them, but you can’t help but smile when you are around those 3-, 4- and 5-year-old kids.”

Donna is also a year-round volunteer with Samaritan’s Purse, which is Billy Graham’s organization for international relief following natural disasters. Part of their activity is Operation Christmas Child, a group responsible for the Shoebox Ministry. People assemble shoe boxes with toys, school supplies, hygiene items and prepare them to be distributed in needy areas around the world.

Although Donna travels back and forth to Florida, where she has a home and family, her base is still in Leipsic, Ohio. Leipsic was originally settled by Germans and is a sister city to Leipzig, Germany. At one point, Libby’s built a ketchup processing plant in the little town, and the farmers in the area started growing tomatoes. This brought in migrant workers and some challenges in integrating them into a rural community. But the community has come together and is now very ethnically diverse. With intermarriage, 70% of the school kids now have Hispanic last names.

Donna thinks the town has bonded with Hispanic culture over food. She oversees a free community meal project serving people from every church, and two of the churches are Hispanic. Everyone loves it when the Hispanic churches prepare authentic food to share.

One more thing... Donna went through training to qualify as a Master Gardener. This requires giving a plant-related service to the community annually. Every year she goes to the greenhouses and picks out 25 flats of flowers-- 15 pots in each flat-- and brings in a couple of other Master Gardeners to create attractive pots to place around the campus of a local nursing home, “The Meadows.”

About her many service activities, Donna states, “When I was working, I couldn’t do these things. But once I retired, it just seemed to be the right thing to do.”

