**Arkansas Choral Directors Association Hall of Fame**

**Geneva Powers (1943-2015)**

**Springdale High School, Director – 1965-67**

**Arts Center of the Ozarks, Director – 1973-1978**

**Springdale First United Methodist Church, Chancel Choir Director – 25 years**

**Central Junior High, Springdale – 1980-1999**

**Springdale High School, Assistant Director – 1999-2003**

**Geneva Umbaugh Powers was born and raised in Springdale, Arkansas. “The family lived downtown, within sight of the First United Methodist Church,” Her sister, Joanne Franco recalled. “She sang there every Sunday. In the ‘dark ages,’ you could hear church over the telephone wire. Mom would pick up the phone and be able to hear Geneva singing her solo down the street.”**

**Mrs. Powers graduated from Springdale High School in 1961. In 1965 she earned her BSE in Music Education from the University of Arkansas where she graduated magna cum laude. She earned a Master of Music in Voice in 1970. While at the University, she was a member of the University of Arkansas Schola Cantorum in its premier year. In 1962, she traveled with Schola Cantorum to Arezzo, Italy, where the choir won first prize in the International Polyphonic A Capella Music Competition. On the choir’s return trip to Arkansas, they were invited to the White House, where they were introduced to President John F. Kennedy in the Rose Garden.**

**Mrs. Powers began her teaching career in 1965 at Springdale High School founding the choral music program as the first Director of Choirs at SHS. Her sister recalled, “Springdale Superintendent, T. G. Smith said he would hire Powers part-time, and if she could get enough students, he’d give her a full-time job. She went to football practice to recruit singers—and of course, she got them!” Thus began the tradition of excellence in Springdale choral music that is still thriving throughout the school district today.**

**After earning her Masters degree and serving as Director of the Arts Center of the Ozarks (1973-1978,) Geneva returned to the classroom as the Choral Director at Central Junior High, Springdale, (1980-1999). During her tenure at CJH the choir program grew to be one of the largest in Arkansas. The choirs were recognized for their outstanding, creative, and musical performances. Her students excelled in All Region Auditions, Regional Choral Assessments, music festivals, and concert performances. Everyone who heard her choirs knew that the expectation for junior high choirs had been raised. Geneva was an expert at teaching the junior high voice, particularly the changing male voice. As a result, it wasn’t only her advanced choirs that were outstanding. Every choir, regardless of grade or ability sang with beautiful tone, intonation and phrasing. She was a master at getting students to sing long phrases. While at CJH her choirs performed twice for the Arkansas All State Conference. In 1993 students from CJH were selected to participate in the first National ACDA Junior High Honor Choir. The late Miss Pat Ellison, SHS Director of Bands, once reflected on hearing Geneva’s choirs, “the benchmark has been raised.” Miss Ellison went on to say: “The thing that hit me about Geneva’s rehearsals was the engagement of students. They didn’t have any idea how she was stretching them. All they knew was she saw a tremendous value in them. She respected them. She enjoyed them.”**

**Geneva was a tremendous advocate for junior high choirs in Arkansas. Many of our ArkCDA policies pertaining to junior high were originated by Mrs. Powers. Although she was not on the ArkCDA Board, her input and ideas were vital in developing our ArkCDA junior high manuals. She, along with her principal, Nancy Roark, was responsible for securing the first junior high assistant director position in the Springdale Schools. Soon after, many other districts followed suit, using Springdale as their example.**

**In 1999, Mrs. Powers accepted the position as Assistant Director at Springdale High School, where she taught until her retirement in 2003.**  **After her retirement she continued teaching private voice lessons to Springdale, Har-Ber and Shiloh High School students. She assisted in the public school program as a volunteer, preparing students for contests and festivals and working with many students to receive collegiate vocal music scholarships to pay for their education.**

**Mrs. Powers passed away in April 2015. She was survived by her husband of 49 years, David; son, Travis L. Powers; grandchildren, Caylen (deceased) and Jordan Powers; sister Jo Anne Franco, and nephews Geno and Jon Franco, and niece Maija Kreishman. In October, 2015, the Springdale School District choirs performed a benefit concert with over 400 student performers to help establish the Geneva Powers Choral Music Scholarship through the Springdale Public Schools Education Foundation. A college scholarship in her name has been awarded every year since.**

***Thoughts from her Springdale Colleagues:***

*“Geneva had the ability to inspire and to instill confidence in students better than anybody. She had the gift of identifying with all her students, and meeting them “where they were.” She expected every student, regardless of natural ability, to sing musically, and she knew how to bring out their untapped ability. The 5 years that I had the privilege of teaching with Geneva at Springdale High was the most fun. She always made it real and you never knew what to expect! She intuitively knew how to get our students to connect to the music.”*  Randy Erwin, Springdale High School, Har-Ber High School, retired

 *“Mrs. Powers class was one the few places that you had a level playing field. She didn’t care who you were. She didn’t care who your parents were. Or what you had or didn’t have. Everybody was treated the same. It was more about a life lesson. She was so musical. She wanted us to have an emotional attachment with each piece of music. You never knew what she would do next, from standing on the piano bench to running across a row of chairs. She would do whatever it took to connect a story to singing.”* Gretchen Watt, Director of choirs at Central Junior High, former Assistant Director and former student of Geneva Powers

*“Geneva Powers changed the landscape of junior high choral teaching in our state. When I first heard her choirs, I was amazed. I recognized the true potential of this age group. I needed to improve my teaching and Geneva was more than willing to share ideas, work with my choirs, and help me grow. In my opinion, every successful choir program in Northwest Arkansas, whether the current director recognizes it or not, is because of the influence of Geneva Powers.”* Rhonda Hawley, Southwest Junior High, Springdale High School, retired

*“Everyone knew Geneva. She could just get people to do things without them knowing it”.* Kathy Blundell, Arts Center of the Ozarks, retired

“*Everyone that came in contact with Geneva was better.”* Pat Ellison, Springdale High School Director of Bands, deceased