

### James Noble - An inspiration...

Donors Dave Johnson and Peggy Bennett share a connection. They were both inspired by and impacted by Peru High School music educator, Jim Noble. Because of Noble's extra efforts, and great character, these two former students made wonderfully generous gifts in his honor.

Noble began teaching at PHS while Dave Johnson, a 1949 graduate, was a student there. He taught all the music classes at Peru High School and was the director for marching band, symphonic band, stage (jazz) band, choir, swing choir and the annual musical.



"I remember him as extremely likeable, full of enthusiastic energy, outgoing and fun to work with. He never put anyone down, but continually challenged us as musicians," Johnson recalled. Johnson's family couldn't afford to buy an instrument for him to play in the band, so Noble had him play the school's sousaphone.

Johnson didn't decide if or where he would go to college until late in his senior year.

"I initially wanted to go to IU so I could play in the 'Marching Hundred'," Johnson said. "Jim informed me that Purdue had a bigger, if not better band, and suggested that I consider going there. Shortly after that, I made up my mind—Purdue it is!"

Johnson was able to secure a scholarship, and he auditioned to play Purdue's giant sousaphone. According to Johnson, he was a poor sight reader and the audition was pretty awful. He is convinced that Noble called the Purdue band director and persuaded him to give Johnson another chance, vouching for his student's abilities. Johnson made it into the band, and was the only freshman sousaphone player to get into the symphonic band.

Johnson soloed with the symphonic band at Purdue and graduated in 1953. He served in the US Army, and joined the Delco Radio Division of GM when he returned. He began as Inspection Foreman and eventually rose to Business Unit Quality Manager. He retired from Delco Electronics in 1992.

"I just know that I am a better person for having known and being associated with Jim Noble," Johnson explained.

That is why he created the "David L. Johnson Fund in Memory of James Noble Fund," a permanently endowed fund that provide support to the band department of Peru High School.

"Jim Noble, our beloved 'Nobe,' saw talent in us that we didn't yet see in ourselves, and he encouraged us to pursue excellence," explained Bennett, who studied under Noble some twenty

years after Johnson had.

Bennett remembers the day 40 years ago when Noble called her into his office.

"He told me that Peru High School was 'putting all their eggs in one basket' and nominating me alone for the newly established Cole Porter Scholarship," Bennett reminisced.

The day finally came when she would audition and interview for the scholarship, just as Noble told her she would. Bennett performed her Telemann solo on her flute and then sat down with the panel for an interview.

Bennett was selected to be the first Cole Porter Scholarship recipient. She would be the first of her family to attend college. Since her family did not have the money to send her to college, the scholarship was what made it possible.

"The PHS administration announced to the entire school that I had won the scholarship. To have the news broadcast to all my supportive classmates lent such an air of celebration to the entire school; it brings tears to my eyes still," Bennett said.

Her mother saved every newspaper item, congratulatory note and all correspondence from those days. Bennett keeps them in a scrapbook; among the bits of paper from this memorable time is a very special note from Jim Noble.

Noble's ongoing encouragement and support of Bennett paid off. She not only graduated from Ball State University with a bachelor of science degree in music education, but she also earned her master of arts in music education there as well. She went on to the University of North Texas where she earned her doctorate of philosophy in music education. Dr. Peggy Bennett is currently a professor of music education at Oberlin Conservatory of Music.

"Nobe was a pivotal person in my formative years. I am so grateful that he saw in me the possibilities that I did not yet recognize in myself," explained Bennett.

Bennett created a permanently endowed fund through the Community Foundation to celebrate the teacher who so inspired her and the family who helped her realize her educational dreams. She created the "James Noble Fund" to help support the Miami County Community Foundation's Preschool Fund

Bennett said she thought that having a fund named in his honor would probably embarrass Noble, who passed away suddenly in the 1970s.

"He would most likely down-play what he did," Bennett remarked. "But his role in my life reminds me that as teachers, we never know when and how our belief in a student will take hold, but it is so very important that we do believe that it will. In some ways that is a legacy that Nobe has passed on to me, and I am so pleased to establish this fund to honor his memory and his place in the Peru community."

