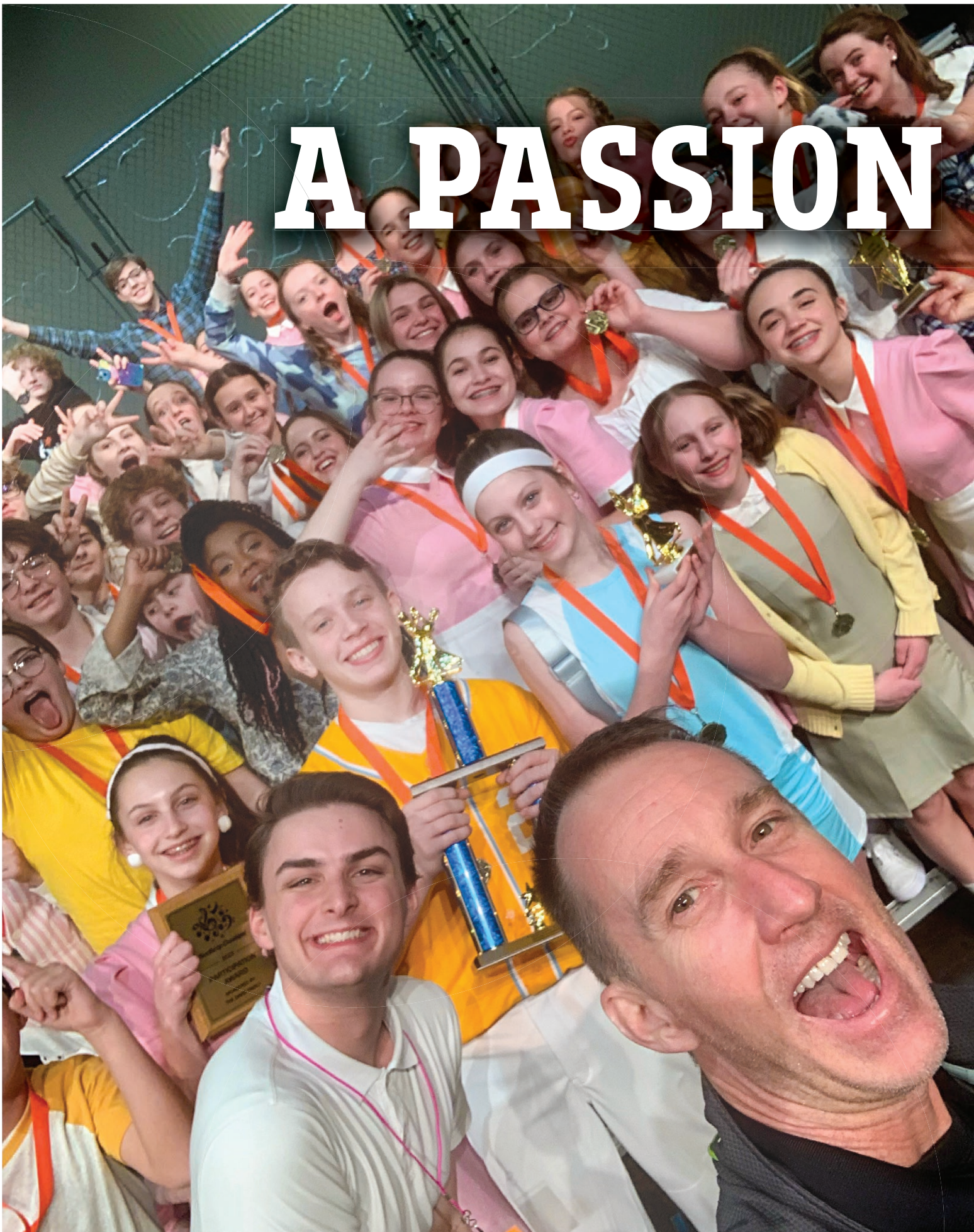


A PASSION



FOR SHOW CHOIR

IN LOVELAND, OHIO

by Lisa Gibbs

In southwestern Ohio, as the Little Miami River meanders toward the much wider and deeper Ohio River, residents of Loveland enjoy an idyllic setting. Numerous outdoor parks and nature preserves dot the area along with a Rails-to-Trails bicycle path that connects Loveland to Milford and Springfield. The trail is an integral part of the charm and allure of downtown Loveland as it runs alongside the river, with restaurants, bars, shops, and offices scattered about. A tenth century style castle built in the early 1900s from stones found along the river, Castle Leroche, sits across the river from the trail.

Not far from a bend in the river, the fifty-eight members of Loveland High School's By Request meet daily to prepare for the show choir competition and performance season. This auditioned mixed ensemble includes students from all four grades and has been led by Shawn Miller since 2006. I interviewed Mr. Miller to learn more about show choir in a city of less than 14,000 residents.

Let's start with a bit of history. I read in your bio on the Loveland show choirs website that you started your teaching career at Loveland Middle School, where you founded the middle school show choir, Revolution. Tell us a bit about that.

I graduated from Northern Kentucky University in 1996 with a bachelor's degree in music education and started as the director at Loveland Middle School for the 96-97 school year. At Loveland Middle School, I had sixth, seventh and eighth grade choirs as well as general music. We also had a show choir that didn't have a name and performed at school concerts. By the end of my first year, that show choir was named Revolution.

During undergrad, I was fortunate to have a great student teaching experience at Glen Este High School under the direction of Dan Kruger. I had not had any exposure to show choirs before my student teaching. While at Glen Este, I was able to attend my first contests at Ada High School and Findlay High School and started to understand why students really enjoyed going to them and performing. Revolution started competing shortly after I started at the middle school, which was the jumping off point for the look of today's Loveland Show Choirs.

QUESTION

In 2006 you became director of the existing Loveland High School show choir, By Request, and almost ten years later founded the high school's female choir, Allure. How did the decision to start a female choir come about?

Allure was established due to the amount of talented kids that were trying out. We wanted to continue to support and grow the talent that we had, but were turning away a large number of women, so we decided to establish Allure. We did make one promise, and that was to always strive for strong female shows that would showcase the power of the women in our program.



QUESTION

I came across a 2017 Local 12 news story that said, “At Loveland High School, show choirs and show band are the cool groups.” That brought a smile to my face. Would you like to expand on that?

That was a neat story they put together. We have been very fortunate to have many different types of kids in our program. We try to be as inclusive as we can, which we hope allows a student the comfort to be themselves. We have had many athletes go through our program. A big part of that has been the relationship with our athletic department. We are both big on the idea that kids should have the opportunity to be a part of as many things in high school as they can.

I’m sure that can make scheduling after school hours rather tricky.

As long as all of the adults want the best for kids, schedules can work.

QUESTION

One of the football players, who had been in your show choirs since age twelve, was featured in the same story and regarding you said, “he teaches us every day not just work hard, work hard for each other.” Are there any techniques you use, or team building activities to assist with that concept, or is that idea woven into your teaching?

Our philosophy is all about students and being the best you can be. Trophies and winning are not the focus. We start that philosophy with the students in the sixth grade. When winning is not the primary focus, that allows room for people to look for a deeper purpose of being in a high-functioning group. The flip side is that once these kids really start working for each other, success tends to follow.

QUESTION

It must be heartwarming to see and feel that energy build as the school year

progresses. In September of 2022, one of the show choir members, who was also a cross country and track team member, was named Scholar Athlete of the Week. How does show choir complement your students’ other middle and high school activities?

I feel that there is a lot of carry-over from what we do to students’ other activities. We also have the mindset that during their season, that is their priority. So during the Fall athletic season, I am very flexible with the student athletes, and they have always been good about being at everything they can.

QUESTION

Humans are certainly diverse, and it’s good to see participation in both sports and the arts being supported and encouraged. To what do you attribute the success of your Show Choir Band, who “consistently earns Best Band,” according to your school website?

We have a great instrumental program, and that has been a big part of our Band's success. Up until about four years ago, I was directing the band, but since then have been blessed with some great show band directors, including a former show band member. The other side of the equation is we want the show band to be a part of the group and not just a backup ensemble. We encourage the singer/dancers and band to spend time together and not just on stage.

QUESTION

A deeper relationship and connection to each other cultivated outside of rehearsals most certainly can show up when they are on the stage. During the 2021-2022 season, By Request became champion of Show Choir Madness, an event hosted by Barstool Show Choir as an "NCAA Basketball March Madness style Bracket, but with Show Choirs." What was that event like for you and your students?

Barstool Show Choir Madness was a fun event that was driven by a very organized and dedicated parent group and social media. The parents would send out reminders and let everyone know where to vote and when to vote. That event demonstrates that we need the support of our parents, and when they are highly motivated, they can get anything accomplished.

QUESTION

You host an event called Showfest, where other schools come to Loveland and compete. Tell us a bit more about that event and what it means to the community.

Showfest has been since around before I started at Loveland. It started as four or five schools getting together and performing and then had a dance at the end for all of the schools involved. It has always taken place the weekend before Valentine's Day, buying into the Loveland name. It has changed since we moved to a contest format back in the early 2000s. We now typically have between twenty to twenty-seven groups that attend our event each year.

The goal has stayed the same: to keep it student focused and make sure that the kids have a great day. We offer great food at reasonable prices and spend a lot of funds turning our stage into a fun space to perform with professional lights and sound. We host our middle school groups on Friday and our high school groups on Saturday. We have been very blessed with a supportive parent group that works so hard to make the event run smoothly.

Yes, I read in the Loveland Beacon that Show Fest "is known to be a very well-run event and is a favorite among many of the schools who come back year-after-year to compete here." Events like that certainly do take many hours of work before, during, and after.

QUESTION

Loveland looks to be a beautiful place to live! The river, the bike trail, the castle, population of about 13,000, restaurants, etc. What is your favorite part about living in Loveland?

Loveland is a wonderful community and has always been very supportive of the music programs. Loveland is cut in half by

the Little Miami River which runs through the center of our town. It is paralleled by the beautiful bike trail which is the life center of our town. It is a great place to visit but an even better place to live. My favorite part of Loveland is the fact that we were able to raise our two children in this wonderful town.

QUESTION

Anything else you'd like to share with us?

I have been married to my wife, Stacey, for the past twenty-four years, and our kids, Paige and Gavin, both went through the show choir programs in Loveland. One of the things we promote heavily is the idea of show choir kindness.

Kindness is a beautiful virtue to promote. Thank you so much for your time!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Productions* staff writer Lisa Gibbs earned her Ed.D. in Higher Education Administration in 2018. She is an advocate for arts, particularly dance, in education and for increasing the financial well-being of artists through financial education.

