

BROMMEL-BARNETT-KENAS-MCGUCKIN-NICOSIA-SPEAKE SCHOLARSHIP IN MUSIC

Why did I name this scholarship after five women in the Music Department at NEIU? The answers are simple; each made an impact on hundreds of students at NEIU; each shared a mission to make music more meaningful to our diverse student body.

For many years the Communication and Music Departments were on the same 6th floor of the Sachs “Beehive” building which is now completely administration. Our offices joined down the corridors. I interacted daily with these women; came to appreciate how hard each of them worked to heighten musical understanding in undergraduates. Besides, I like music in spite of the fact I am not a good violinist or pianist - but I tried!

Virginia Barnett, a pianist, came to Chicago from Florida where she studied at the Conservatory of Music. There, Harold Berlinger became her piano mentor and later hired her at NEIU when he was chairperson of music.

Jane Kenas-Heller followed her undergraduate mentor Dr. Ron Combs from Wisconsin to NEIU for her masters degree. There she remained as staff accompanist the next decades, beloved by all music majors, for she played weekly in all voice lessons, as opera accompanist and for faculty recitals.

Marie McGuckin taught introductory classes and specialized in the use of the recorder to learn music. She loved classical guitar and taught generations of students to play. Marie graduated from Duquene University first and then from De Paul with a masters. She performed then and still today in her ethnic Croatian Folk festivals.

Dolores Nicosia taught a variety of music classes with a specialty in music education. She had done her undergraduate degree at Marycrest College in Davenport, Iowa, where she remained for a few

years teaching piano. Then she finished a masters and doctorate. Early in her piano studies she also had been a pupil of Dr. Berlinger. Both she and Marie taught for a number of years in the Chicago Public Schools.

Dr. Constance Speake replaced Dr. Nicosia when she retired. Connie took over the supervision and training of student music teachers. She brought to the curriculum a keen knowledge of musical instruments used in many cultures. My office was next door to hers and I learned to appreciate the different sounds and beauty of other forms of music. We had a special bond because we both were graduates of Iowa Northern University in Cedar Falls, Iowa, although not at the same time. She focused on piano and voice and I on history, communication and theatre.

There were other fine music professors in that department, but this core of five women left their mark on each student that studied with them.

-Dr. Bernie Brommel