

Jewel Bittner Griffith

2016 Distinguished Alumnus- presented June 5, 2016

Mrs. Jewel Bittner Griffith, a member of the Roaring Creek Valley/Southern Area High School *Class of 1960* was chosen for this award in recognition of her distinguished career as a music educator, a career which has provided decades of inspiration to students, colleagues, and audiences worldwide.

Jewel attended Southern Columbia Area schools at a time when they were transitioning from one-room schoolhouses to a format more familiar to today's students. She spent 5th grade, for example, at the Tyson School, a one room school house that housed grades 5 through 8, with 5-6 students per grade; there was one teacher, no indoor plumbing and a pot belly stove in the corner for heat.

The next year she moved to the newly-opened elementary center in Numidia, a modern facility for its day. The new school had a different teacher for each grade, indoor plumbing, a cafeteria, and best of all according to Jewel, a talented music teacher, Miss Carol Undercuffler, who some may remember as Mrs. Myers. It was Miss Undercuffler who gave Jewel the opportunity to be the lead in the Christmas musical, a moment in time that ignited Jewel's love for music and learning- a passion that still burns bright today.

Jewel's interest in music continued through her high school years as she played trumpet in the band and sang in the chorus. She was part of a singing duo called the RCV Ponytails. They presented musical entertainment in the community and around the state winning two statewide talent contests, one sponsored by 4H and another by the Pennsylvania Grange. Winning the state Grange contest earned the RCV Ponytails a trip to California to sing in the national competition. The talented high school students also finished in 2nd place in a *Ted Mack Original Amateur Hour Talent Quest* competition, a contest that in its day, enjoyed the popularity and fervor equal to contemporary TV shows like America's Got Talent and American Idol.

Upon graduation from Southern Area, Jewel enrolled at Mansfield University, completing her studies in 1964 with a BS in Music Education. She launched her teaching career with the Newark Valley Central School District in New York, starting there as an elementary teacher in 1964 and retiring as the district's High School Choral teacher in 2003. The years in between were packed with much activity and energy.

Jewel was- and still is- loved and respected by her students. Through the years she has received many awards including *Newark Valley Central School District's Most Influential Female Teacher* as chosen by the students. Jewel's long list of accolades also includes *Sam's Club Teacher of the Year*, *Newark Valley Central Teacher of the Year* four times, and *WBNG-TV's Teacher of the Week*.

In 2003, upon Jewel's retirement, her school district established an annual scholarship in her name to support students pursuing a career in music. In 2012, she received perhaps the ultimate honor a school district could bestow, when the High School's auditorium was named the Jewel Bittner Griffith Auditorium, in recognition of her service and contributions to students and community.

In 2014, Jewel was recognized by Mansfield University for outstanding service, dedication and leadership to education. She was also selected to serve on the Mansfield University Alumni Board of Directors, advising the University on programs which serve alumni and informing alumni of ways they can serve Mansfield.

Jewel and her late-husband Ken were married for 45 years and have three daughters and three grandsons. She lives in Owego, NY and continues to be very active in her community. Jewel initiated and co-chaired the *Annual Alumni Concert for Scholarships* which has raised over \$50,000 for Newark Valley Central students. She is also the director of an Annual Fourth of July Concert which raises scholarship money for Candor High School Students. At Christmas, Jewel conducts an annual program with proceeds going to a community food pantry and for twenty-five years she served her church as the organist and choir director. Jewel continues to work with students as a private piano and voice teacher and is an oft requested accompanist for concerts, musicals and student solo festivals.

Jewel has truly enjoyed a rich and storied career in education. The Southern Columbia Area School District is proud to name her as its 2016 Distinguished Alumnus.

[Click here for additional biographical information.](#)