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Citizens Of The Year January 2, 2010



Jack and Margaret Lyons have been chosen as Yankton's 2009 Citizens of the Year. The Lyons, who are both retired music teachers, are longtime community members who have been involved in numerous organizations and activities. (Kelly Hertz/P&D)

Lyons Honored For Symphony Of Service

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As music teachers, Jack and Margaret Lyons have amassed a large choir of extended family members during more than 40 years spent together in Yankton.

These familiar faces greet the now retired couple no matter where they go in

the community they call home. It's a fact of life that gives them great pleasure.

"There are the young people, parents and grandparents," Margaret said. "It's just one full circle, and it's really fulfilling."

The Lyons have been named Yankton's 2009 Citizens of the Year by a committee composed of various local civic organizations. The Press & Dakotan is a sponsor of the Citizen of the Year award.

When informed recently by close friends that they were being bestowed with the honor, the Lyons said they felt bewilderment and humility.

Jack taught music at Mount Marty College for 33 years. Margaret spent many years teaching music to elementary students in the Yankton Public School system.

Both have been involved in various organizations during the years. Between the two of them, they have volunteered with Keep Yankton Beautiful, the Cramer-Kenyon Heritage Home, the Lewis and Clark Theatre Company, Habitat for Humanity, Yankton Retired Teachers, nursing homes and various other entities.

"Their names have surfaced in many volunteer programs, which has made Yankton a better community to live in," wrote Kathy Hintgen, a friend of the couple, in her Citizen of the Year nomination letter.

"Many people belong to a lot of organizations, but Margaret and Jack never just belong; they contribute time, talent and treasure with enthusiasm and reliability," added Lea Ann Schramm, another friend of the couple, in her nomination letter.

"There are so many opportunities for leadership. There are various boards and commissions," Jack said. "I don't know if all communities would have had the opportunities for us that we have here. I don't think they would."

The couple has raised four boys while living in Yankton: Will, Sean, David and Derek.

"They have gone in four different directions and that works," Margaret said. "We're proud of them and support them."

Jack and Margaret share a love of music, the arts in general and teaching young people.

"I like the idea of lifelong learning, which was the purpose of the liberal arts curriculum (offered at Mount Marty College)," Jack said. "The idea is these skills can be carried over to the students, communities."

"It's really a pleasure to see students now, after you had contact with them for a few years, maturing into very capable young adults in many areas in addition to the arts," Margaret said. "You try to give your students something that will last a lifetime. You give them the best you can offer. The trivial and the trite are here and gone again, but give them something that's going to pass the test of time. That takes practice and patience. I've tried to do that. Time will tell if it worked."

One of the accomplishments Margaret is most proud of is working with Lea Ann Schramm to found the Yankton Children's Choir in 1994. Having seen children's choirs in other places, the two decided that Yankton had the talent necessary for such an endeavor. Margaret was involved with the children's choir until recent years.

"I still miss the sound of those children - the clarity of their voices," she said. "Then they grow up and their voices change. You think, 'OK, we got them started. I hope they take it on.' And they do."

Since retiring about a decade ago, Jack and Margaret have found time between their volunteer commitments to travel to places such as Europe and China. However, they are always glad to return to Yankton, the place where Jack was raised and where he returned with Margaret in 1965 after spending some time in her native Iowa.

He said Yankton's blending of the past with a progressive agenda for the future, along with the unlimited opportunities it holds for people of all age levels, makes it unique.

"(Yankton) is also a nice-looking city," Jack said. "We as a community had to work at that. When you come to the city and drive around, it's impressive."

Margaret adds, "I think the fact that we have a national park, the Missouri National Recreational River, makes us pretty unusual. The medical facilities here are wonderful. They are very accessible, and if you need something more, you can easily get to Sioux Falls or Omaha. It's the same for entertainment possibilities."

Moreover, Yankton has great opportunities on the horizon, they believe. Jack and Margaret cite the conversion of the Meridian Bridge into a recreational

trail and transforming the Mead Building on the historic Human Services Center campus into a museum as two examples.

The couple said they will continue to do what they can to keep Yankton moving forward and will encourage future generations of leaders to step forward.

"Yankton needs a diverse group of people who are willing to commit themselves to getting involved," Jack said.

"It's important to be an advocate - telling others that they are capable of doing something and offering them suggestions on how to do it," Margaret added. "You don't always have to be out there pulling the wagon. Sometimes you need to step aside and let others take the lead."

A reception for the Lyons will be announced at a future date.