

PRESIDENT'S PAGE

Edmund Chiarello – NYSSMA® President



In the Trenches with our Festival Season

NYSSMA® festival performances are equally subject to the same rules and regulations across our state. However, the business of setting up and facilitating a NYSSMA® festival often differs from zone to zone. Not better or worse, just different. Serving as an adjudicator, I learned to appreciate firsthand some of the unique customs and traditions of our various zones, as well as the great spirit, pride, and collegiality of our membership, rural, urban, and/or suburban.

Spring 2022

Zone 1 – At the 2022 Frontier High School Festival located in Hamburg, 10 miles south of Buffalo, Christina Vota, a seasoned, experienced festival chair, and her team did a fantastic job. An adjudicator came to the NYSSMA® office just prior to the dinner break excitedly describing having just heard a “fabulous, unbelievable saxophone ensemble!” She exclaimed, “You must hear this group. They were incredible! Can we let other judges hear what I just had the pleasure of listening to?” Zone Representative Paige Hardison thought quickly and suggested we invite the students to play in the commons area outside the adjudicator dining hall during dinner. The students performed and the judges all left their dinner plates and came out to enjoy and applaud.

Zone 3 – At Johnson City High School, just outside of Binghamton, the festival host was Julie Beard and Adam Shatraw was Zone Representative. A group of teachers accompanying their students at the Johnson City Festival took the time to stop me in the halls and personally thank me for adjudicating their students. A kind gesture is always so very much appreciated, and the timing

couldn't have been better after a 10-hour/ two-day judging assignment. Two weeks later, I learned that the teachers followed-up by sending a feedback form wherein they memorialized their kind sentiments. Thank you, Johnson City. It is still hanging on my fridge!

Zone 4 – Mexico Festival, Mexico Middle School, just east of Oswego and Lake Ontario. In order to adjudicate the Mex-

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ico '22 festival, I drove down from the North Country after working on Friday night at the Carthage Festival. Exiting route 81 late on a Friday evening, I found myself weaving through the woods and the hills on the outskirts of the Adirondack region. Pitch black and empty, only lonely roads and deer in front, I suddenly caught a slight glimmer of emerging lights. A beautiful oasis hotel emerged at the top of this mountain. The Tailwater Lodge served as a beautiful respite for Mexico adjudicators. It was set in a lovely, picturesque, remote area of our state. I learned that the hotel was converted from what originally had been an elementary school. Very appropriate! The Festival at Mexico Middle School the next day was expertly run. Thank you to

Kevin Upcraft, Festival Chair, his super staff, and Bill McCoy, Zone 4 Representative at that time. (Note: Kevin currently serves as Zone 4 Representative.)

Zone 12 – While adjudicating at the Zone 12 Tottenville Festival, run by Festival Chair David LaMorte and assisted by Zone Representative Shelly Bauer, I learned quickly that I was merely a cog in a tremendous wheel assembly. The festival included regular solo and ensemble performances, all-state auditions, and major ensemble adjudication, occurring simultaneously! A flock of NYC teachers were assisting, in addition to an army of student volunteers who were stationed throughout the building. A myriad of student major ensemble performers, dressed in formal concert attire were staged and ready to perform outside the auditorium. Many of these same musicians were also performing individually for a regular solo or all-state solo audition.

I was amazed at the coordinated work going on in the building, as well as the NYSSMA® office where all the evaluation sheets, solo and majors came for approval and processing. My hats off to you Shelly and Dave! (Note: Sadly, Dave LaMorte is no longer with us. Our hearts go out to Dave's wife, Joyce, and the family, and the NYC music educators' community. Shelly Bauer currently serves as NYSSMA® 3rd Vice President).

Zone 14 – At Smithtown 2022, an annual festival was run by Festival Host Michael Mastrangelo, assisted by Zone Representative James Uzzi. The site was additionally designated an adjudicator orientation site. Truly amazing attention to detail! The adjudicators, the orientation participants (AFC coordinators, as well as the candidates and the Director of Adjudicators), were all treated with



the utmost care and respect. There was a sea of student helpers throughout the building, as well as many teachers assisting. The campus of Smithtown High School West provided more than adequate space for everyone to do their job. Every component of the schedule ran like clockwork. The accommodations were fantastic, allowing for a valuable experience for all: students, teachers, and festival personnel.

Zone 15 - The Zone 15 2022 Festival run by Jessica Chapman at Fillmore High School, assisted by Zone Representative Collin Smith, was just a delight. A pleasure to work there. Throughout the building there were lock boxes enabling adjudicators to slip completed evaluations through the slot. Runners came by periodically with a key to unlock them, gather sheets, and return them to the NYSSMA® office. I would be remiss if I didn't mention that the adjudicator dining hall was in the home economics room where the Music Booster Organization prepared home cooked meals! Apple pie, literally fresh out of the oven, was on the buffet table! What a treat!

Spring 2023

Zone 2 - The festival took place at Gates-Chili High School and was run by Festival Chair Jeff Welch, assisted by Zone Representative Scott Canan. The building at Gates-Chili was incredible! Tremendous music facilities, wonderful space, and a brand-new auditorium christened in March 2022. Additionally, there was a large jazz band room and keyboard lab. One wing of the school housed a science atrium featuring aquariums with assorted species of fish and turtles and a Botany Club space. Jeff is no newcomer to planning and staging the event, and his festival was incredibly well organized and articulated. It ran like a well-oiled diesel. Thank you, Jeff!

Zone 5 - Carthage Middle School was run by Festival Chair Heather Wood, assisted by Zone Representative Ashley Trudell. In Zone 5, as with many of the zones, particularly in the North Country, distance and travel are a unique part of the equation.

Working in the festival office, it was a pleasure to enjoy the camaraderie with all teachers and festival personnel. Many school music teachers from participating schools camped in the office at tables that were set up for them. They brought their laptops and tablets and enjoyed the company of each other (the facility was a large library), in addition to bringing their dinner, breakfast, and/or lunch as they patiently waited for their district envelope to populate with completed evaluations. Teachers were welcome and encouraged to take the evaluations, read them, add them to whatever database they may have brought, place them in their bags to take back to school. Teachers and sheets came and went as the festival hours passed.

Zone 7 - The event was run by Festival Chair Julie Taylor at the Bethlehem School District, assisted by Zone Representative Gregory Verheyen, and housed at the Bethlehem Central Middle School. All instrumental gear was brought down from the high school for use in the percussion room. I was amazed at the ability of the middle school students to handle the hall duties at this festival: receiving students and parents, checking them in, monitoring the correct heading on the evaluation sheet, keeping the schedule, and running the sheets to the NYSSMA® Office. A very mature group indeed and clearly well trained! On Saturday, in my adjudication room I welcomed the State Percussion Coordinator, Dr. Chris Hale, and an orientee. I enjoyed assisting the apprenticeship and orienting progress very much.

Zone 8 - The Norwich High School Festival was run by Festival Chair Amy Rogers, assisted by Zone Representative Julie Smith. Zone 8 is one of the most rural zones in our great state, and there is only one NYSSMA® festival for all of Zone 8. The festival was large, and the warmth and the personality offered by the Norwich school community was larger!

The festival embodies an annual rural town celebration. There were parent volunteers in the halls, oversized NYSSMA® flags outside to welcome you to the building, and halls decorated with

large NYSSMA® banners spelling both warmth and welcome. The music parents and community prepare and serve food to adjudicators and staff and the entire town is transformed for two days in May into a celebration of music education! A heartwarming experience for us out-of-towners who don't get to feel the small-town warmth often.

Zone 9 - The Tri-Valley Secondary School festival was run by the multi-faceted Kevin Girou, assisted by Interim Zone 9 Representative Bonnie Glaser. Kevin previously served as Zone Representative for eight years, and during the pandemic years was the All-State Choral Chair. He continues to serve as Tri-Valley Festival Chair every year. The students were incredibly well prepared! Thank you to all the teachers who escorted their students to the evaluation room door.

The unique takeaway from the Tri-Valley festival was that all the evaluation sheets were checked prior to the festival. Therefore, there was no need for room monitors. Instead, Kevin had all of the students work as runners. They were assigned to every room to maintain the continuous flow of evaluation sheets to the NYSSMA® Office.

Looking ahead

On my agenda for the 2024 season is adjudicating at Zone 10, Zone 6, and Zone 11. I will report about a very special annual festival event in Zone 13 (where I served as Zone Representative for six years). I promise to report on the four remaining zones in a subsequent issue.

Thank you, everyone, for your care and service. From the far reaches of our state to the inner portions — rural, suburban, and urban — there is an enormous pride of ownership that typifies our annual festival season. Music teachers and administrators doing their best for the growth and benefit of students and programs. It is the engine of NYSSMA® at work. I thoroughly enjoyed my time working at each of your festivals. Have a fabulous Festival Season '24! ||