



A Real Life Mr. Holland Opus: Laura Plummer is Recognized as Outstanding Teacher of the Year

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - A favorite movie for many in the string music world is "Mr. Holland's Opus," a 1995 American drama starring Richard Dreyfuss as Glenn Holland, a high school music teacher who inspired hundreds in his role as an orchestra instructor. The movie is inspiring and a realization of just how important music is to education.

A real living example of Holland's character and the impact a music teacher can have on her students is Laura Plummer, the Alton High School orchestra director. Plummer recently received the American String Teachers Association 2019-20 Outstanding School Teacher Award at the Illinois Music Education Association's Annual Conference in Peoria.

Unlike the fictional Kennedy High School music program, the Alton School District string and overall music program are strong as a new decade begins in 2020. The Alton School District Music program is flourishing with its instructors and constant school board and Alton Band and Orchestra Builders (ABOB) support.

What is the same as the Holland character in the movie is the impact and legacy Plummer has established in Alton. Countless students who graduate stay in touch with her and keep her posted on all the different positives in their lives.

“I just love it,” Plummer said of her role as AHS orchestra director. “I love music-making and watching their growth. It is beyond music. It is a sense of community and students learning to work together and put aside their differences.”

Plummer said much of her success is due to the support of the school district and ABOB.

“ABOB goes all the way back to 1948,” Plummer said. “The organization has been so supportive all these years.”

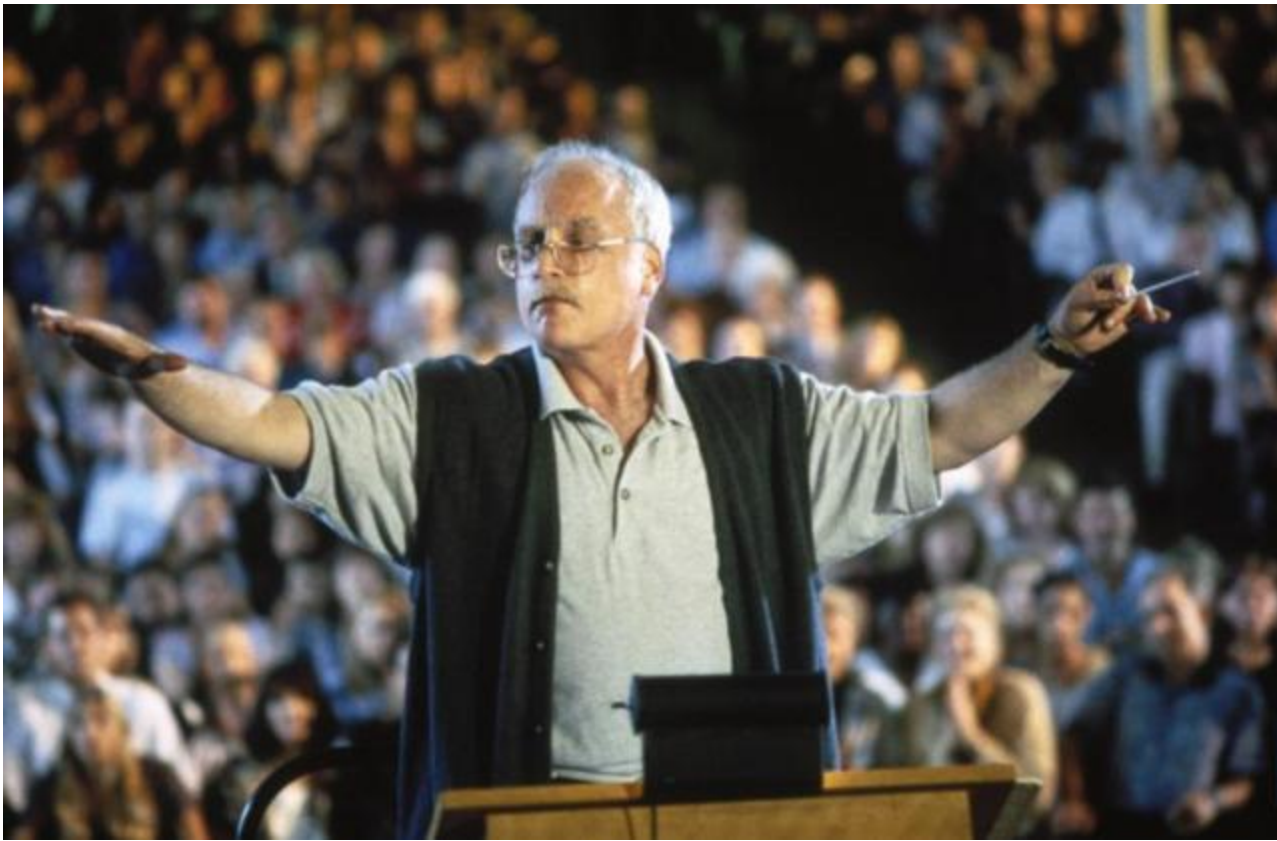
Individuals like Ken Conrady, Larry Crabbs and many more remain involved in ABOB and were associated through the many years.

Plummer has been an orchestra teacher for 29 years, the last 25 in Alton, where she graduated from high school. Today, some of her students are teaching, one she mentioned was Abbie Knoche in the Hazelwood School District. Vince Piazza was another student she mentioned who is now a key performer for the Alton Symphony Orchestra who carried the love of music on to other generations.

“I graduated from Alton High School in 1985 and I never thought I would come back,” she said. “I am really glad came back and I stayed. My daughter graduated from Alton High. The kids come together at the school to do some great things. When they go to college from Alton High, they are really prepared for life experiences.”

The “rock” as she calls of her life is her husband, Todd. Todd and Laura were married in 1993 during the legendary flood.

“I say to my kids when they need to find someone who stands beside them in sickness and health,” Plummer said. “Todd has always been there through the rehearsals and the musical season and my time with ABOB. He always takes care of things. He is my constant rock.”



At the conclusion of "Mr. Holland's Opus," Holland comes to the realization of his legacy when the music program at Kennedy High faces budget cuts and is eliminated as well as arts and drama from the school curriculum. Holland is dejected and feels a great sense of failure. Holland's students, thanks to his wife, return to the high school to pay tribute to him, including one of his most challenging students Gertrude Lang, now Oregon's governor. The former students perform his symphony. She explains to Holland the symphony he wrote is his legacy but it includes the people he inspired and taught that allowed each to be a better person.

Because of the strong support of the Alton Band and Orchestra Boosters, the Alton Youth Symphony and an unraveled commitment by the Alton School Board and District, for 25 years, orchestral music has continued to flourish under the direction of Laura Plummer.

Plummer's recognition as the 2019-2020 Outstanding School Teacher Award is extremely significant. However, it is small, compared to the number of students and young people's lives affected by her tireless commitment to string music over the two-and-a-half decades at the school.

"You don't get the support we have of the music program in Alton anywhere else," Plummer said.

