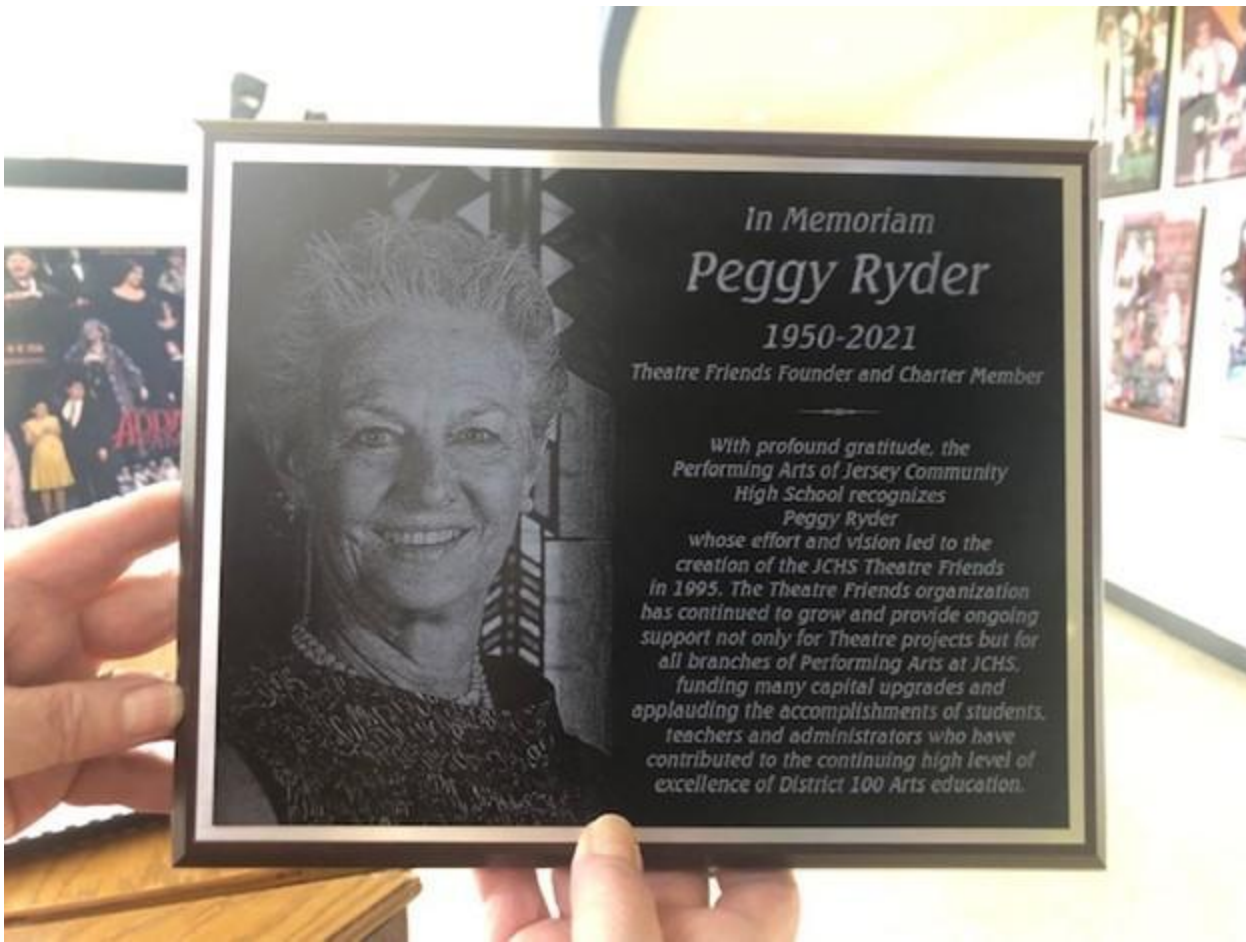


Peggy Ryder Remembrance Brings Heartfelt Emotion At JCHS Theatre Friends Event

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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JERSEY - At the Jersey Community High School Musical on Sunday, April 3, 2022, the Ryder family was honored for beginning JCHS Theatre Friends.

JCHS Theatre Director Brett Beauchamp coordinated the event.

Beauchamp announced they are installing a plaque in the lobby here so that even when Brett and Christine Bair are no longer in these halls to tell these stories, Peggy's legacy will live on.

This was an explanation given about the long-time program:

Christine Bear said in 1995, she and Brett Beauchamp found themselves in charge of the choral program and theatre program respectively at JCHS.

"We joined a colleague, Mr. Cliff Kaminsky, who had inherited the band program a few years previously," Bear said. "We were all excited about our new work in the fine arts department until we began to recognize some uncomfortable truths confronting all three of us: Mr. Kaminsky had only a few band students, I had only a few vocal students, and Mr. Beauchamp had even fewer theatre students. We did have a lovely auditorium but alas – no sound amplification. And all our programs were broke.

"The three of us set about attempting to set things straight – beating the bushes for potential singers, dancers, instrumentalists, and actors. We made numerous trips to the lower grades and tooted our collective horn concerning the fun that awaited all those willing to rise to the performing arts challenge. We skulked the halls of JCHS looking for that outgoing student, that class clown, that kid who had musical parents or parents who themselves once were in theatre.

"The lack of sound was a more ticklish and expensive problem. We knew we were not going to inspire many audiences if they could not hear anything on stage. So, for the first two musicals, we produced we hired a guy with a van (we called him Biker Bob) who provided us with mics and amplification. We knew if people could hear we might fill the seats and if we filled the seats, we could afford the sound. It was a leap of faith. There were multiple problems associated with this approach. He had only eight mics but we had 15 speakers.

"So that meant we were switching mics as well as costumes making Mr. Beauchamp's infamous thirty-second scene changes rife with anxiety. Also, someone had to keep track of who might be wearing mics 6,7,8 for Scene 12 and then where they went for scene 13. Most unwieldy, we had only a few days to rehearse with Biker Bob – Bob for short -. All the mic complexity meant one of us had to sit with him and keep track of the journey of the mics."

Bear's explanation continued: "Enter Josh Ryder to the cast of our second musical "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat" in 1995. His mother and dad, Peggy and Tom Ryder as well as other parents, soon became acquainted with our wealth of talent but also with our technical and financial poverty.

"Peggy immediately jumped into this quandary to attempt to find remediation. She worked to create a group of parents and interested citizens who could provide support to all the performing arts at JCHS. With her encouragement, indefatigable optimism, and the simple joy she found in the arts, the Theatre Friends was founded.

"Over the years the group has been able to fund many upgrades to the theatre's technical capabilities, provide scholarships, fund capital improvements in both the vocal and instrumental departments, and be an ongoing advocate for fine arts in District 100. In its 26 years, the Theatre Friends has only continued to grow and now has over a hundred donors. None of this would have been possible without those beginning days of vision and possibility. The program here at JCHS has produced band directors, vocal directors, professional instrumentalists, professional singers, professional actors, professional sound masters, and professional stage personnel.

"More importantly, it has given its many students enrichment and skills that will continue to bless them throughout their entire lives. In short, the performing arts programs at JCHS- band, vocal music, theatre - have been a model of what can happen in a school - even a smaller school – when teachers, administrators, parents, and the community put their heads and resources together toward a common goal. Without a doubt, the theatre friends have been a huge, huge part of this success."

Bear closed with the following statement: "There is no greater way to honor our friend than to leave her personal reminder of the importance of the arts and the enrichment it brings our lives. Thank you, Peggy, and God Bless."

Anyone wanting to join JCHS Theatre Friends, please contact:

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