

# Chorus prepares for concert this weekend

By Eileen M. Daly

The sweet sound of voices raised in song wafted out of the open door of Central Baptist Church on Monday night as the Jamestown Community Chorus prepared for its upcoming spring concert. The chorus, led by Choral Director B.J. Whitehouse, is approaching its 60th year, an event that will be celebrated at the Holiday Concert in December.

Whitehouse, now in his 20th year as director of the chorus, retains his original enthusiasm. "Every Monday night I am amazed that there are people out there who are not in here singing. The music is so beautiful and so much fun to sing and the people in the chorus are so wonderful," Whitehouse said.

Whitehouse was hired as choral director in 1989. "We had just moved to Jamestown from Wickford and one of the chorus members knew my work and asked me to apply," Whitehouse said.

Whitehouse teaches music to kindergarten through eighth grade students in Little Compton and has a degree in voice with a minor in choral directing. After accepting the position as director, Whitehouse hired Janet Grant as the chorus's accompanist. "Janet also plays for the community theater company and teaches piano privately," Whitehouse said. "We are very fortunate to have her. I like to say I made two great decisions in my life: the first was marrying my wife and the second was hiring Janet."

Whitehouse is fond of pointing out that the word community precedes the word chorus in the name of their organization. "It's

absolutely about the people," Whitehouse said. "I've met some of the finest people I've ever met through this chorus." Indeed, this sentiment is shared by virtually all off the participating chorus members.

Jessica Wilson of Narragansett, who has been with the chorus for eight years, described her experience in the chorus as "a very pleasant social community." "I love being in this chorus," she said. "We are really encouraged to get to know one another and when I started with the chorus I found the group to be very welcoming."

Chorus member Christine Ariel, who is Whitehouse's wife, said that singing in the chorus "keeps us young, young and happy."

Most of the members are not professional musicians, but regular people who just love to sing. Bob Florentino, a member for two years, was first a member of the men's chorus that Whitehouse also leads, as was newcomer Dan McGregor. "I always liked to sing," Florentino said. "I can't read music or anything, although I'm getting better at it, but it's wonderful to listen to the music and B.J. is so talented."

McGregor, who was recruited by Florentino, also has no professional background in music. "I just like to sing," he said. "I was a member of the St. Paul's choir when I was a kid and I sang in St. Mary's choir with Bob. He told me about this group and encouraged me to join because they needed tenors, so I did and I am really enjoying it," McGregor said.

Ruth Caswell, perhaps the



Christine Ariel practices for the Jamestown Community Chorus' spring concert this weekend. Ariel is the wife of chorus director B.J. Whitehouse and said singing in the chorus keeps her young and happy. Photo by Andrea von Hohenleiten

group's longest member, first sang with the Jamestown Community Chorus back in 1951. "That's when Rita started it," Caswell said. Since then, she said, she has been present through at least five more choral directors. "I first heard about the chorus on the old exchange of topics and crafts board," she said, "and I joined because my mother-in-law was a member."

Whitehouse goes out of his way to foster this sense of community. Snacks and drinks are shared during the breaks in rehearsal and members are encouraged to participate in ice-break-


ing rituals. Monday's rehearsal included a grouping of pictures of chorus member's mothers and the group members had fun guessing which member belonged to which mother. On another occasion members brought in their own childhood pictures.

Aside from all the fun and socializing that goes on, however, these folks are serious about their music. The spring concert, called Classic Choral, will include mostly classical choral music from the 19th and 20th centuries, Whitehouse said. "It's basically a collection of all of my favorite choral music." Whitehouse

described the process of preparing for the concert as "great fun with a lot of laughing and singing. The spirit is very positive." Whitehouse is confident that the chorus will deliver a wonderful spring concert. "Many people will recognize the song titles," he said.


The spring concert will be held at the Central Baptist Church on Saturday, May 2, at 7:30 p.m. and on Sunday, May 3, at 3 p.m.

For information and reservations, call 423-1574 or online at [www.jamestownri.com/chorus](http://www.jamestownri.com/chorus).




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