

# TMEA Executive Director

ROBERT FLOYD

## Never Have We Needed It More

*Never has our need for each other been more apparent than during the four-day Celebrating Music Together convention.*



**T**hroughout the pandemic, we all began to recognize the one basic need that overrode all others in terms of healing and surviving. We realized we need each other to withstand the challenges that the pandemic brought from its first days. As we all began to teach and work virtually, the isolation began to wear on us more each day, and we soon realized videoconferencing, email, or phone calls were inadequate to meet that need, both professionally and personally.

We first began to see that need surface in our students. The isolation began to erode social skills, and mental health issues became more prevalent as students' abilities to concentrate, focus, and communicate in a personal manner lessened, though we did not realize the depth of that impact until this past fall when everyone returned to school. Thankfully, a healing process in our classrooms, while still ongoing, is progressing in a positive way.

Initially, many believed our students would weather the pandemic with minimal challenges. After all, kids have grit, they are resilient, and they are tough, and as teachers and parents we generally believed that. However, I recall hearing a mom on a national news program even recently proclaim, *not so fast!* She shared that in the case of her son, he heard that message as well, and because he did not want to disappoint, he suppressed his real emotions over the months of isolation and as a result is battling serious mental health issues.

Even now, NPR recently shared a study that 94% of parents believe their children have social and emotional health challenges because of COVID. Please never forget that *we are the healers in our classrooms*, and

it is a part of what we do.

So back to my initial statement—it was not just the students who needed each other but each of us as well. Never has that been more apparent than during the four-day *Celebrating Music Together* convention. In the convention survey, we received multiple comments that echoed that need, but none as deeply as the following: “I was ready to quit teaching music before I attended the convention . . . a few days away from my job attending TMEA changed my entire perspective. I am back in my classroom, enjoying my students, and making music!”

I do not believe any of us, including staff, who labored countless hours in partnership with the Board to produce it, predicted the gratification and healing that we too felt to get back together again. The challenges were many, from planning with our service providers who were understaffed, to creating a COVID protocol for attendees, to safely housing over 1,800 All-State students from across the state, to losing almost 500 hotel rooms after they had been reserved, to presenters and attendees withdrawing for COVID and other reasons, yet it all came together when we needed it the most.

I must congratulate the membership for the sacrifices you made to attend this convention. Despite COVID and struggles to obtain substitutes, we had almost 10,000 active member/teachers in attendance. All-State student chaperons had additional responsibilities, and many directors and sponsors of 35 invited and 44 music showcase ensembles had limited rehearsal time to prepare. Finally, 513 companies and higher education institutions made the trip to San Antonio, occupying 1,257 booths in the exhibit hall, with the faith that the costs would be worth it financially. The Executive Board and staff thank you all for your support!

This issue of *SOUTHWESTERN MUSICIAN* is dedicated to remembrances of the 2022 Clinic/Convention. Enjoy!

### These Are the Heroes

I remember visiting with a member at the 2020 convention about an advocacy/legislative policy issue, and I commented that we had materials in the office I could send him. His response caught me a bit off guard. He responded inquisitively, “TMEA has an office?” And I answered, “Yes, we do have an office in Austin as well as a staff of nine dedicated, talented employ-

ees.” We laughed about it, and he was a bit embarrassed that he did not know that. Of course, it does take a staff to carry out the day-to-day operations of TMEA, not to mention planning an annual convention. Perhaps you have heard me say on occasion that our staff is TMEA's greatest asset and that I am proud to say that every employee in the office now I had the privilege of hiring. It is my single greatest contribution to the past as well as the ongoing and future success of TMEA.

The pandemic has taken its toll on our membership, and certainly the impact is the same for our staff. A short three weeks after our 2020 convention, where we celebrated TMEA's Centennial, the world was put on hold. For the past 24 months, the never-ending challenges it brought continued at a rapid pace. We developed the new website, virtual audition processes, and a virtual convention. Then, just like teachers pivoting in their work, we found ourselves creating safety protocols that could support a return to in-person auditions, clinics/concerts, and our face-to-face convention that hopefully all attendees believe was truly a celebration of music together.

And by the way, this was all taking place while carrying out the daily operations of TMEA, providing member services, producing and editing the publication of *SOUTHWESTERN MUSICIAN*, managing and protecting the integrity of the 18,500 member database, administering an almost \$900,000 elementary grant, assisting the Executive Board members in all their responsibilities, supporting Region officers, continually improving technology for auditions and administrative needs, staying abreast of political challenges and planning for the next legislative session, and the list continues. Now layered on top of this is the planning of the 2023 convention that requires some level of decision-making practically every day year-round.

Thus, this section of my column is a tribute to our amazing staff. They pushed

through the last two years with commitment, dedication, and fortitude in ways that I hope you will agree have served you as a member with grace, professionalism, and a high level of quality.

Join me in saluting the following staff members. I have listed their years of service as well as their primary job responsibilities (the list of all responsibilities would require many more pages!). You may find a more detailed list of responsibilities of each on the TMEA website:

*Susan Daugherty, Membership Manager (23 years):* Manages our 18,500 member database and protects its integrity, oversees registration at convention, proofs *SOUTHWESTERN MUSICIAN* and the convention program.

*Frank Coachman, Deputy Director (22 years):* Develops and manages the audition process, manages all phases of TMEA technology needs, coordinates the annual clinic/convention schedule, and assists with its planning.

*Karen Cross, Communications Manager (15 years):* Serves as Managing Editor of *SOUTHWESTERN MUSICIAN*, produces all TMEA print publications and electronic communication, and develops advocacy materials.

*Andrew Denman-Tidline, Information Technologist (15 years):* Designs web-based applications, supports all staff technology needs, manages TMEA databases, assists with audition programs, and oversees technology for convention registration and All-State housing.

*Kay Vanlandingham, Administrative Director (14 years):* Serves as office manager, supports Region and Area officers and the Executive Board, manages All-State student music, and oversees the scholarship, mentoring, and TFME programs.

*Rita Ellinger, Administrative Assistant (10 years):* Maintains the TMEA Job Board, Texas Music Scholars, and Distinguished Administrator recognition program and provides staff support, convention plan-

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