

## Couple brought together by passion for music, community

Rebecca Heisler grew up near Carbondale, about as far away from McHenry County as you can be and still be in the state of Illinois. With sojourns in Alton and DeKalb, she arrived in Crystal Lake with her talents well-honed and ready to share.

As a child, Rebecca's family was not well-to-do, but there were more important gifts to share than the kind money can buy.

Her grandfather played the fiddle, and his love of music was contagious. Rebecca first learned to play the piano by ear. When her parents could not afford to pay for music lessons, her grandmother stepped in. Later, she learned the mandolin and bass. On a hot summer's evening, passersby could hear the local version of the Grand Ole Opry as the music from Rebecca's house wafted through the open windows.

Her grandmother's example of doing volunteer service work in their community inspired Rebecca to venture out. With high school over, she entered Southern Illinois University and earned a degree in journalism. She has not stopped evolving since then.

Her first job was in Alton as a reporter and journalism teacher at the high school. In addition to work, there were her own kids to raise and, to top it off, she eventually went back to school to get a masters degree in public relations followed by a doctorate in adult and continuing education.

For 27 years, Rebecca was the dean of continuing education for McHenry County College in Crystal Lake. It was a good match. She loved creating projects and programs that serve the public.

Rebecca now is the director of major donors for the Raue Center for the Performing Arts in Crystal Lake. She is thrilled to be working at the Raue because it brings together two aspects of her life and passion: first, a love of Crystal Lake and the network of community residents that has given stability to her life, and second, the enduring love of the arts.

Through her efforts, future generations will have access to first-class music, drama, dance and comedy in the Crystal Lake area.

Particularly exciting at this time is the Raue's new in-house professional theater company, the Williams Street Repertory. This is a new concept for Crystal Lake and should be a major contribution to the arts in the area. Her goal is to keep looking for opportunities to grow.

Four years ago, Rebecca married Jim Heisler. Although they had met in passing, their relationship did not become close until well after Jim had suffered the loss of his wife, Carol, to breast cancer.

Ironically, it was a dream he and Carol shared before her illness struck that helped Jim through his loss.

They had hoped one day to visit the ancient Incan ruins of Machu Picchu in Peru. This dream lived on in Jim, and when he mentioned it to his adult children, they not only encouraged him, they signed up to go with him.

The ruins are high in the Andes Mountains where the air is thin, which makes climbing them physically demanding.

Jim walked for miles every day to prepare for this strenuous adventure, sometimes carrying rocks in a backpack. It was well-worth the effort. The trip was cathartic for Jim and his children as they struggled with their grief.

To residents of Crystal Lake, the name Heisler often brings shoes to mind. The Heisler Bootery has been a fixture in the downtown business district for more than a century.

Jim has been a member of the McHenry County Board for 20 years. In fact, the Heislars have been such an integral part of the community that Jim was asked to write the history of Crystal Lake when the city celebrated its sesquicentennial in 1986.

A fact about Jim that is perhaps not as well known is, like Rebecca, he is a musician at heart. He learned to play the trumpet when he was young, later becoming a public school band director for 18 years.

In his spare time, Jim also played in his own band called The Brothers Plus Two.

From their childhood love of music, to their work as public school teachers, to their care and concern for the community, it makes sense Jim and Rebecca were destined to meet and fall in love.

In fact, the story of their meeting almost proves their marriage was inevitable.

While attending a fundraiser for the Pioneer Center at the Sanfilippo Estate in Barrington, the couple took a ride on an antique carousel.

It was on that carousel a year later their relationship progressed to the next level.

As they spun round and round on that merry-go-round to the sound of the calliope, Jim popped the marriage question. Of course, Rebecca accepted. Nearby guests who witnessed Jim's proposal broke out into applause.

Now that's a happy ending.

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