



Susan Ives

2019 NAFME Award Recipient

*“Keep them singing for the
rest of their lives”*

Born to a family of singers and multi-instrumentalists, Susan Ives recalls traveling to family vacations in a car “filled with music and never the same song twice!” Her efforts to bring the same sense of musical joy and belonging to her students earned her the 2019 National Association for Music Education (NAfME) Educator Award.

Established in 1992, the award recognizes outstanding music educators who are members of both NAfME and Sweet Adelines International. Nominees must have made outstanding contributions to the furtherance of music education in public or private schools promoting the barbershop style.

Susan, a two-time international champion lead (with Classic Edition, 1998 and Zing!, 2010), found Sweet Adelines during college, where she majored in trumpet. After hearing her sing in her community band, a fellow trumpet player invited her to the local chorus, Sunflower Harmony Chorus. She became an immediate — and enthusiastic — member. Today, Sunflower Harmony is called Topeka Acappella Unlimited, and Susan has been their director for 25 years!

She said her Sweet Adelines experience melds perfectly with her profession.

“In my first job right out of college, I began incorporating the skills I was learning in Sweet Adelines with the degree I had just earned,” she said. “Sweet Adelines has since provided further education and tools for my chosen profession. Being an educator has helped me teach others about their voice, social skills, and personal improvement. Sweet Adelines has provided so much of that to me, and I simply share.”

Since the 1980s, Susan has taught music in both rural and inner-city schools, introducing generations of young singers to the joy of barbershop harmony. She has been instrumental in organizing

Young Women in Harmony events, and her students have gone on to join active quartets and even become barbershop directors.

For Susan, watching the effect music has on students is extremely gratifying.

“Teen years can be a struggle,” she said. “Music gives those who don’t have a feeling of worth or self-confidence a sense of purpose. If the person in charge is compassionate, demonstrates inclusion, provides encouragement, and loves what they are teaching, not many turn that down.”

She recalled the challenge of teaching a mixed choir class at an inner-city school. Incoming students considered it a “just here for the credit” class. By the end of the first semester, Susan took them on a tour to sing Christmas carols at local malls. Later that year, several of the students auditioned and were chosen for the music department’s select singing ensembles.

“Those students found a sense of belonging and purpose and a lifelong skill set,” Susan said. “They came together, got along better, and enjoyed coming to class each day. I saw courage and self-confidence form in front of my eyes.”

She advises new music educators to focus on students’ need for inner strength as much as on music techniques.

“I highly suggest they get involved in their community and in their school activities. The children will respond to someone they know loves what they do but more importantly loves who they do it for,” she said. “You hope to give them the tools, drive, and self-confidence to keep them singing for the rest of their lives.”

Countless singers would agree Susan has accomplished that. In countless family cars, on stages, and in other classrooms, the singing that began in her classroom continues. 