



You may know Gerri Piscitelli as the president of The Opera Club of The Villages, but what you may not know is that she's always tried to help people experience the arts wherever she goes.



Bill Mitchell | Daily Sun

GETTING TO KNOW GERRI PISCITELLI

Village: De La Vista
Family: Three children, nine grandchildren
Moved Here In: 2006
Moved Here From: Wellesley, Massachusetts
Favorite Villages Activities: Attending Opera Club, PEO Chapter JC and Classical Music Lovers club meetings and live performances by the Central Florida Lyric Opera and The Villages Philharmonic Orchestra



Kristen Fiore

THE VILLAGES DAILY SUN

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When there's a will there's a way, and Gerri Piscitelli definitely has willpower.

When Piscitelli gets an idea in her head, she doesn't rest until the thought becomes a reality, especially when the arts are involved.

Piscitelli's love for opera can be traced back to her 16th birthday, when her mother took her to a performance of "Madama Butterfly."

"I was dazzled by the costumes and music," said Piscitelli, of the Village De La Vista.

When Piscitelli's three children were young and growing up in the Boston area, Piscitelli took them to children's concerts, where they were exposed to performances of "Peter and the Wolf," and the opportunity to go back stage and meet the musicians.

The concerts were frequented by famous conductors like Leonard Bernstein, Piscitelli said.

Piscitelli graduated from Northeastern University after studying English and education, and education was always at the forefront of her mind as she raised her kids.

As they got older and attended public school, Piscitelli started thinking about the difference between private and public school curriculum and realized that it was exposure to the arts.

So, she decided to create a cultural enrichment program for their school in Wellesley, Massachusetts. Piscitelli and a group of parents brainstormed around her kitchen table to create the program, which ended up being a success.

Through the arrangement, which was held once a month after school, students enjoyed theater group skits, Shakespeare, puppet theater, appearances from

members of the Berkshire Ballet and more.

It was so popular that it spread to other area schools.

Piscitelli's next effort became forming a curriculum on tall ships, traditionally rigged sailing vessels with big flowing sails, after enjoying a parade of tall ships en route to New York for the United States Bicentennial.

When a New England historic seaport started building its own tall ship, Piscitelli spoke with the president of the seaport and worked with teachers at Wellesley High School to create a curriculum on tall ships and sailing.

Several years later, there was another parade of ships for the 100th anniversary of the Statue of Liberty.

"All I wanted to do was be on a little hill on the side of the Hudson River with my family watching this parade of ships," Piscitelli said.

So, she found a way to make it happen. She learned from a friend who was the president of the Italian American Sports Hall of Fame that the group was interested in attending, and through meetings with the head of transportation for Boston and an Admiral with the Massachusetts Maritime Academy, Piscitelli learned that the academy's training ship was preparing to sail in the parade and was looking to raise funds for the voyage.

The Italian American Sports Hall of Fame offered a scholarship of \$10,000, and in return, the group was offered 100 spots on the ship for the day.

Piscitelli was able to join not only with her family, but a few friends from Wellesley.

"That was the most exciting thing I've ever done in my life," Piscitelli said.

When her family got off the ship, they walked across the Brooklyn

Bridge and saw the Statue of Liberty up close as they listened to patriotic tunes performed by the Boston Pops Orchestra.

Piscitelli joined the Opera Club soon after moving to The Villages in 2006 and quickly became involved in the group's music scholarship, which is awarded annually to local students hoping to study music in college.

The scholarship is largely funded by the group's annual "Three Tenors Plus One" concert at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center, which will be held at 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. Feb. 12. Tickets go on sale Dec. 8.

"We've had many (recipients) who have really gone on to wonderful professional lives in music, and it all started with the scholarships from the opera club," Piscitelli said. "For this, I'm very happy and blessed."

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