

Hearts and Hands and Voices

A loyal band of volunteers from the Hopewell Valley Chorus fills the Community Room of the First Presbyterian Church in Trenton with love every Tuesday afternoon. When they visit, homework gets done, spelling gets drilled, jump ropes are turned and snacks are served. There are smiles and hugs enough for everyone. It's just an ordinary day at the Trenton Children's Chorus, but there's nothing ordinary about these volunteers and the relationship between the Hopewell Valley Chorus (HVC) and TCC.



Valerie Nelson (left) and Kate O'Neill with 2006 scholarship winner Joy Johnson.

It all began in 2000 when four members of HVC responded to a newspaper ad seeking volunteers to help out after school. The children immediately reacted to their warmth and sense of fun, arriving each week eager to spend time with their new grownup friends. The volunteers were just as delighted with the children, and over time, more joined the group.

In 2001 TCC was invited to perform at Spring Into Song, an annual community concert featuring area musicians hosted by HVC. The children were a hit with both their audience and fellow musicians, and the volunteers wondered if future concerts might

be used to raise money to send young singers to camp. The following year a hat was passed and the Hopewell Valley Chorus Spring Into Song Scholarship was born. Since that time, twenty-five young singers have enjoyed the intense musical training and fun offered at Camp Albemarle at the American Boychoir School.

What inspires these faithful volunteers to come week after week, year after year? "I was raised in a socially conscious family," says Valerie Nelson, "one that did a lot of volunteer work, so volunteering is something I've always done. I like helping the children in a focused activity which I'm sure will benefit them their whole lives long. It feels really good that those involved with TCC feel like an extended family where everyone's participation is valued."

The kinship between the two choruses was so strong that when the Hopewell Valley Chorus celebrated their 50th anniversary in 2010, it was only natural to include a piece that incorporated young voices. HVC commissioned *In the Arms of Music*, a work by Matthew Harris for adult and treble voices.

Because the Hopewell Valley Chorus shares their hearts, hands and voices, young singers have opportunities that might otherwise not be possible and experience the benefits of a warm and loving environment.

For volunteer Kate O'Neill, lending a hand is a no-brainer. "This gig is about the kids, community and music. How much better can it get?"