

LEOMINSTER

## Larger than life

Community remembers dedicated educator, arts champion  
Bob Healy



The Leominster and greater community is remembering Robert 'Bob' Healy, the talented music conductor, theatre director, and educator who passed away on Feb. 6 at the age of 78. COURTESY CHUCK KOSTOPOULOS



Leominster legend Robert 'Bob' Healy with his wife Gail Lois Healy and their nephew Chuck Kostopoulos. "To me it was like being related to a celebrity" Chuck said of his uncle's notoriety in the community he loved. COURTESY CHUCK KOSTOPOULOS

BY DANIELLE RAY

[DRAY@SENTINELANDENTERPRISE.COM](mailto:DRAY@SENTINELANDENTERPRISE.COM)

LEOMINSTER >> Dedicated. Larger than life. A true legend.

These are just some of the ways community members and friends are describing Robert 'Bob' Healy in the wake of the talented music conductor, theatre director, and educator passing away on Feb. 6 at the age of 78.

The longtime city resident was deeply entrenched in his beloved hometown, so much so that chances are if it had to do with arts, music, sports, or education, he had his hand in it. He was behind launching Starburst, the popular annual summer event during which he conducted the Starburst Band for decades, led the Johnny Appleseed Festival big band each fall for many years, and cofounded and was the vice president of the Leominster High School (LHS) Athletic Hall of Fame, helping to select athletes for the honor and recognizing

their accomplishments.

When Starburst returned in 2021 after a hiatus the year before due to the pandemic, Bob spoke about what that felt like.

“It has been a long drought, a long time without live music,” he said then. “The musicians are happy to be back, and people will be happy to see each other and enjoy the night. It is a great event for the City of Leominster.”

Bob was born on Dec. 6, 1946, in Worcester to his musically-gifted parents, Daniel and Helen (Curry) Healy, and his uncle Hugh Curry was a conductor for the U.S. Army Band, so music was in Bob’s blood from the very beginning of his story.

“He absolutely loved music and theatre, but music was his big thing, and he did it until he died,” said his nephew Chuck Kostopoulos, his only living relative left besides Bob’s devoted sister Mary Healy and a cousin.

Chuck said that the man he looked up to and greatly respected was “a huge part of this community” — and that Bob’s sister was “very important to him.”

“To me Bob was basically a saint, he was so protective of me,” Mary said of the brother she idolized. “He protected me his whole life.”

Charles said the siblings were able to spend one last Thanksgiving together this past fall, which he knows “meant a lot” to Bob.

According to his obituary that Charles lovingly put together, Bob graduated from St. Bernard’s High School in Fitchburg in 1964 and went on to earn a degree from Fitchburg State College (now Fitchburg State University) in 1968, setting the stage for a lifelong commitment to learning and teaching.

For 35 years, his passion for education shone brightly at LHS, where he served as both a math teacher and an administrator. His influence extended far beyond the classroom though as he produced and directed musical plays for both Leominster and St. Bernard’s high schools, and his dedication to the performing arts was further evidenced by his 20 years of producing and conducting Starburst, a testament to his commitment to fostering local talent and community spirit.

Bob’s love for the gridiron was equally matched by his love for the stage, coaching football and earning a place in the LHS Football Hall of Fame for the teams he was part of, and his leadership and mentorship shaped the lives of countless young athletes.

A member of the New Players Theatre Guild in Fitchburg, Bob directed countless plays, leaving an indelible mark on the local theatre scene. His musical prowess continued as he

took up the baton as the Ashby Concert Band conductor and along with leading the band at the Johnny Appleseed Festival. He eventually moved to Lunenburg but the contributions to the cultural fabric of his hometown were recognized when he was named Leominster Citizen of the Year in June 2007.

In his personal life, Bob was predeceased by his loving life Gail Lois Healy and found joy in the companionship of his beloved dogs, all of whom he adopted from Cape Cod animal shelters.

The dedicated community contributor who was known for the warmth of his generous spirit touched the lives of many people, including Mayor Dean Mazzarella, who had a long history with Bob going all the way back to middle school.

“We were a pretty rough crowd. He used to walk around with a yardstick, fooling around with a smile on his face, but at the same time if you were stepping out of line that huge smile would disappear, and he would only need that look” Mazzarella said of his 8th grade math teacher who people called a teddy bear. “We needed that discipline. He was a good teacher for all of us.”

He talked about how humble Bob was, how he was “not a self-promoter,” and that although he was happy to help make things happen for the community, Bob didn’t like to be in the limelight.

“I never met somebody who was so diverse in any subject — music, sports, theater, education, he had so many passions,” Mazzarella said. “A lot of us have passions but may not be good at them, but he was really good. There wasn’t anything he wasn’t good at.”

He disclosed that it wasn’t until five or six years ago that he started calling him Bob instead of Mr. Healy, as his teacher turned friend insisted he do, but it was a hard habit to break.

“You never lose that respect going from a student to an adult,” Mazzarella said. “To me he was larger than life and that never goes away. I hope he left this earth knowing how much he meant to so many people.”

When Chuck posted his uncle’s obituary on social media, the accolades started pouring, comment after comment from people who knew and admired Bob and shared memories of him.

“To me it was like being related to a celebrity, but the coolest part is I was his nephew, and we could just talk sports, music, theatre, tv, movies, he knew it all,” Chuck said. “I knew if I needed anything, I could count on him for it as well. He was always there for me.”

Dom Ciccolini was also a classmate of Bob’s at Gallagher and they both taught at LHS. Dom

was involved with a lot of the musical and arts endeavors that Bob championed, such as musicals and Starburst, although more behind the scenes.

“I’m going to miss his laugh and his commitment to the kids and the city and the arts, just his friendship,” Dom said of his friend. “We were together in a lot of things and he was a mentor to many people who are now in the arts.”

He talked about the ROMEO club they both belonged to — retired old men eating out — and how the members collected scholarship funds for local students going into education.

“He was a great guy, he did a lot of things for a lot of people and the kids loved him,” Dom said, adding that Bob would come in to school early to teach the kids chess and that he heard from more than one student that Bob “made high school the best time of their life.”

“I’m gonna miss him, the citizens are going to miss him, the community, everyone.”

Johnny Appleseed Festival founder and organizer Rick Marchand said they will have a special dedication for Bob on the main stage that he conducted on between noon and 2 p.m. at this year’s festival on Sept. 20. There will be an hour music program featuring Bob’s most popular music along with guests who performed with Bob in high school musicals that will blend into the orchestra, theatre, solo, and group performances.

“Come down and bring your lawn chairs just like Bob would like,” said Rick, adding that if anyone wishes to be involved with the tribute, they can contact him 978-660-2313.

He talked about Bob’s “50 years of community service” that he gladly gave during his life and expressed that “he was a true legend.”

“He meant so much to so many whose lives he touched,” Rick said. “Such a strong champion for the arts and the never-ending support to nurture cross generational talent in both theatre and music. His teaching career was stellar, and the athletes he coached will always have a special place in their heart as he had in his own for them. To miss Bob is an understatement, and we help live his legacy by following the path he guided us on.”

Calling hours for Robert ‘Bob’ Healy are on Friday, Feb. 27 from 4 to 7 p.m. at Richardson Funeral Home, 106 West St., Leominster and his funeral will be held on Friday, Feb. 28 at the same location with a funeral mass at 11 a.m. at St. Boniface Church, 817 Mass Ave., Lunenburg. Burial will follow in Forest Hill Cemetery in Fitchburg. In lieu of flowers donations can be made to the New Players Theatre Guild or to MSPCA Cape Cod.