

# Chorus Chatter

News and Musings for Young at Heart Chorus Members

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*Editor: Ray Scroggins*

## **Murray Kugler 1931-2022**



This biography of Murray appeared in our June, 2017 newsletter. We reprint it here in his honor and memory.

**Murray Kugler** joined the chorus last year, after singing

with the Mesilla Valley Chorale since about 2007. He was born in Missouri and attended school there. When his birth mother died, an uncle took him into his home, and he was adopted into the Kugler family.

In 1953, Murray was drafted into the Army and sent to Fort Bliss and then to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where he worked in communications as part of the 59<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion. Upon leaving the Army in 1955, he majored in Social Studies at Central Missouri State Teachers College, where he and his first wife both received degrees.

After college, he came to New Mexico, where he taught social studies in Lordsburg and then in Grants before heading to another teaching position in Eureka, Montana. After two years in Montana, he returned to New Mexico and enrolled at Highlands University in Las Vegas. There he worked as a teaching assistant to a history professor while studying for his Master's degree. After teaching for one more year, Murray left that profession and worked for

a title company in Las Vegas until 2002. He still works part-time for a title company here in Las Cruces, examining final paper work on title policies to check for errors. Following a divorce in 1973, Murray married Barbara. They took a lot of auto trips in the 1980s and 1990s, but when she became ill, they moved to Las Cruces in 2002 to be near her daughter. Barbara died in 2003, and in 2005, Murray moved to Good Samaritan Independent Living, where he has served as vice-president and president of the Resident Council.

Murray is a proud father and grandfather, with four sons, four grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. His oldest son, Danny, works for Hewlett Packard in Oregon. His next-oldest, Chris, was an archaeologist in Texas but died in April of this year. His next son, Barry, has retired from the Air Force and lives in Las Vegas, and his youngest, Darren, has now retired but was a lawyer and judge in Las Cruces.

At Good Sam, Murray stays busy playing bridge, attending exercise class and reading, especially history. In addition to singing with Young at Heart, he has sung in his church choir, the Mesilla Valley chorale and the Village Singers, when they were active at Good Samaritan. He also has sung the National Anthem for Flag Day programs

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### How the Poinsettia Took Over Christmas

It's one of the most popular plants in the world, with annual sales of 90 million units and a

global retail impact of nearly \$1B. How did this Mexican shrub become America's best-selling holiday plant?

Indigenous to Southern Mexico, the poinsettia (or *cuetlaxochitl*) was first used by 14th-century Nahua people for dye and medicinal purposes. The plant's brilliant red bracts — which are leaves, not flowers — were so revered by the Aztec emperor Montezuma that thousands of them were transported to the high-altitude capital of Tenochtitlan each winter. After Spain colonized Mexico, Franciscan monks dubbed the plant *Flor de Nochebuena* ("Flower of the Blessed Night") and began to showcase it in annual Christmas processions.

Then, Joel Poinsett, a wealthy Southern Unionist and slave owner, was appointed as the first US minister to Mexico. On a trip to the Southern town of Taxco in 1828, he encountered the *Flor de Nochebuena* and was so struck by it that he shipped specimens back to the US. The plant — which eventually became known to Westerners as the "poinsettia" — made its public American debut at a flower show in Philadelphia and quickly became the talk of the town.

But several things worked against the poinsettia as a commercial entity. The plant's disposition meant that it couldn't readily be transported en masse. In 1900, Albert Ecke a German immigrant, began selling cut flowers, including poinsettias. By 1909, they were selling so well that he made them the focus of his entire business. His son, Paul Ecke, assumed the business in the 1920s and soon developed secret breeding techniques to improve the durability and aesthetics of poinsettias. The specifics of Ecke's prized breeding technique were guarded with the intensity of the Coca-Cola recipe.

In 1992, a graduate student named John Dole got his hands on an Ecke cutting and managed to reverse-engineer the company's top-secret process — a method that involved grafting together two poinsettia plants. Competition flooded in, sparking a "golden age" for poinsettias. Big-box retailers like Home Depot, Lowes, and Walmart began purchasing vast quantities of poinsettias and selling them as loss leaders. Today, most poinsettias are grown by large international companies, but soil regulations prevent the importation of potted poinsettias. Only cuttings are permitted, so the final stages of growing still happen in the US at major greenhouses. *The Hustle Newsletter*

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## The Healing Power of Music



There's little doubt about the power of music in our everyday lives, but new research shows just how beneficial it can be in modern medicine.

For example, in 2011 Arizona Rep. Gabrielle "Gabby" Giffords was shot in the head at close range and survived a traumatic brain injury. Her neural connectors that translate thought and ideas into speech were severely damaged, and she lost the ability to understand or express speech. Her doctors employed neurologic music therapy, and Gifford turned to singing and playing the French horn as part of her rehabilitation.

Today, music therapy is being used in targeted treatments for asthma, autism, depression and more, including brain disorders such as Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, epilepsy and stroke. Numerous scientific and psychological studies have shown that music can lift our moods, combat depression, improve blood flow and lower levels of stress-related hormones.

Easy-to-play wind instruments like the harmonica address diaphragmatic breathing and body posture, which improves breathing. And singing helps breathing control and improves social interaction among those suffering from respiratory ailments.

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## Deck the Halls...

originally was titled "Deck the Hall," and we're singing it on our December program. The melody is Welsh, dating back to the sixteenth century, and belongs to a traditional Welsh New Year's Eve carol, "Nos Galan." The English lyrics, written by the Scottish musician Thomas Oliphant, date to 1862. The original Welsh words were written by John Jones (Talhaiarn).

The original English lyrics, as published in 1862, run as follows:

*Deck the hall with boughs of holly,  
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la! (etc.).  
'Tis the season to be jolly,  
Fill the meadcup, drain the barrel,  
Troll the ancient Yuletide carol,*

A variation of the lyrics appears in the December 1877 issue of the *Pennsylvania School Journal*. This version, in which there is no longer any reference to drinking, runs as follows:

*Deck the hall with boughs of holly,  
'Tis the season to be jolly,  
Don we now our gay apparel,  
Troll the ancient Christmas carol,*

The pluralizing of the title to "Deck the Halls" is found as early as 1892.

**I never thought  
I'd be the kind of  
person who'd  
wake up early in  
the morning to  
exercise ...**

**And I was right.**