

Fred Fitzgerald '62 learned to specialize in versatility back in the early 1960s. He was a baritone soloist in the Westfield State College choir. He built sets for musical and theatrical productions, served as yearbook co-editor, played baseball and basketball, and also ran track.

He says the late Dr. Catherine Dower, professor emerita of music, impressed on him that broad-based knowledge was a must for educators. "It was definitely a mission of hers that we learned to do it all—the best that we could," Fitzgerald says. "We all benefited from her efforts to expand our worlds."

Dr. Dower will continue to expand the worlds of music students for generations to come through the Catherine Dower Performing and Fine Arts Center that was created with her \$1 million gift. She was Fitzgerald's beloved mentor, too, and as the keynote speaker at the Celebration of Life and dedication of the center in May, Fitzgerald highlighted that Dr. Dower inspired him to enroll in college, become a teacher, and dream big.

"She understood my talents better than I did," says Fitzgerald. "She helped me develop them. She would tell me, 'You're here to be a teacher.' At the time, I had no idea that I was going to become a teacher."

After he graduated from Westfield High School in 1955 as valedictorian, Fitzgerald also didn't know he would even go to college. He was accepted at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, where he hoped to study chemical engineering, but Fitzgerald didn't receive a scholarship, and his family could not afford the tuition. He got a job at Westfield Chemical Corp. instead.

Reading the evening paper one day several years later, Fitzgerald saw an article about a choir rehearsal at Westfield State; he attended and ended up joining the group, which was led by Dr. Dower. She encouraged Fitzgerald to apply to the college.

Once a student, Fitzgerald says Dr. Dower empowered him to learn, to lead, to explore. She created opportunities for students - from performing for a Hawaiian senator, to singing at the Rockefeller Center or at a teacher's college in Washington, D.C. Fitzgerald developed a love for both teaching and music. He later bolstered these passions at the Graduate School of Education at Boston University.

Fitzgerald is now retired after 40 years as an educator; for the last 33 years, he taught math to middle school students. "I love to see the lightbulb go on," he says. "There really is a lightbulb, and when you see it turn on—that's when teaching is worth it."

Fitzgerald continues to be versatile. He performs a one-man show at local senior centers, sings at his synagogue, and teaches part time at Goodwin College in East Hartford, Connecticut. He has also proudly helped his granddaughter Aeron by tutoring her for 14 years in reading and math. She recently graduated from community college and is enrolled

at Central Connecticut State College. “Good things can happen if your actions are deserving of them,” he says.

Inspired to Creativity

This math teacher’s storied career was launched by the late Dr. Catherine Dower

By Janice Beetle ’85

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