

2010 Partners in Excellence

Sandi Simmons has been a member of the Kansas City Lyric Opera Guild for 37 years, having joined in 1973. She has been a member of the Board for 34 years and this year was re-elected to her 12th three-year term. She served as president of the board from 1982 to 1984 and has held numerous committee memberships and chairs. Her most onerous current responsibility is organizing the Cast Rehearsal Suppers which take place on weekend rehearsal days when the cast is called all day and few restaurants are open during the dinner break. Not only does Sandi organize and coordinate the pot-luck items, she leads the set-up, clean-up, and frequently provides the main course, often cooking it herself. Sandi never misses an opera, is always in the Guild Room recruiting new members, and attends all Guild functions. She is an unflagging participant and always willing to take on any extra task she is asked to do.

Julie Todaro is the Young Patronesses of the Opera immediate past president (finishing her term in May 2010) and is an exceptional leader, contributor, and volunteer for opera. As president, she has been responsible for almost every phase of the organization.

She has been an exemplary member of YPO for five years and has been honored with the Gold Star, an award acknowledging a member who has gone beyond the call of duty for the organization. Her most important contribution is considered by many to be her leadership and expansion of the In-School Opera Program for the past several years. She took over the production of this program from her mother, Louise Todaro, who produced it for 35 years. This program brings opera to more than 40 schools for approximately 30,000 students in South Florida annually.

Being a talented soprano, she even occasionally fills one of the singing roles. She has also been actively involved with a number of additional educational programs and the fundraising gala where they raise over \$200,000 each year (which funds the educational programs as well as donating \$50-\$100K annually to the Florida Grand Opera). Working well into the night to achieve what she does, she almost seems super-human at times.

Helen Brown is a past president of the Nashville Opera Guild, having graciously taken the helm after the sudden passing of the standing guild president. During her three year tenure as president, the Nashville Opera Guild set a new record for contributions to the Nashville Opera, presenting a check for \$145,000. Under her leadership, Helen oversaw the successful opening of the new home of the Nashville Opera, the Noah Liff Opera Center, with a community festival where more than 500 attended. Recently, she was a hands-on leader and volunteer for the Guild's newest fundraising event, a children's fashion show highlighting children's clothes and the Nashville Opera Association's education program where portions of the children's opera *The Three Little Pigs* were performed. Even though her term as president has been completed, she has remained an active and vital volunteer, and her dedication, determination and leadership are inspiring.

The Opera League of Los Angeles will celebrate its 30th anniversary in 2011. Since its founding in 1981, predating the formation of LA Opera in 1986, members of the League have worked tirelessly to support opera in Los Angeles. Currently the largest volunteer support group of LA Opera, the League has over 1,000 members, many of whom volunteer for various activities that support LA Opera. In 2008-2009, the Opera League provided 28,481 hours of volunteer service: over 21,000 were in direct service to the opera and visiting artists, and the remainder for League operations and events. The Opera League of Los Angeles donates at least \$75,000 annually to LA Opera from their boutique, member dues and other fundraising activities. In addition, the Opera League donated \$100,000 to the Ring Cycle Friends of the Ring campaign, as well as an additional \$50,000 to assist the LA Opera with other projects.