

THE OPERA VOLUNTEER VOICE

October 2025
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The official newsletter of
Opera Volunteers

Celebrate
OPERATOBER
With OVI!

See page 2

Get Ready for World Opera Day: October 25

25 October 2025

WORLD
OPERA DAY

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World Opera Day is held annually on October 25. It is a collaboration between **OPERA America**, **Opera Europa**, and **Ópera Latinoamérica**.

World Opera Day is a social media initiative - an opportunity for the industry's administrators, artists, trustees, audiences and volunteer groups to shine a light on opera through their social media platforms. www.worldoperaday.com

For **World Opera Day 2025**, we invite you to join **OPERA America** on social media on Saturday, October 25, to celebrate opera as a vital part of our cultural landscape. World Opera Day is an opportunity to share with newcomers how local opera companies contribute to making a better society.

We encourage opera companies, artists, volunteer groups, and audiences to share how opera can transport us through music and storytelling.

How to Participate on October 25, 2025

- Highlight an artist, company, or program making an impact in your community through opera.
- Post about the role opera plays in your city's arts and culture scene — from inspiring audiences to supporting local creativity.
- Share a photo or short video from a production that brought your community together and tell us why it mattered.
- Tag your content with #WorldOperaDay and follow the hashtag to see what's happening worldwide
- Tag @OPERAAmerica to expand the conversation, share posts, and increase engagement.
- Visit the OVI website or follow us on Facebook

For more ideas on how to participate go to: www.operaamerica.org/r/advocacy/4197/world-opera-day



OPERA
VOLUNTEERS
INTERNATIONAL

October is "Operatober"!

Opera Volunteers International (OVI) invites you and your members to join a month-long celebration of opera in October, with special events, entertaining creative activities, and plenty of ways to connect.

Daily Social Fun

Every weekday in October, we'll post themed content on OVI's social media channels. All fun activities! Please share it with your own followers on your pages!

- Meme Mondays
- Twisted Tuesdays (opera trivia & puzzles)
- Wine-Down Wednesdays
- Thumb-Thru Thursdays (favorite books & scores)
- Factual Fridays (opera facts & history)



Weekly Highlights

Enjoy a fresh activity each week to share with your group. It's a fun way to bond with local members and explore the world of opera together.

- **Week of Oct 6: Opera Scavenger Hunt** – Virtually discover opera groups near & far.
- **Week of Oct 13: Opera Art Show** – An online celebration of opera with a curated mini art show, soaring arias, a lively Carmen sing-along, historically accurate costumes, decorations, and more.
- **Week of Oct 20: Opera Movie Club** – A one-hour Zoom discussion of Bellini's enchanting *La Sonnambula*. Then gather with OVI opera friends on Thursday, Oct. 23, at 8:00 p.m. CST for a lively one-hour [Zoom discussion](#)* led by Rick Greenman.
- **Week of Oct 27: Behind the Scenes** – A backstage tour with Florida Grand Opera's CEO, Maria Todaro, during rehearsals for *Silent Night*. Check the OVI website for details on how to take this virtual tour.

Check out the complete details can be found on OVI's website at:

www.operavolunteers.org/operatober

Connect. Create. Celebrate.

This is a great "opera-tunity" to bond with your local members and meet opera enthusiasts across the U.S. and Canada.

Don't miss the music and the fun—be part of Operatober!

- **Zoom link for 10/23 opera discussion:**
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/4269943831?pwd=ooVLSxEIxoEZ4PBq8ZCkEPIDHlfv06.1&omn=84031915792>

From the President: Rhonda Cantazaro



Looking Ahead Together

As I step into the role of OVI President this October, I am filled with gratitude for the strong foundation our organization has built over the years, and for the remarkable leadership of **Mary Svela**, who has guided us with wisdom, humor, and a genuine love of opera volunteers.

In the Summer issue of **OPERA America**, I was struck by an article on why audiences return to the inherited repertoire. Productions of *Carmen*, *La Bohème*, or *Tosca* draw people in because the music is familiar and beloved. However, if audiences are to return again and again, productions must feel fresh, relevant, and connected to the world we live in today.

I believe the same is true for OVI. We will always remain true to our mission of supporting and expanding volunteerism in opera. That is our “repertoire.” However, we also have the opportunity and the responsibility to reimagine what volunteerism looks like for the future. How do we connect with new generations of volunteers? How do we embrace diverse skills and fresh ideas? How do we ensure that when people volunteer, they feel that vital sense of connection that brings them back, again and again?

These are some of the questions I hope we will explore together in the coming year. Along the way, we’ll continue the programs that have become OVI hallmarks: our Matching Grants, our annual recognition awards, and our expanding webinar series, while also experimenting with new ways to engage, train, and celebrate volunteers.

Opera endures because it strikes a balance between tradition and innovation. OVI will thrive for the very same reason. I look forward to working with all of you as we write this next act together.

Warmly,
Rhonda

OVI Board Leadership 2025-2026

President	Rhonda Cantazaro
Secretary	Marlene McAllister
Finance / Fundraising	Dianne Schemm
VP Administration	Ingrid Kessler
VP Membership	Tyler McKenzie
VP Commun. / Mktg	Lorena Zapata
Past President	Mary Svela
Nominating	Rhonda Sweeney

REGIONAL DIRECTORS

Northwest Region	TBA
North Central Region	TBA
Great Lakes Region	Erika Erich
Northeast Region	Carol Steigleman
Mid-Atlantic Region	Phyllis Driver
Gulf Southeast Region	Jim Jolly
South Central Region	Jerry Bohannon
Southwest Region	TBA

CHAIRS

Social Media	Paige Bush
Social Media	Kaycee McFalls
Resources Director	Danielle Di Stefano
Newsletter	Rick Greenman
Matching Grants	Julie Anne Benson
Partners in Excellence	Deanna Stevenson
Projects of Special Merit	Sarajane King
Database	Anne Prokopovych



Click Links

OVI web-

Welcome to the Team

Introducing New OVI Board Members

Congratulations and thank you to our newest board members: **Carol Steigelman, Deanna Stevenson, Paige Bush, and Kaycee McFalls.** These four individuals, who have proven themselves in their own opera support groups, have chosen to share their skills with the wider opera world. At OVI, they will likely gain new skills, connections and fulfillment in the process.



Carol Steigelman

Northeast Region Director
Guild of the Glimmerglass
Festival



Deanna Stevenson

Partners in Excellence
Opera Theatre of St. Louis



Kaycee McFalls

Social Media
Tennessee



Paige Bush

Social Media
Tennessee

Changing Roles: Regional Director Tyler McKenzie will be taking over the position of VP Membership; Lorena Zapata, Events Coordinator, is the new VP of Communications and Marketing; and Danille DiStefano, Northeast Regional Director, will be the new Director of Resources.

We Would Love to have you Join Our Team

One of the most crucial elements in building a strong organization is finding and recruiting the people who can provide special insights and attributes to a focused and organized team. Special thanks to Nominating Chair, Rhonda Sweeney for assembling a truly remarkable group. If you're interested in honing your skills, broadening your outreach, and enhancing your resume, contact Rhonda to see where your needs and ours can align.



Gulf Southeast Regional Director Spotlight **Jim Jolly**

Jim Jolly currently serves as a past President of the **University of Alabama Opera Guild**, where he has played a key role in supporting the opera program, student engagement, and community outreach. As a longtime college professor and dean, in retirement, he continues to hold a position as Adjunct Professor of English at the University of Alabama. As OVI Southeast Regional Director, Jim serves as the first line of communication with our members in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. A person who enjoys being entertained by all kinds of music, Jim is past president of the **Tuscaloosa Symphony Orchestra Board of Directors** and also serves on the boards for the **Chamber Music Society, Theatre Tuscaloosa, and the University of Alabama Theatre Alliance.** He is also currently the president of the **Tuscaloosa Educators Retirees Association**, a group of retirees from Kindergarten to University employees. Jim came to the UA Opera Guild at the invitation of its founder, **Elizabeth Aversa.** Over the years, Jim has brought his passion for the arts and opera into leadership work, bridging academic, administrative, and artistic worlds. Jim is the epitome of an arts advocate and volunteer!



Jim is second from the left

----- Like us on Facebook to join the conversation! -----

OVI Volunteer Groups Across America 2024 - 2025

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Northwest Region

Portland Opera Guild

North Central Region

Opera Omaha Inc.
 Opera Omaha Guild
 Twin Cities Opera Guild, Inc.
 Minnesota Opera Company

Great Lakes Region

Chicago Opera Theater
 Lyric Opera of Chicago
 Chapters Exec. Board
 Toledo Opera Guild

Northeast Region

Erwin H. Johnson
 Memorial Fund, Inc.
 Opera Maine
 Glimmerglass Opera Guild
 Opera Guild of Rochester

Mid-Atlantic Region

Knoxville Opera Guild
 Chattanooga Symphony &
 Opera Association
 Friends of Nashville
 Opera

Gulf Southeast Region

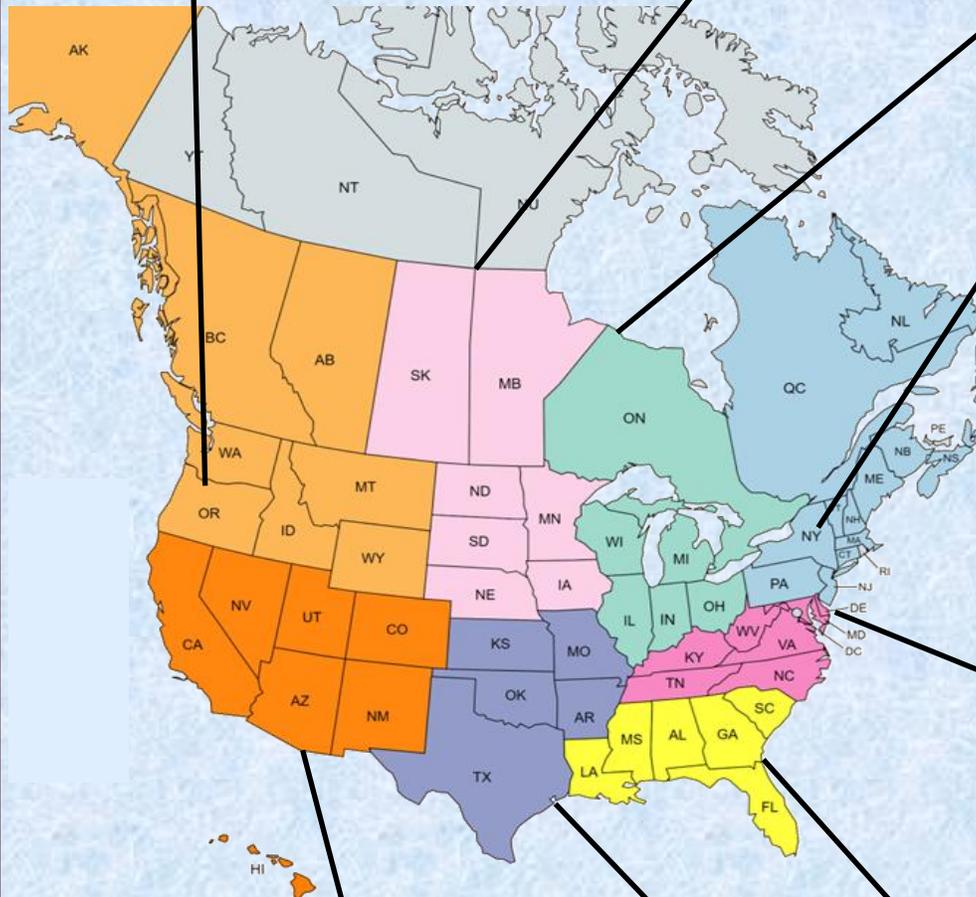
Bravi! Pensacola Opera
 Volunteer Group
 The Opera Guild at the
 University of Alabama
 Peach State Opera Company
 Young Patronesses
 of the Opera

Southwest Region

Valley Friends of Arizona
 Opera
 Central City Opera Guild
 San Francisco Opera Guild
 Opera League of Los Angeles
 Denver Lyric Opera Guild

South Central Region

Houston Grand Opera Guild,
 The Guild of Tulsa Opera
 Opera Theatre of Saint Louis
 Guild



OVI Supporting and Recognizing your Organization

Applications Now Open for OVI Awards & Matching Grants – Deadline February 15, 2026

Opera Volunteers International is proud to support and celebrate the work of volunteers across North America. Each year, our Awards and Grants program highlights the very best of opera volunteerism - projects that inspire, partnerships that flourish, and creative initiatives that make a lasting difference.

- **Matching Grants**

OVI offers Matching Grants of up to \$2,000 each to support innovative, volunteer-driven projects. These funds can help launch a new program, expand community outreach, or bring fresh ideas to life in your guild or opera company.

Awards of Excellence

We also honor outstanding work through two signature awards:

- **Projects of Special Merit**, recognizing creative, high-impact initiatives and/or milestones led by volunteers.
- **Partners in Excellence**, honoring exceptional contributions volunteers make to their opera companies. Over 100 such individuals have been honored through the years.



These awards not only celebrate achievement but also spotlight models of excellence that others can learn from and emulate. Honorees will be invited to attend our Annual Awards luncheon at the Opera America Conference in Delaware, this coming May.

How to Apply

Applications and full guidelines are available on the OVI website:

<https://www.operavolunteers.org/grants-and-awards/>

Submissions are due by February 15, 2026. Don't wait—this is your chance to secure support for your work, or to shine a national spotlight on the creativity and commitment of your volunteers.



October is a time for renewal

Renew your OVI Membership Today

<https://www.operavolunteers.org/joinovi/>

Your support allows OVI to celebrate the hard work of volunteers and offers ways to help make more volunteer involvement possible by:

- **Recognizing achievement and creativity**
- **Supporting volunteer projects**
- **Advocating for continued involvement of volunteers in opera.**

Joining at the Grantor level helps fund our Matching Grants program for member projects.

Volunteering enriches the lives of volunteers, builds bridges to the community, and makes it possible for opera companies to do more.

----- Find us on the internet at www.OperaVolunteers.org -----

WHY OVI?

OVI offers many member benefits, including our expanding, exciting new initiatives and perks!

Our support includes:

- ♪ Matching Grants
- ♪ Awards: Two offered annually
- ♪ Arts Admin and Management Webinar Series: year-round
- ♪ Interviews and podcasts
- ♪ Resources: hundreds!
- ♪ Newsletters: quarterly
- ♪ Annual Convention
- ♪ Online Calendar and Virtual events for Celebrate Operatober and World Opera Day to share



November

All Member Survey

December

Webinar on Fundraising—just in time for year-end gifts

January

Zoom help with OVI Grant applications

February

Inaugural Virtual Gala

Operatober Planning Committee

- Danielle Di Stefano—Erwin H. Johnson Fund (NY)
- Patty Duncan—The Guild of Tulsa Opera (OK)
- Kathy Eichenberger—Central City Opera Guild. (CO)
- Lisa Hagstrom—Opera Omaha Guild. (NE)
- Tyler McKenzie—Opera Theatre of St. Louis (MO)
- Karen Ritz—Central City Opera Guild (CO)
- Julie Todaro—Young Patronesses of the Opera (FL)

2026 OPERA CONFERENCE

Mark Your Calendar!

WILMINGTON, DE MAY 12-15

OPERA America and OperaDelaware invite administrators, trustees, artists, and advocates to the largest annual conference about the creation, production, and enjoyment of opera.

Join us for four days of networking, panels, presentations, and performances in Wilmington and Philadelphia!

HOSTED BY

OPERA AMERICA | OPERADELAWARE



Congratulations to the winner of the Operatober Celebration Scavenger hunt: **Sarah Lockwood** from **Minnesota Opera**, won a year's free membership in OVI.

Visit us online and follow us on Facebook for other fun events through October 31.

Opera Volunteers International

PO Box 24
Signal Mountain, TN 37377

Send your guild news and photos to Newsletter Editor and Publisher:

Rick Greenman
newsletter@operavolunteers.org

Find us on the internet at
www.OperaVolunteers.org

Opera Volunteers International is a nonprofit volunteer organization dedicated to connecting and bringing together volunteers who support opera companies in cities and local communities throughout the United States and Canada.





My name is **Amanda Krause**, and I teach 5th-8th Grade Band at **Lake Geneva Middle School** in Wisconsin. I want to thank members of the **Lyric Opera of Chicago Lake Geneva Chapter** for the generosity they show our local schools every year.

For the last 11 years, along with my orchestra and choir colleagues, **Lauren Klement** and **Kim May**, we have had the privilege of taking our entire 7th grade performing arts department to the Lyric opera in Chicago. Each year we bring over 150 students, teachers and chaperones. This trip has become a rite of passage for our 7th grade students, and it simply would not happen without your financial support. Your contributions cover everything: the buses that get us to the train station, the train into the city, a stipend for the food court, and—of course—the opera tickets that open a whole new world to them.

For almost all of our seventh graders, this is their very first opera. And to be honest, many come in with some very distorted ideas of what to expect. Some have never been to Chicago. Most have never ridden a train. And yet, from the moment we board the bus to the moment we step back into Lake Geneva.

The experience is nothing short of transformative.

Prior to attending the opera - we teach them everything. From how to use the revolving door in the train station, to how to get on and off the escalator. We teach them what to wear and how to conduct themselves in the opera house. We talk about basic city safety, and how to avoid solicitors. We share the educational resources provided by the Lyric Opera, which covers basic vocabulary, plotline, and even music samples so they have an idea of what to listen for.

The kids light up at the French Market and food court in the train station. They are fascinated walking over the rattling bridge while crossing the Chicago River. They are in awe when they walk into the opera house for the first time. They're surprised at how easily they can follow the story by reading the subtitles, and they're genuinely moved by the sheer power and beauty of the music and the acoustics, as well as the costumes and scenery.

We have been fortunate to sit near some incredibly friendly opera patrons that share their knowledge with our students, and discuss this overall experience. It is a life skill to be able to talk to a stranger, but also to know when it is appropriate and safe.

Last year, we saw *La Bohème*, and I'll never forget how our students described the emotion in the music - even though it was in another language. Experiencing a performance at the very highest level gives us, as their music teachers, the chance to raise the bar in our own classrooms. It shows them what is possible when skill, passion, and hard work come together.

..... ***And the impact lasts.***

Many of these students will attend an opera, or other professional performances again later in their lives. That would never happen without this life-changing first experience.

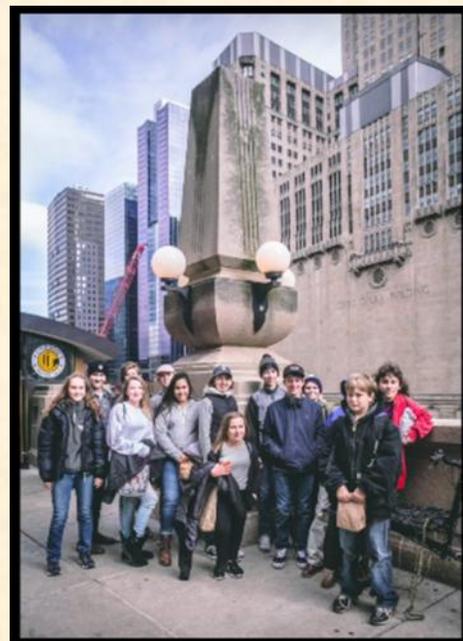
I am originally from Lake Geneva, and grew up attending the same school I currently teach at. In fact, my own dad was my band director. Just this summer I started my oldest daughter in our band program. I share this, because like you, I am deeply committed to our community and our schools. Without active community members our students would not get this experience. I can promise you, my students and I appreciate this generous opportunity.

Most of our students will not become professional musicians or music teachers, but they will leave our programs being supporters and advocates of the arts.

On a daily basis I tell my students to **“Work hard, be proud, stay humble, and go do something that matters...”**

What you do matters...

So on behalf of our students, their families, the other surrounding schools and music programs, my colleagues and myself—thank you. Thank you for your generosity, for making this tradition possible, and for helping me teach not just notes and rhythms, but the joy and power of music itself.



Regional News:

Great Lakes Region



by *Elizabeth Narut*
Lake Geneva Chapter
Education Chair



Lake Geneva Wisconsin Volunteers Introduce Students to Opera

In a time when technology is taking entertainment into the future, experiences like opera connect people to each other rather than connecting people to things. Connections between people matter because they have the human heart at the core. Giuseppe Verdi's opera, *La Traviata*, sends a message that it is possible to experience joy out of self-sacrifice and pure love. Stories like these translate lessons to young audiences that cannot be learned from electronic devices.

Thanks to the **Lake Geneva Chapter of the Lyric Opera of Chicago**, students are being given a new realm to experience culture, song, music, art, and storytelling. Opera may not be as exciting initially to students who are used to instant gratification with technology providing social media, movies, and video games. However, the new schedule the chapter has put into place offers middle school students repeated exposure to the opera art which will enhance their knowledge and pique their curiosity for the arts in the future. Because of donations from Lake Geneva Chapter members, a new crop of 5th graders will be able to see *Lyric Unlimited's* operetta in fall 2019. Seventh graders will be able to see their first opera in the 2019-2020 season, and 8th graders will travel back to the Lyric Opera House for the backstage tour that had this year's 8th graders begging to see another opera! These comments from 13 year-olds are proof that the efforts of the Chapter are paying off by extending opportunities to younger generations. The Lake Geneva Chapter of Lyric Opera of Chicago has sent over 700 students to experience classic performances in this school year alone! Most recently, more than 300 Lake Geneva seventh grade students and chaperones witnessed a classic opera, *La Traviata*, in February and March, wrapping up another successful school year of trips to Lyric Opera. Students from the **Big Foot Area Consortium, (Sharon, Walworth, Fontana, and Reek Grade Schools)**, took a field trip to see their first opera on February 20, 2019, and **Lake Geneva Middle School** travelled to Chicago by train on March 7. The students are abuzz with excitement about these trips.

About the Lake Geneva Chapter

The **Lake Geneva Chapter** is just one of the twelve area volunteer groups supporting **Lyric Opera of Chicago** under the supervision of Lyric's **Chapters Executive Board** (an OVI group member).

The Lake Geneva Chapter's educational outreach program is especially impressive because Lake Geneva is in another state (Wisconsin) and is 90 miles from the Opera House.

Each Lyric Opera chapter has its own unique character with myriad activities, projects and events suited to its particular membership and community. Lyric Opera Chapter volunteers help fund Lyric Opera through member donations and from the profits of chapter programs and initiatives. The chapters also sponsor and staff the lobby OperaShop and serve in other volunteer capacities.

Chapters also provide an important social framework where community members can get together to mingle, learn, and share their love of opera.

————— *Like us on Facebook to join the conversation!* —————