

Edmund Chiarello – NYSSMA® President



Thomas N. Gellert: The Music Man and Grill Master Who Harmonizes Education, Leadership, and Flavor

In the world of NYSSMA®, few names evoke the same level of respect, admiration, and warmth as that of Thomas N. Gellert. With a career spanning publishing, leadership, mentorship, and even the culinary arts, Tom has spent decades enriching the lives of educators, students, and colleagues.

Now, as he retires from his role as Editor of the *School Music NEWS* after an incredible 31-year tenure, the New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA®) community reflects on a legacy that has left an indelible mark.

Since taking over the editorial reins from the iconic Bob Campbell, Tom has led the *School Music NEWS* through three decades of growth, challenges, and innovation. What began as a trusted publication for music educators became — under Tom's guidance — a true cornerstone of NYSSMA's communication and culture. With nearly 250 thoughtful editorials, countless layouts, and decades of deadline management, Tom didn't just edit, he inspired!

A true colleague

NYSSMA® Interim Executive Director Michael Salzman, who also served as NYSSMA® President in 2018–19, highlights the collaborative ease with which Tom worked alongside each President. While deadlines were structured and clear, typically spanning a two-year article schedule, Tom always brought flexibility and empathy to the process. Michael shared this: "His ability to stretch timelines when needed helped Presidents finalize their thoughts with ease — a testament to his supportive and collaborative spirit."

Former Executive Director Dr. Bert Nelson added: "Tom is creative and uniquely multi-talented. He is a musician. He teaches others. He provides leadership for music educators. He

writes, creates, and edits the NYSSMA® journal. And he makes outstanding delicious and singular foods on his grill."

Tom's talents extend far beyond the editorial page. From managing printers and proofreaders to navigating the constant unpredictability of USPS shipping, Tom was the steady hand behind the scenes. Whether replacing a printer mid-issue, confirming the correct spellings of 850 all-state performers (every year), or scribing and editing Executive Council minutes, Tom handled each task with calm resolve and unwavering attention to detail.

In addition to his editorial leadership, Tom has served as NYSSMA's historian and archivist, thoughtfully chronicling the organization's evolution. His detailed work on the third volume of the NYSSMA® History Book (1990–2006) went beyond simple documentation; it captured the growth, spirit, and heart of music education in New York. With Volume Four (2007–2023) soon to be released, the NYSSMA® community looks forward to another masterful chronicle from Tom, whose commitment to preserving our collective story will serve generations of educators to come.

A charming host

For those who know Tom personally, his artistry doesn't end with music or writing; it extends to the kitchen and backyard grill. A passionate and skilled culinary artist, Tom is known for his legendary cooking, whether it's perfectly smoked barbeque or grilled vegetables.

Together with his wife, Karen, Tom has turned countless gatherings into culinary celebrations. His creations — like his writing — are crafted with care, precision, and a desire to bring people together. A symphony of sound — enhanced by a symphony of words and ideas — and topped off by a symphony of

foods. Thomas N. Gellert clearly served as NYSSMA's unique and multi-talented Editor and chef.

Steve Schopp, NYSSMA® Executive Director Emeritus, recalls Tom's early days: "It seems like yesterday I was sitting in the NYSSMA® office interviewing candidates to fill the rather large shoes of the iconic Robert Campbell. Peter Brasch, NYSSMA® Past President 1994–95, had suggested a band director named Tom Gellert, someone we didn't really know at the time. Who knew it would lead to a three-decade collaboration with the magazine and several NYSSMA® history books?"

Despite the inevitable changes in leadership, technology, and publishing, Tom remained a constant: reliable, insightful, and unflappable. Former NYSSMA® executive directors all agree that during their tenures, the *School Music NEWS* was one thing they never had to worry about. If there was a challenge — and there were many — Tom handled it, sometimes clearing his head on a bike ride, but always returning to the task with care and commitment.

As Tom Gellert retires, he leaves behind far more than a well-run publication or a shelf full of NYSSMA® history volumes. He leaves a legacy of excellence, creativity, and community. He has shown us that one person can harmonize multiple passions — education, leadership, writing, and, yes, even cooking — into a life of purpose and joy.

From the editorial desk to the bandstand, from the historian's archive to the BBQ grill, Tom Gellert has truly done it all.

Thank you for your vision.

Your service.

Your stories.

And yes—your cooking.

Enjoy your well-earned retirement! ||