

Hello, fellow women and members of our MWBDA!

May 4, 2022

I would like to introduce myself. My name is Elke Overton and I am the newly elected president of MWBDA. I am very excited to have this opportunity to give my time toward this wonderful and meaningful organization. I have to tell you how excited I was when I first discovered this group of incredible women. I wish I would have known about this organization earlier in my career, but I'm so thankful to be part of it now.

I first started teaching in Missouri after moving here from Iowa at the age of 23. My first position was K-8 band and general music at a very small Catholic school. I can tell you that it was one of the most fun and most challenging positions I've ever had. I had such a great time working with the band kids teaching beginner band to the 4th graders and 5-8th "middle school" band. I even got to pull the kids out of classes for weekly private lessons! The kids were so much fun. The most challenging part was teaching the general music classes all day Tuesdays and Thursdays, something I never thought I would end up doing and something I really did not feel adequately prepared for... However, as we all know, sometimes the best learning experiences are TRIAL BY FIRE! I came home on Tuesdays and Thursdays more exhausted than I have ever been after a full work day in any other job. At the same time, I learned how adorable and affectionate those little ones could be. I wouldn't trade that time for anything.

I first realized I wanted to pursue more studies in conducting during my student teaching experience when I had my first real experience directing and rehearsing a full ensemble. I got the bug, for sure. During my time teaching elementary school, I attended several conducting workshops at University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music and consequently decided to pursue a master's degree there at CCM. I auditioned for Mallory Thompson (an incredible colleague and mentor in the world of women band directors) and was accepted into the program. Unfortunately for me, two months later she was offered a position at Northwestern University, where she teaches to this day. I decided to attend CCM instead of following her to Northwestern, because I couldn't really turn down a FREE master's degree with a graduate stipend at CCM. I ended up having a wonderful experience there studying with Frank Battisti, Wayne Jeffreys and Rod Winther... such an amazing learning opportunity.

Following my master's degree, I taught high school band, marching band and orchestra for one year. Then I landed my first college teaching job at age 28. I was very fortunate to be in the right place at the right time and had some great references to get me in the door. I taught community college at SCC for 4 years, and as I was preparing to go back to graduate school, I ended up getting pregnant (after 2 years with no success). Unfortunately, I had a complicated pregnancy and needed to stay at home with our little girl. I ended up staying home with kids for 13 years, although it had never been my plan to take time away from teaching. Taking on a high school position doing marching band again wasn't really in the cards for me, because of my husband's schedule running his business.

I finally had an opportunity to go back to work at the college level in 2015 when I was offered a position to conduct the band at Jefferson College as an adjunct. I was so ready to go back to teaching and making music!!! Naturally, I took the position and it was a good transition back into teaching. The following year they offered me a full-time position at Jeffco and I was thrilled. I felt so fortunate! So I just completed my 6th year at Jeffco, I had the opportunity to conduct the UMSL Wind Ensemble this past year as an adjunct and I can only see more opportunities in my future.

At some point I will be ready to retire, but I cannot imagine not continuing to conduct and make music with other people. Somehow, I will find a way even after I give up my full-time position, I'm sure!

Stepping into my new leadership position with the MWBDA is giving me a new and wonderful opportunity to reach out to young women teachers and fellow band directors. I truly believe that the camaraderie that we have with one another is irreplaceable. Truthfully, probably most of my friends are men and I've always had great working relationships with all the men in the band world, but none of those relationships can replace the mutual experiences that we all share. We know there are still challenges to face with equity for women in the band world. I remember distinctly feeling like no one would even consider me for a high school position right out of college, but I knew many young men were getting those positions, sometimes with no experience at all. We all must work very hard to demonstrate our abilities and prove our worth in our field. This will never change, but with the support of one another, we can stand together, cheer for one another, celebrate our successes and keep pressing forward for more opportunities for women.

One of my goals as your new president is to recruit as many new members and young women teachers as possible! This organization is worth every drop of our energy to give our budding young professional women a lift and the full emotional support of our members. Together, we have the combined expertise from decades of teaching music, not just band, but MUSIC. That is what we do... we share the experience of music with our students. First and foremost, we are MUSICIANS and we spread our passion for music with everyone we touch, because we are also TEACHERS... and so much more in our every day work.

I can't wait to share more stories and experiences with all of you. Our organization works to provide learning opportunities for teachers by sponsoring workshops at our state conferences. We always do this in collaboration with other music organizations and support networks, like our local and state music merchants. We also always do it together by providing a hub at each conference for our women to stay together and bond in our "down time". I look forward to sharing all these moments with all of you over the next year and beyond.

We are all gathering again this year at the MBA conference on June 19-22 at Margaritaville in Osage Beach. I hope you all can join us. Jo Ellen, one of our fearless leaders, has shared information about the house that we have with rooms available for all of us to stay together and bond. We are sponsoring one of the clinics at the conference (Monday at 11am) and we are organizing a luncheon and an evening picnic at the house.

I hope to see you all there!! Feel free to contact me anytime! eoverton@jeffco.edu

Sincerely,



Elke Overton
MWBDA President
Associate Professor of Music at Jefferson College