

# BHS band director goes national

## Ruggieri named quarterfinalist for Grammy Music Educator Award

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By Amy Leigh Wilson, Town Crier

"What a band!"

Those three words let musicians in Boardman know that their band director is proud of their performance.

"What a teacher" might be the words used by the three people who nominated Boardman High School Director of Bands Tom Ruggieri for the first-ever Grammy Foundation Music Educator Award. The foundation will honor one music teacher in the country and offer him a trip to Los Angeles to accept the award, attend the Grammy Awards ceremony, and receive a \$10,000 honorarium. The nine finalists will receive a \$1,000 honorarium, and the schools of all 10 finalists will receive matching grants. Ruggieri is currently a quarterfinalist for the award and semifinalists will be announced in August.

### Article Photos



Photo by Jim McCreary, Town Crier correspondent

Boardman High School Director of Bands Tom Ruggieri has been directing with pride and passion during his 14 years at the school. He has recently been named a quarterfinalist for the Grammy Foundation's first-ever Music Educator Award.

The idea behind the award was for professional musicians to thank the teachers who inspired them, said Ruggieri.

His son, Nico, was watching the Grammys on TV this year when they announced the new award.

"I was in my office working and overheard the announcement, when Nico said, 'Dad, did you hear that?'"

One of his nominators, former student Rebecca Crowley, "must have been watching and heard about it because I got an email within five to 10 minutes after they opened nominations" saying she nominated me, Ruggieri said.

Once a teacher is nominated, the Grammy Foundation sends him an email encouraging him to apply for the award. In addition to Crowley, Ruggieri was nominated by current band parent Lori Ann Filicky and former student Katie DiCola. That's high praise for a band director.

"Teachers don't do this for the rewards," Ruggieri said. "I feel like I've already won when people say, 'You were the first person I thought of when I heard about the award.' "

Explaining why Crowley, a 2001 BHS graduate, nominated Ruggieri, she said, "Music education is clearly his passion, and I think he does wonderful things for the music program at Boardman. He's a caring and genuine person, and he immediately came to mind when I heard about the Grammy's Music Educator award."

Crowley, whose mother, Edie Davidson, is an art teacher at Boardman, was a junior when Ruggieri took the band's leadership from longtime director Thomas Groth. In the years since graduating, she earned a doctoral degree in music performance (flute) and teaches flute and piano in northern Virginia.

"I have had a large number of fantastic teachers and professors in music over the years. But Mr. Ruggieri really stood out to me as an educator who cares so much about music and his students," she said.

When he's not in the classroom, Ruggieri continues to make music. He plays drums with Backbeat, a local band that plays parties and weddings, and has stepped into the recording studio and on stage to play percussion with local musicians like Bambo Kino and Joe Augustine, while also performing with national acts like The Letterman, The Marvelettes and The Drifters. The jazz lover still makes the rounds to local clubs with the John Reese Project. He said that being a professional musician helps make him a better teacher.

"I hope I never stop playing because it gives me credibility," Ruggieri said.

It also offers life lessons that he shares with his students. His job requires a lot of effort, energy and time, he said, "but I didn't get into this thinking it would be a 9-to-5 experience. Like I tell the kids, there are other rewards than just dollar signs."

With his own musical career, time spent teaching band and jazz classes at BHS, hours devoted to arranging music and band formations for marching season, and drafting emails and tweets to keep band families informed, it's a wonder Ruggieri has any down time.

"Fishing is my other passion," he said. "My wife even knows now when to pull me aside and say, 'Hey, when are you planning some time to go fishing?'"

Of course, family is a priority. He and his wife, Patty, have a daughter, Rachel, who just finished her freshman year at Kent State University, and a son, Nico, who just finished his first year at Boardman High.

Ruggieri lights up when he talks about his family.

Rachel just landed the role of Amber Von Tussel in "Hairspray" at Salem Community Theater this summer, he mentioned with pride.

Ruggieri's father also was a drummer and now his son is following in their footsteps.

"He's going to play drums way better than I am. He's amazing," he said in an Internet interview with Tommy Chris.

Born in Italy, Ruggieri came to Youngstown when he was six months old. He graduated from Boardman High School and Youngstown State University with a degree in music education. He also has a master's degree.

Just as he was finishing YSU, Groth called to say he was taking a sabbatical, and Ruggieri interviewed for the temporary position.

"I took a big chance taking a six-month job, but I thought it was worth it," Ruggieri said.

He finished in Boardman on Jan. 20, 1989, and began substitute teaching in the city schools, most of the time teaching vocal music at Hayes Elementary. He said around that time, Youngstown City Schools asked him to apply for the band director job at East High School, where he spent the next eight years.

"I absolutely loved it," he said.

After spending two years at Liberty High School, his alma mater called again as Groth announced he'd be retiring in 1999. Without hesitation, Ruggieri applied and got the job.

"I am lucky to get paid for doing what I adore," he said. And with three nominations, he's certainly adored by his students.

Across the nation, 30,000 teachers were nominated for the award, according to the Grammy Foundation, and 217 have been named quarterfinalists, including six other teachers from Ohio.

"I have fond memories of him saying 'What a band!' after many of our performances. I am thrilled that he is a quarterfinalist," said Crowley.

- See more at: <http://www.towncrieronline.com/page/content.detail/id/512165/BHS-band-director-goes-national.html?nav=5003#sthash.Ms6yOwSW.dpuf>