

JIM FERN: A TRIBUTE

He is no longer in our midst – that wonderfully positive, polite, courteous, courtly, and caring man we called Jim, but his memory lives on in our hearts and minds.

I first met Jim Fern the night he was chosen Executive Secretary of KMEA. It was a crucial time for KMEA. An accounting of KMEA's financial situation had not been provided for some time and a change in the executive secretary of the organization was needed. I remember the occasion very well, since it was the first KMEA board meeting at which I presided as president.

There were four candidates. The board interviewed each candidate asking questions related to the responsibilities of the position – the board was much smaller than today, but included four future presidents of KMEA. The interviews were quite thorough and took a considerable amount of time to conduct.

The board then debated the merits of each candidate for the position, and two candidates were removed from consideration. After several votes and considerable debate, Jim Fern received the majority of the votes and was chosen for the position. It was KMEA's good fortune that Jim Fern was the candidate chosen.

An analysis of KMEA's financial status at that time was difficult to assess and attempts in the days after the board meeting estimated the indebtedness to be between seven and fourteen thousand dollars, not a significant amount in relation to the association's current budget, but a matter of great concern at that time. Through careful management of the association's resources and emphasis on fiscal responsibility, the organization was able to take care of its debts and move forward. Jim Fern played a major role in this process.

Jim was unique. He told me on many occasions how he loved KMEA. Never before those instances nor after have I heard anyone say so fervently that they loved an organization.

I remember Jim in happy circumstances. I can still see him at district festivals managing the sight reading sessions at those events. In my mind's eye, I see him at KMEA conferences handing out badges, convention materials, and Smart Person cards with a smile on his face as he greeted conference goers. And I can see him at a KMEA banquet playing the bass fiddle with the Grumpy Old Men with such obvious joy on his face because he was making music.

Jim Fern contributed greatly to the development of KMEA into the organization that it is today. His major contributions were his stewardship of KMEA finances, the achievement of non-profit status for the organization, the organizational stability of his thirty-two years of service, his sound investment of KMEA money with Edward D. Jones, and the good will he engendered through positive personal relationships with others.

Yes, Jim is no longer in our midst, but we feel his presence and remember with gratitude the contributions he made to KMEA. The current efforts to fund the James L. "Jim" Fern Music Education Scholarship could serve as a capstone for Jim's efforts on behalf of music education.

Robert W. Surplus