

History that began with Music

The history of the Village Pops first appeared in the July 8, 2005 issue of the Farmingdale Observer. Written by Erica Conte, it is reproduced here with permission of the Observer.

Sounds of music were welcomed back to the Village of Farmingdale...when the Village Pops concert series kicked off its 23rd summer on the green. Also for the 23rd summer Brad DeMilo, former Farmingdale High School band director, can again be found conducting the show. The concert series was DeMilo's idea some 23 summers ago and has since grown into a Farmingdale tradition residents look forward to each summer.

DeMilo began the band after asking himself the question, "What happens to all the Farmingdale high school band students after they have graduated?"

He proposed his plan to have an adult community band that performed a concert series of four shows to the Farmingdale Mayor (John T. Hallahan). Once accepted, the location of the Village Green was decided on and the plan to find band members began. To find those former students and bring music back into their lives, he sent out invitations. The band borrowed music that belonged to the Farmingdale Public Schools and in the summer of 1983 began the Village Pops concerts.

With the help of the Mayor, the Village of Farmingdale, and the Board of Education, he was able to deliver these summers of music for over two decades. The concert series has grown to seven shows each summer, with the addition of special concerts such as the much anticipated children's concert. The Village Pops now has a 600-title library of songs that the band rotates each year. Some of the music is not used anymore to keep the music fresh and up to date. The band, that was once a nucleus of 25 people, has grown to as large as 65 volunteers each year. DeMilo continues to send out invitations and is still amazed at how many volunteer.

"The fact that they are all volunteers is a credit to what we're doing," said DeMilo.

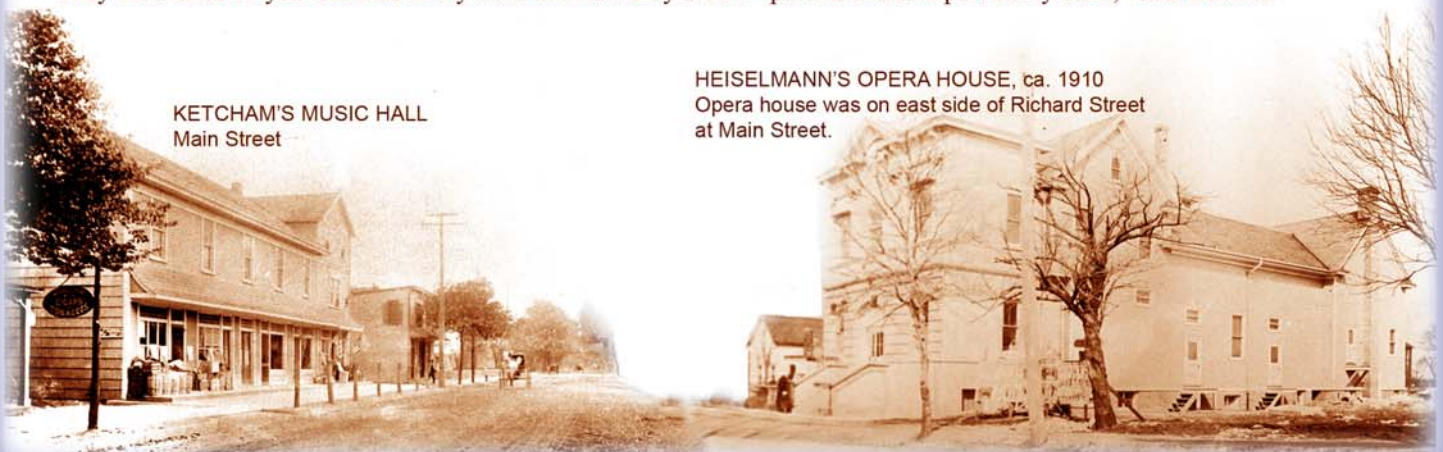
The community is a very important part of the Wednesday night Village Pops. Not only do they entertain with music, but for the past 17 years, during intermission, a minute of history is given to the crowd. Each year, Village Historian William Johnston organizes a group of town leaders and those active in the community to speak about certain phases of community associations.

There are also many other special parts to the show. Ice cream is donated each year to both the band and audience by Bollinger's Restaurant, The Board of Education, The Farmingdale-Bethpage Historical Society, VFW Post 516, McCourt and Trudden Funeral Home, former mayor Bill Carman, and others. Audience members are chosen each week to conduct some of the band's songs and therefore they all feel involved with the show. Johnston says the event is a "real Norman Rockwell experience" and looks forward to it, as do many Farmingdale residents.

"The Pops is a well established Farmingdale tradition that the people of the community look forward to," said Johnston. "Brad is a charismatic leader who keeps the people coming back week after week."

DeMilo says his roots are in Farmingdale and this role he commands with the Pops gives him "that warm fuzzy feeling." He has always enjoyed doing it and loves to see his former students and second generations in the band together.

"They were once 15 year old kids in my band and now they are 50 - parents and still part of my band," said DeMilo.



KETCHAM'S MUSIC HALL
Main Street

HEISELMANN'S OPERA HOUSE, ca. 1910
Opera house was on east side of Richard Street
at Main Street.