

A One-Woman Show

			
Lucille Halfvarson, musician, teacher and dedicated community leader for the arts in Aurora, died on Monday at age 91.	Lucille Halfvarson conducts the 'Do-It-Yourself Messiah' at the Paramount Arts Center in December 1989.	Lucille Halfvarson conducts the 'Do-It-Yourself Messiah' at First United Methodist Church in Aurora in 1986.	Sten and Lucille Halfvarson supported the arts in the Aurora community.

AURORA — Lucille Halfvarson is remembered by all who knew her as a woman who spent her life serving the Aurora arts community.

Halfvarson, 91, died Monday in Hayward, Wis.

She perhaps is most well known for organizing and directing 25 years of the Waubensee District Chorus "Do-It-Yourself Messiah" performances, where the chorus led the crowd in singing Handel's "Messiah." These concerts were an Aurora community tradition from 1968 to 1992.

"She was just one of those major personalities," said the Rev. Gary McCann of New England Congregational Church. "She was involved in everything — starting groups, supporting groups, she was involved in the arts hall of fame."

Along with her late husband, Sten, who spent many years as West Aurora choir director, "she was an icon of the music world in town," McCann said.

Waubensee Community College music professor Gibby Monokoski, who worked alongside Halfvarson for decades, said when it came to a performance, she would do it all, from directing the musicians to managing tickets.

"She was a one-woman show," Monokoski said.

Halfvarson was past co-chairman of the Citizens Advisory Committee for the Paramount Arts Center, founder of the United Arts Board Fox Valley, founder of the Fox Valley Arts Hall of Fame and served on the board of directors at the YWCA. Halfvarson, along with her husband, commuted to Chicago on Saturdays to volunteer at the Merit Music Program, a program aimed at providing music opportunities for disadvantaged kids. She served as vocal instructor there from 1982 to 1993.

At the beginning of her career, Halfvarson taught music and speech at Freeman Elementary School in Aurora from 1941-1944.

After raising four children and years of teaching private lessons, she became an instructor of music and director of choral groups at Waubensee Community College when the college opened in 1967.

Halfvarson spent many years directing church choirs, too, first at her home in Galesburg, then at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Aurora from 1950 to 1963 and Westminster Presbyterian Church in Aurora from 1963 to 1984.

Her legacy continues through those she instructed, said Meg Papadolias, director of choirs at West Aurora High School for 32 years. Papadolias was a student of Halfvarson's at Waubensee.

"When I was a young mom I decided to return to college to study music. Lucille was one of my first teachers at Waubensee," she said. "She taught me skills that I have been able to pass on to thousands of kids.

"I have always been grateful for the opportunities Lucille provided for me. She was a great lady."

Halfvarson received a bachelor of arts degree from Knox College in Galesburg in 1941. In 1969, she received her master of music degree from the American Conservatory in Chicago. In 2000, Sten and Lucille Halfvarson were awarded honorary doctoral degrees from Aurora University.

Halfvarson was named Woman of the Year by the Aurora YWCA in 1976.

"She never did anything in a small way," McCann said. "She was grand."

Visitation will be at the New England Congregational Church, 406 W. Galena Blvd., Aurora, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Friday. Interment will be private. A memorial service will be held at New England Congregational Church at 2 p.m. Saturday.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests contributions be made to the Lucille R. Halfvarson Scholarship Fund through the Community Foundation of Fox River Valley, or to Northwoods Strings, a non-profit organization dedicated to teaching children to play stringed instruments. Checks can be sent to Northwoods Strings, 14979 W. Chippewa Trail, Hayward, Wis. 54843.

For more information, call Healy Chapel in Aurora at 630-897-9291.