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‘A JOYFUL HUMAN SPIRIT:’
EILEEN SEARS DIES AT 103, LEAVES UD WITH THE GIFT OF SONG

DAYTON, Ohio — University of Dayton music professor Linda Snyder sang “I Could Have Danced All Night” to Eileen Sears when she turned 103 on Aug. 27. It was the consummate tribute to a woman who, even in her 90s, could dance the night away.

Mrs. Sears quietly died in her sleep on Sept. 12 at a Kettering retirement home. A memorial service at the University of Dayton is pending.

“She was one remarkable lady,” said Snyder, who also serves as associate dean for humanities and fine arts at UD. “She was just a ball of energy and an inspiration to our students and faculty.”

Mrs. Sears and her late husband, Troy, ensured that her love of music will continue to inspire generations of University of Dayton students. In 1992, they gave UD $1.3 million to construct the 183-seat H. Troy and Eileen Sears Recital Hall in the Jesse Philips Humanities Center on campus. In all, the couple donated more than $2.2 million to UD during their lives, with a significant portion funding scholarships.

“The University of Dayton is blessed to have been a part of Eileen and Troy Sears’ lives. We’re deeply grateful for the generosity of this couple, who believed passionately in the power of the arts to uplift the soul,” said Daniel J. Curran, president. “They were truly part of the UD family and helped countless students by providing scholarships and a superb place to perform on campus.”

Mrs. Sears served as director of the student union in the 1950s and taught music and education for 40 years in the Dayton Public Schools as well as at UD. Mr. Sears, a 1940 UD graduate, taught business management at his alma mater before devoting his working life to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, where he retired as chief of contract terminations. Both received
their master's degrees from The Ohio State University — she in music and he in education. Mr. Sears died in 1999 at the age of 91.

"I have lots of wonderful memories of Eileen Sears," said Brother Raymond L. Fitz, S.M., past president of UD. "She was a wonderful person with a joyful human spirit. They were a very loving couple, and she had a genuine appreciation of how music and singing give us energy and bring out the best in us."

During their tenure at UD, the couple chaperoned student dances, including the time Lawrence Welk performed. As a physical education instructor, Mrs. Sears taught football players how to folk dance. Every December she would stage a Christmas pageant on campus with the help of Maurice Reichard, then chair of the music department.

Later in life, in her 90s, Mrs. Sears accompanied Friday night sing-alongs at the Dayton Country Club. She attended faculty and student recitals in the Sears Recital Hall on campus.

"I, for one, appreciate this beautiful space every time I enter this hall. Its acoustical and aesthetic design cannot be matched anywhere in the Dayton area," Linda Hartley, coordinator of music education at UD, wrote to Sears in May. "The future teachers I train are required to perform on their instruments every semester at UD, in preparation to become excellent musicians, as well as getting accustomed to being on stage. The Sears Recital Hall permits these students to give their best performances."

A group of music faculty members brought the gift of song to Mrs. Sears during a birthday celebration when she turned 100. Another group returned a few weeks ago to help her usher in birthday 103.

"We enjoyed a sing-along of some vintage popular tunes," Snyder said. "She was dressed up, looking lovely, and even joined us in song at one point. She had such a wonderful, long, active life."

What inspired this couple, who had no children, to "adopt" the University of Dayton? "We love being around young people, and we are so pleased we have been able to bring music and joy and hopefully some love into young lives," Mrs. Sears told a Dayton Daily News reporter in 1995.

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For interviews, call Linda Snyder at (937) 229-2602; Brother Raymond L. Fitz, S.M., at (937) 229-5409 and Linda Hartley at (937) 229-3232.