



Arnold and Dorothy Oehlsen Memorial Endowment

Arnold L. Oehlsen was born in 1910 on a farm near Marshalltown, Iowa, to Louis and Louise Oehlsen. After finishing high school, Arnold felt himself ill-equipped to proceed directly to a large university, and he enrolled at the junior college in Marshalltown and developed an appreciation for junior and community college education. He then moved on to Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, where he was awarded the degrees of bachelor of music education and master of music. During his student days at Northwestern, Arnold was given the assistant directorship of the university band, a position he retained for six years. It was also during this time that he met Dorothy Rice.

Dorothy, daughter of Dr. O. R. and Mary Rice, was born in Delavan, Wisconsin, and received her primary and secondary education in the Delavan public school system. She earned a bachelor of arts degree from Beloit College in Beloit, Wisconsin, and then taught high school history for four years in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin. Recognizing the benefits to be gained from further education, Dorothy enrolled in graduate work at Northwestern University and earned a masters degree in counseling and guidance. During her time in graduate school, Dorothy worked as a dormitory counselor. While at Northwestern, she met Arnold Oehlsen at a Sunday night supper. He escorted her home, and six months later, in 1937, they were married.

Arnold and Dorothy settled in Springfield, Ohio, where Arnold started the college band program at Wittenberg College. In 1941, the Oehlsens moved to Iowa City, Iowa, where Arnold became associate director of

the State University of Iowa band and where the same year Dorothy gave birth to their son Robert. For the next ten years, Arnold was kept busy making marching charts for each member of the band in preparation for the band's Saturday half-time performances at Big Ten college football games. He then took a position with the audio/visual department at the university, making films and filmstrips for classroom use.

However, Arnold's heart was in directing, and in 1956, Devils Lake had the great good fortune of obtaining Arnold's services as director of the Devils Lake Concert Band. The city also benefitted greatly when Dorothy Oehlsen returned to public school teaching, first as a substitute teacher, then full-time as a seventh-grade English teacher and counselor.

During this time, their son Bob was educated in local schools and attended Lake Region State College from 1959 to 1961 before matriculating at a state university. He now resides in LaSueur, Minnesota, with wife Barbara.

Arnold served as band director until his retirement in 1969. Dorothy remained with the Devils Lake school system until her retirement in 1972. Now, free to fulfill their life-long dream the Oehlsens traveled extensively, visiting more than forty-three countries. Still, they were always happy to return to the Lake Region and called Devils Lake home.

Sadly, Dorothy died in December of 1997. Upon her death, Arnold moved to LaSueur where Bob cared for him until his death in October of 2001. Lake Region State College is proud to count the Oehlsens among its generous benefactors. ♦

Arnold and Dorothy Oehlsen and the Devils Lake Concert Band

The Devils Lake Concert Band, although composed of children of school age, had never been part of the public school system; therefore, it had to provide its own means of support and operation. The band was controlled by an elected band board composed of five parents of band members. To take on this more-or-less thankless job, these parents had to be vitally interested in their children's general education.

Darrell Maxson, a strong advocate for the privately incorporated band, met with Arnold and Dorothy Oehlsen in Chicago in 1956, and soon the Oehlsens were on their way to Devils Lake. That year, Arnold became the third director of the band, building the strength and reputation of the corporation.

The year 1963 proved to be one of crisis and triumph for the band and the Oehlsens. The band had lost its rehearsal room in the Pershing Building, then in the Armory; no adequate rehearsal space could be found. The Oehlsens sold their house, planning to leave Devils Lake.

At this point the Norm Leevers family became involved, with Norm serving as president of the band board. The Salvation Army Building had come up for sale, and Norm and Arnold investigated and discovered it would be an ideal solution to the problem, providing sufficient room for rehearsal space, storage, and living quarters for the director. With application of much elbow grease, Arnold and Dorothy refurbished the first and second floors, creating a spacious rehearsal room, an office for Arnold, and comfortable living quarters. Two weeks before school started, the Oehlsens were ready to fit uniforms. Arnold was always extremely grateful to Norm Leevers for his assistance in acquiring the building.

Arnold retired in 1969, but in the six years between 1963 and 1969, the mortgage of \$16,000 was paid off, a new heating system was installed, and new uniforms were purchased. This was all made possible by the wonderful support of the citizens and merchants of Devils Lake and the untiring efforts of Arnold and Dorothy Oehlsen. ♦