

# WHO'S WHO **Ethelyn Sparfeld** in Chesterfield

by Jean Wessel

Shakespeare said that a man who has no music in him has a spirit that is as "dull as night." If one agrees with him, then the opposite must be true. If so, then Ethelyn Sparfeld's spirit is as bright as the noonday sun.

Music has always been a vital part of her life. Currently a music teacher at The Principia on Clayton Road, her love affair with it began when she was growing up in Chandler, Oklahoma. Born and raised on a farm, it was a 50 mile trip to her lessons in Oklahoma City. She graduated from the University of Oklahoma where she majored in music, with an emphasis on the organ. Her ability was evident when she won the talent competition in the "Miss Oklahoma" pageant.

Ethelyn, who says that "teaching is her calling," took her graduate studies at Union Theological Seminary in New York City and pursued a two-year program in voice, organ, and conducting. While in graduate school, she conducted under Abraham Kaplan. She laid a solid foundation for her future career.

Following graduation, marriage took her to North Hollywood, California. She gave private music lessons and sang with the Robert Wagner Chorale. Her daughter, Tisha, 16, a student at Parkway West, was born in California. After her divorce, she and Tisha returned to the Midwest and

she began her teaching career in earnest.

The most important thing in Ethelyn's life is her church. She joined the Christian Science Church when she was in graduate school and today is the organist at the First Church of Christ Scientist in Clarkson Valley. When she began teaching, it was at Principia, the Christian Science college in Elmhurst, Illinois. She also met Paul Sparfeld who was, at the time, employed by the college. They've been married for 12 years and have a six-year-old son, Tobin. Paul is a stockbroker with offices in Chesterfield.

Ethelyn, whose name is a combination of her grandmother's names, has been a Chesterfield resident for five years. A music teacher at Principia, she shares her love and knowledge of it with preschoolers and first and second grade students. She formed the school's Youth Chorale for grades seven through twelve. She still gives lessons privately. These private lessons have taught her patience, although she says that working with groups has done the most for her in that area: "You learn it when you're working with 40 people who are talking at the same time." When her son was young, she worked with the Parkway Schools and conducted in-service training for music specialists.

In 1975, she spent a year in intensive training at the Kodaly Musical Training Institute in Boston.



**Ethelyn Sparfeld: Music is her way of life.**

Photo by Debbie Franke

The Kodaly method believes that music is for everyone — Ethelyn sees a power for good in music — and uses folk songs as the core of its program. Unlike the traditional method of music teaching which has presentation at its core, the Kodaly method emphasizes a long time of preparation (discovery) before presentation and practice. She is the regional representative for the national Organization of American Kodaly Educators and is the co-chairperson for its national convention in 1986 in St. Louis. Using the method, she has

recorded and published a book of 139 folk songs which is available in the bookstore at Principia.

The St. Louis Children's Choir is one of the benefactors of Ethelyn's talents. She is its director and works with its three choirs. Each group, comprised of children from the entire St. Louis Metropolitan area, meets once a week. The Concert Choir has additional rehearsals on alternate Saturdays. Her days are filled with music. Her favorite composer is Mozart.

The Concert Choir currently occupies much of her time; it will

tour Japan for two weeks this summer. The group will perform in Tokyo, Kyoto and Suwa. In Suwa they will stay in Japanese homes. Members of the group are raising funds for the trip. Ethelyn anticipates that the trip will result in the international reputation she believes the St. Louis Children's Choir deserves. Their message of harmony is a way for people to come together, she says.

Her spirit and zest for life does not extend to the time she spends in the kitchen. It is definitely not one of her favorite places although it is tolerable in the summer when she has more time. The Sparfeld's freezer is stocked with the whole beef they bring from her parent's farm each Christmas; Paul is the "good cook in the family." He's also a treasure in another area: He does the laundry.

Asked to describe herself, Ethelyn says that patience and a sense of humor are her best qualities. She knows she has a gift for inspiring children and "pulling out the best in them. I love them because they teach me so much."

On the debit side of the ledger she states: "I can't cook." One has to think that she can, but enjoys using her time in other ways. She'd like to become more consistent in the use of her good qualities: "I think I could avoid the peaks and valleys if I could do this."

"Musick is the thing of the world that I love most," Samuel Pepys wrote in 1666. More than three hundred years later, Ethelyn Sparfeld would probably echo the sentiment. Her students, and those who hear them, benefit from her spirit that is filled with music.