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Posted on Sun, Jan. 24, 2010

**Sang out for diversity, then led Montco district**

By Walter F. Naedele  
Inquirer Staff Writer

John E. Rice's baritone won him first a college education and then a fair lady.

"He was paying a good portion of his college education as a singer at churches, weddings," his son John F. Rice said.

"When he and my mother met, they were both working at Temple, he as a graduate assistant and my mother with the dean of women's office.

"She has said she fell in love with the voice and then fell in love with the man."

On Jan. 1, Mr. Rice, 87, superintendent of the Jenkintown School District from 1958 to 1982 and a founding member in 1948 of the integrated Singing City Choir, died of sepsis in the medical center of Rydal Park, the retirement community where he and his wife, Elvira, had lived since 2005.

Born in Philadelphia, Mr. Rice graduated in 1940 from Overbrook High School, was a Navy supply clerk from 1943 to 1947, and earned a bachelor's degree in education in 1950 from Temple University and a master's in education there in 1952.

In Jenkintown, which had one elementary school and one high school, it took him only six years to go from sixth-grade teacher to high school counselor to high school principal to superintendent.

But he had wanted just to teach music.

After school officials interviewed him, his son said, "he realized that Jenkintown had only one music teacher. He felt that he wasn't qualified to teach music. He didn't have a mastery of the piano."

So, his son said, "he recommended his best friend . . . J. Frank Kuykendall. Frank was given the job. Shortly afterward, my father was called back and offered a sixth-grade teaching position.

"And so he and his best friend - best man - spent their careers working together until my dad retired in '82 and Frank retired in '89."

In the 1950s, Kuykendall formed the Jenkintown Music Theatre, and Mr. Rice was the leading man for the first couple of years, his son said.

When Elaine Brown founded what would become Singing City, it was not the music alone that attracted Mr. Rice to be a singer and its first business manager.

"While it was a performance group, it was also very much a socially aware group," his son said. "Elaine Brown wanted it to be an all-inclusive organization regardless of race, social standing."

"My dad was proud to be involved in something that meant something more than just performance."

The group's Web site states that it "was born out of the Fellowship House movement, which believed that differences between races, religions and cultures could be bridged, by ordinary people coming together in shared activities."



John E. Rice was Jenkintown superintendent for 24 years.

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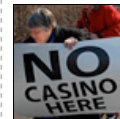
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**How Foxwoods got a leg up**

Autumn was make-or-break time for the Foxwoods Casino in Philly. Opposition had stalled the project. Lenders had grown wary. State regulators set a final deadline to open or lose the license. That's when Foxwoods' lawyer and lobbyist, Stephen A. Cozen, turned to an old friend whose campaigns he had generously supported: Gov. Rendell.

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Sonya Garfinkle, who retired in 1991 after 20 years as executive director of Singing City, recalled that Mr. Rice was among the 60 to 65 people who formed what first was called the Fellowship House Choir.

One of several projects of the Fellowship organization, which was housed in a converted firehouse at 1431 Brown St., the choir became independent and named itself Singing City in 1956.

Mr. Rice, Garfinkle said, "was the one who started a choral office at Temple University, too, in 1950 - the first manager of the Temple University Choir."

Later, Temple gave him its alumni award for distinguished service.

In 1974-75, Mr. Rice was president of the Rotary Club of Jenkintown.

A board member of Old York Road Savings & Loan from his retirement in 1982, Mr. Rice kept that job after First American Savings & Loan acquired the firm.

In retirement, Mr. Rice was the volunteer coordinator for the Arcadia University Community Scholars program.

Mr. Rice also worked with an American Red Cross rent rebate program and, at his death, was president of the Rydal Park Residents' Association.

Besides his wife of 55 years and his son, Mr. Rice is survived by two grandsons.

A memorial is set for 2 p.m. Saturday at Grace Presbyterian Church, 444 Old York Rd., Jenkintown.

Contact staff writer Walter F. Naedele at 215-854-5607 or [wnaedele@phillynews.com](mailto:wnaedele@phillynews.com).

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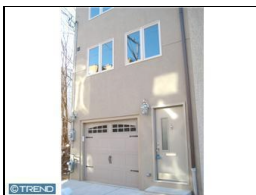
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