

Introducing Dr. Lynn Sargeant

A physician and musician who has been enriching Huntsville for 50 years

By Paula Boon



INNOVATOR: Retired doctor Lynn Sargeant created Huntsville's first intensive care unit and also brought echocardiograms (ultrasound of the heart) to town. However, he is best known in the community for his many contributions as a conductor of singing groups and bands of all kinds.

Dr. Lynn Sargeant thinks it's strange that he is best known around town for his musical accomplishments. "I was a much better physician than I was a musician," says the 81-year-old Huntsville resident. "I was just lucky to be in the right place at the right time with my music." Sargeant has made many contributions, both medical and cultural, since he brought his family to this community 50 years ago. "I truly like to innovate things," he says.

When he arrived in Huntsville on July 1, 1959, Sargeant expected to stay only six months. He planned to practise internal medicine in the United States, where he had completed his internship and residency after graduating from Queen's University's medical program in 1954. He only applied for the Huntsville locum in general practice while he waited for some red tape to be cleared for his American job.

In September, a delegation of musicians who were starting to organize a district band invited Sargeant to audition to be their director. "They had heard I had directed the Queen's band," he says.

Sargeant was the university band's director for five of his eight years in Kingston, and he also had experience playing the trumpet professionally on a Canadian Pacific boat to Thunder Bay and directed both a quartet and the school orchestra as a high school student in Sault Ste. Marie.

Sargeant agreed to audition but cautioned the Muskoka musicians that he would be leaving in a few months. However, when the call from the States finally came, he decided not to go. "I loved living on the water and being able to come home at lunch and take my kids waterskiing," he says. Instead, Sargeant worked in general practice for a few years, then at age 40 completed his final year of training to become a specialist in internal medicine. He spent 1968-1969 as a senior resident at Toronto General Hospital. "That was hell on wheels," he says. "I loved it, but the work was unbelievable. I'd been out of it fixing wrists and so on, and so much had changed academically."

The 1970s and 1980s were a busy time musically for Sargeant. As well as directing the district concert band, he began a dance band and was the founding director of the Muskoka Music Men barbershop singers. "Also the Rotary Club, of which I was a member, asked if I'd be interested in doing musicals. I said, 'On one condition: if you will allow me to have a string section in the pit.' I really enjoyed those shows. Jane (Hutcheson) and I did 17 of them."

Sargeant says 1974 was a difficult year. The eldest of his five children was killed in a car accident, and Sargeant and his wife divorced. "It was an awful strain on everyone in the family," he says.

But Sargeant carried on, redoubling his efforts to make his mark on the area's health-care system. He convinced the Ministry of Health to fund him to do critical care medicine in Huntsville. "It was the first intensive care unit in a hospital with under 100 beds in Ontario," he says.

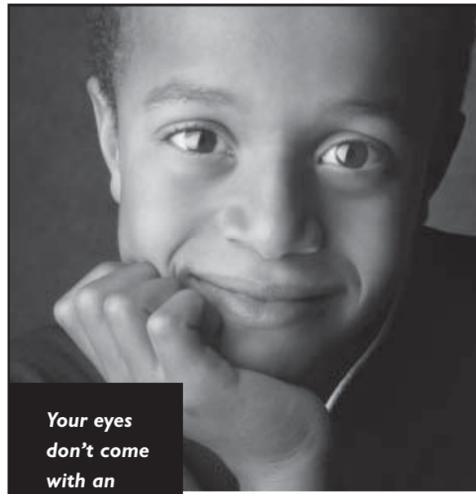
The only internist in Muskoka at the time, Sargeant was on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week and also had to train nurses to do IVs, use respirators and a whole host of other duties. "They became extremely efficient," he says.

The program, which he also expanded to include the Bracebridge hospital, was a success.

Sargeant also brought echocardiograms (ultrasound of the heart) to Huntsville. After giving up clinical medicine around 1990, he did echocardiograms almost full time for various community hospitals in Ontario. "The absence of night work was easier on the old bod than clinical medicine," he says with a laugh.

Since retiring in 1999, Sargeant has been doing a lot of gardening, golfing, cooking and playing bridge. "With 11 grandchildren, visiting is important, too," he says. "My days are full. I've had a wonderful life, and I've got a lot of good memories, good friends and good fun."

Thanks to Ray Ward and Ken Raven for suggesting that Dr. Lynn Sargeant be profiled.



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