

Tony and Michelle Strauss have been involved with the Ventura Music Festival since 1999. Tony, a board member since 1999, also is a past board president, while Michelle is a member of C-Notes Productions, the fundraising arm of the festival.



Photo courtesy Linda F. Petersen



Following the letter of the gift giving law

The race is on. It's less than a month until Christmas and Christmas shopping is in full swing in the stores and on the Internet. Assuming, of course, you know what you want to buy.

This biggest problem with Christmas shopping, aside from paying for it, is deciding what to buy for whom. And some people, my dad for instance, are notoriously difficult to shop for. Fortunately, science is, once again, coming to our collective rescue.



Bill Nash

It seems that as early as about 1985, scientists have both studied and documented a phenomenon called "name-letter preference." Simply put, name-letter preference means that people gravitate toward things that begin with one of their initials.

When shopping, Frank is more likely to buy a Ford, John will opt for a Jaguar. Over the years, scientists have found the same correlations in other areas. A baseball player whose name begins with a K is more likely to strike out (K is score-keeping shorthand for striking out). And student grades are affected when students whose names begin with A or B are compared with student names beginning with C or D.

In many cases, the differences are very slight, but they are there and, despite repeated studies, the results can't be refuted. For all of you frustrated shoppers, this should be good news.

Take out your shopping list, check out the names, and the ideas should start flowing. For example, my name is Bill. So my gift list could include books, Beethoven, baseball, bourbon or Baywatch (parts of it, anyway).

I'm thinking this is going to work out fine for me. All of those B-things are welcome under the tree as far as I'm concerned, and for the rest of the family, I've now got some great ideas.

My wife's name begins with an H, so diamonds are out, but hardware is in. My daughter is an S-girl, so a sweater might be appropriate. And my son, he's a J, so how about a Jacuzzi? No, wait, a gym membership, oops, no, a jacket.

Think about how much easier this would make things for the retailers; they could simply arrange their stores alphabetically. Employees wouldn't have to remember where items are shelved, they could just say, "Shirts? They're over there on the S aisle."

The downside to all of this is, how long can you sustain alphabetical gift giving? I mean, what if your wife's name is Xena? Once you buy her the xylophone you're pretty much done. And, even though my list as a B is longer, I still don't want to get the same things for Christmas and my birthday year after year.

I also know my wife would only accept so many harmonicas, hair dryers and hammers before she'd change her name to Jill or Jennifer and point me toward the jewelry department.

Well fine, maybe alphabetical shopping isn't such a great idea, despite its scientific validation. I suppose I can just go back to my old methods; thumbing through dozens of catalogs in hopes of inspiration or, wandering aimlessly through the mall until either desperation or hunger forces me to buy something — anything — and move on.

The truth is, I'll probably resort to the common cure for the Christmas conundrum, the gift card. Gift card starts with a G, and that means Good for Everyone, no matter what your initials are.

— Contact Star columnist Bill Nash at bnash805@aol.com.

Champions of music



Two Ventura couples to be honored for devotion to city's annual festival

By Alicia Doyle
 Correspondent

Two Ventura couples will be honored by the Ventura Music Festival Association for their passionate commitment of time, energy and resources that has helped make the festival a signature event in the city of Ventura.

"We are fortunate to have the support of many wonderful people," said Cheryl Heitmann, executive director of the Ventura Music Festival. "This year, we are pleased to recognize Tony and Michelle Strauss and Stephen and Lynn Kipp, who have gone beyond to ensure the success of the festival through their generous contributions of time and resources."

Each couple will receive a Champions of Music Award during a gala event and fundraiser Friday evening at the Pierpont Inn in Ventura.

This is the second year the festival association has honored supporters who also are true champions of music, Heitmann said.

"These two couples are important because they have made such major contributions of their time and financial resources," Heitmann said. "We are a small nonprofit, so we really depend on community members such as the Kipps and Strausses who enable us to be successful in bringing musical talent from all over the world here to Ventura. It's only possible with the support from people in the community."

The Kipps

Stephen Kipp is president and chief executive officer of Kipp Brant Drummond & Associates in Ventura.

"Both Stephen and Lynn are deeply involved in the community and are dedicated to supporting and sponsoring many local nonprofit organizations, including the Ventura Music Festival," said Heitmann, adding that the couple also are involved with, among others, Ventura Rotary, San Buenaventura Foundation for the Arts, Bell Arts Factory, Rubicon Theater Company, Boys & Girls Club, Focus on the Masters and

If you go

Awards banquet: The awards banquet begins at 5:30 p.m. Friday at the Pierpont Inn, 550 San Jon Road, Ventura. Cost of \$125 per person includes dinner, dancing and entertainment. For more information, call the Ventura Music Festival offices at 648-3146.

Ventura Music Festival: For more information about the 14th season of the Ventura Music Festival, "Appassionata," which runs May 1-10, 2008, visit the official Web site at <http://www.venturamusicfestival.org>.



Jason Redmond / Star staff

Violinist and conductor Nuvi Mehta takes his Education Outreach program to elementary schools throughout the city of Ventura, teaching music to third-, fourth- and fifth-grade students for the Ventura Music Festival Association.

Canine Adoption Rescue League.

For the past several years, the Kipps' firm has been the exclusive sponsor to Nuvi Mehta, artistic director for the Ventura Music Festival.

"Through this partnership, Nuvi takes his Education Outreach program to elementary schools throughout the city of Ventura, teaching music to third-, fourth- and fifth-grade students," Heitmann said.

Stephen, a third-generation resident of Ventura County, said he and his wife are humbled as this year's award recipients.

"It's not about us," he added. "It's about people in the community ... who have spent the last 15 years really making Ventura the community art city of California. We're excited about the changes we've seen, and we're blessed to be in this community. We believe in giving back. ... It's pretty much that simple."

The Strausses

Tony and Michelle Strauss have been involved with the Ventura Music Festival since 1999. Tony, a board member since 1999, also is a past board president, while Michelle is a member of C-Notes Productions, the fundraising arm of the festival.

Both have been active in the Ventura community in various capacities since moving to the county in 1977. Tony began his legal career with the County Counsel's Office, has been in private practice since 1987 and is currently the principal of the law firm Strauss Law Group, specializing in employment, business and real estate law. Michelle works as the office manager of the firm.

"Music is an essential part of life, and this is one way to help bring it to the community; that's the bottom line," said Tony, a member of the Cultural Arts Commission, the Ventura County Rent Review Board, San Buenaventura Foundation for the Arts, Ventura Rotary Club, Ventura Medical Resource Foundation, Bell Arts Factory and the Ventura County Bar Association.

"Having some input into what we get to hear and be a part of the presentation of it is very rewarding."

»HELPING HANDS

EAST COUNTY

J.C. Penney gives grant to aid area's YMCA

The J.C. Penney Afterschool Fund is providing the Southeast Ventura County YMCA with a \$32,812 grant to help support the YMCA's child care programs in Simi Valley, Conejo Valley, Santa Rosa Valley and Moorpark.

Nationwide, the J.C. Penney Afterschool Fund is expected to help more than 20,000 children participate in safe, life-enriching child care programs this year by contributing more than \$9.25 million in grants to organizations that provide care.

"With grants from the J.C. Penney

Afterschool Fund, at-risk children now have access to after-school programs that will keep them safe and foster their academic, physical and social development," said Mike Theilmann, chairman of the fund.

The fund assists children who were currently not in after-school programs or who were on the verge of leaving after-school programs because of a lack of funds.

"We are grateful for J.C. Penney's commitment to our youth," said Rick Politte, president and CEO of the Southeast Ventura County YMCA.

"The YMCA never turns away a child from any of our programs because of an inability to pay. The

J.C. Penney contribution helps offset our costs."

The Southeast Ventura County YMCA offers after-school programs on elementary and middle school campuses through three of its branches: Simi Valley Family YMCA, Conejo Valley YMCA and the Triunfo YMCA. For more information about after-school care, call the Southeast Ventura County YMCA at 497-3081.

NATION

Safeway to help fund S.T.A.R. Program

Safeway Inc. and the Prostate Cancer Foundation announced they

will collectively donate \$6 million to fund the Special Team Amplification of Research Program, a research initiative focused on exploring the role of targeted heat in cancer therapy to treat prostate cancer, as well as other research strategies.

The S.T.A.R. Program is being launched for the first phase of research and development with a \$3 million grant from the Safeway Foundation, which raised the funds from its customers with donations made at checkout.

The Prostate Cancer Foundation developed the collaborative research partnership and matched the initial funds dollar for dollar.

— From staff reports