

# Reconnecting through music

## CSIU restarts choir as a celebration of staff, love of music

BY JIM DIEHL

THE WEEKENDER

MILTON — “Do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do” rings out from the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit (CSIU) headquarters in Milton.

CSIU is a regional education service agency that prides itself on serving the needs of schools, students, families and communities.

In addition, a choir comprised of CSIU employees has also recently formed.

Under the direction of Chief Outreach Officer Dr. Bernadette Boerckel and Chief Academic Officer Dr. Alan Hack, the choir has had several performances.

Hack said the choir had sung the National Anthem on numerous occasions, including the CSIU Professional Leadership Day, a Central PA Chamber of Commerce event in October; The CSIU’s Winter Extravaganza and at a recent CSIU board meeting.

The choir was reborn from one the CSIU had years ago.

“The idea of the restarting the CSIU choir was a joint venture with Dr. Boerckel to prepare the National Anthem for our annual Professional Learning Day (PLD) and subsequently for our Winter Extravaganza,” said Hack.

“It was an opportunity coming out of the pandemic to reconnect with one another through music,” Boerckel said. “The initial idea was to perform the national anthem at our annual professional development day, which brings together more than 600 CSIU employees for a day of learning, inspiration, and celebration of staff.

“Since it was a virtual event this year, we pre-recorded our songs at the First Baptist Church in Lewisburg because it was nearby, and Brett Hosterman is the music director and a mutual colleague and friend,” she continued. “He generously offered the



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**Dr. Alan Hack directs the CSIU Choir at the First Baptist Church of Lewisburg.**

space and piano for our recording and accompanied the choir for our PLD video.”

In addition to the National Anthem, Boerckel said the choir has performed “I Believe,” composed by Mark Miller with anonymous text found etched into the wall of a cellar during World War II.

“It resonated with the post-pandemic themes of our PLD day and the perseverance that so many of our employees demonstrated throughout COVID,” Boerckel said.

The choir’s first outside performance was at the chamber event, following an invite from President and CEO Tea Jay Aikey, who saw a social media post featuring the choir.

“It was an honor to (sing at the chamber event) and very much in line with our partnership, mission and values,” Boerckel said. “We have not sought opportunities to perform, but enjoy singing.”

Hack said rehearsals had been held for about 45 minutes after work at the CSIU headquarters.

“We are very flexible and provide rehearsal recordings and YouTube videos so people who are busy or travel can rehearse on their own,” Hack said. “The idea

is to have fun and be as inclusive as possible.”

Starting as just a way for the educators to get together and sing, the choir could possibly continue to offer outside performances.

“Truly, this is meant to be informal and fun, a form of fellowship and a different way to connect and belong in a workplace setting,” Boerckel said. “We see regularly the power of music in our CSIU programs. Each year Work Foundations collaborates with Geoff Craven and KJ Reimensnyder-Wagner to write songs with our students about gratitude. The experience is transformative for our students, teachers, and parents every year.”

CSIU has also hosted PME’s regional professional development day for district music educators for the past two years.

“We also recently purchased a used piano to have rehearsals and performances in our building and to find new ways to bring concerts and local student talent to the CSIU,” said Boerckel.

The choir would like to expand in members and opportunities.

“Music appreciation, advocacy, and education is a part of who we are,” Boerckel said. “The choir

is another way to have music in our lives and in our buildings. Our only goal is to keep growing. We know there are many more people who sing in our organization. We want them to feel comfortable and raise their voices.

Choir member Brian Paulhamus, information security officer for CSIU, enjoys being involved with the choir.

“I’ve sung in several choirs throughout my life,” he said. “I’ve not been able to afford the time recently, but this choir fits well with my schedule. It’s always fun to sing with people of all musical skill sets and see the music come together off the page.”

“Music has a unique way of bringing all walks of life together,” Hack said. “As a diverse organization with employees engaged in a variety of different tasks, the choir brings those who have a passion for music together in a way that promotes unity, connectedness, and purpose.

“The creative element of our music is a wonderful way to bring together employees who may otherwise not cross paths due to the unique nature of their work.”

Jim Diehl can be reached at 570-742-9671 ext. 114 or [jimd@standard-journal.com](mailto:jimd@standard-journal.com).