

Musical passion leads lawyer to follow family tradition

By Kathleen Shipman

Area resident, Ryan Opel has a fond memory of being four years old, when his mother first asked if he wanted to play the violin. His response was, "Like grandma?"

It was only destiny that Opel would develop the same passion for music for which his grandmother had. Now a lawyer, Opel dedicates his legal talents to the Phoenix Symphony, where his grandmother played as a violinist many years before. Recently elected as the Vice Chair of Nominating and Governance, Opel's hope is to spread his love of the musical arts to future generations.

He may not have chosen a career path of playing the violin professionally, but for Opel music has been the guiding force in his life. It was while playing the violin at Wake Forest University in North Carolina that Opel met his future wife Dawn. She too was a musician and also his standing partner in the symphony.

"Music is not just something that is personally important to me," said Opel. "It has created this incredible relationship with my wife."

After college, Opel decided to pursue another dream of his, which was to practice law. It was during Opel's first year as a lawyer still in North Carolina, that a great mentor taught him the importance of giving back to his community. When given a chance to write the bylaws for the Winston-Salem Symphony, he saw it as a



Ryan Opel's grandmother, Josephine K. Davis, played in the Phoenix Symphony over 60 years ago.

great opportunity to intertwine music into his profession.

"I chose at that point that my way of giving back and being involved in my community was going to be through the arts," he said. "There was something that was just really exciting to me. To be able to use my professional training to give back to an art form that was so foundational in my life was beyond meaningful."

Although he had only ever lived in

Illinois and North Carolina, Opel's family history is deeply embedded in the Phoenix area. In fact, when his wife Dawn was asked to relocate to begin a teaching career at ASU, they decided it was fate.

"It's been like this unbelievable sort of homecoming for us, even though we haven't lived here a day in our lives," said Opel. "We felt so lucky that Dawn had this opportunity. It gave us an excuse to come home."

Opel right away began practicing law at Gallagher and Kennedy in Phoenix. With the law firm also encouraging their lawyers to give back to the community, he once again discovered musical venues which allowed him to do so. Not only did he begin performing work for the Arizona Music Festival, but he also received an invitation from the Phoenix Symphony. For Opel, being able to donate his skills to a place that had such historical value to his family was indescribable. His grandmother, Josephine K. Davis, had played the violin in the 2nd and 3rd seasons of the Phoenix Symphony, and now he too would make an impact there.

Opel is now able to combine his knowledge of the law with the art of music. He has found satisfaction in being part of an organization that offers such great educational programming to children, especially now being a father himself. For Opel, music has been so positively influential in his life, that he believes it is his obligation to provide the same gift to the younger generations.

"It is my responsibility after being so benefited by music to give back," said Opel. "We are equipping kids with the grit and with the life skills, whether they ever step into Symphony Hall as an adult, or whether they ever play a musical instrument. Music has the power to really change their lives and then the ripple effect of changing lives around them."