

Robert L. Cummings

Smith-Cotton students learned a lot under the guidance of music teacher Bob Cummings, chiefly that, "Practice does not make perfect. Only perfect practice makes perfect."

Mr. Cummings taught music in the Sedalia school district for almost 30 years, 16 at Smith-Cotton High School. He taught concert, marching and jazz band, as well as orchestra and vocal music. Nancy Preuitt Edwards, one of his former students who went on to become a music educator herself, said: "Any class under the instruction of Mr. Cummings was taught well. He was an optimist. He was an encourager. He knew how to motivate us."

A 1939 graduate of Clinton High School, Mr. Cummings earned a bachelor's degree in music education in 1950 from Central Missouri State College and a master's degree in music in 1954 from Northwestern University. He also was an Air Force veteran of World War II, serving four years with the 551st Air Force Band. Mr. Cummings was an officer for Local Musicians Union No. 22 and performed with the Sedalia and Marshall symphonies and the Liberty Park Concert Band. One of his favorite non-musical accomplishments was that he once scored a hole-in-one at Sedalia Country Club. While teaching at the elementary level, Mr. Cummings stressed education over performance to better prepare students for junior high and high school instrumental instruction. He truly enjoyed working with fourth graders as they started out on their instruments, and after retiring from the district he continued to teach private music lessons as well as doing instrument repairs. He also had his own dance band that performed across the area. When Mr. Cummings became Smith-Cotton's director of music, he succeeded another S-C Activities Hall of Fame member, Geraldine Schrader. During his tenure, S-C music students and groups won numerous awards and honors, and he inspired many to become professional musicians or music educators. His children, Trish and David, wrote: "Our father was truly a musical person, not just a person who played music. He found early on that in addition to his great talent as a musician, he also had the ability to connect with young people and a gift for teaching."

Inducted in Smith-Cotton Activities Hall of Fame, 2015

