Mickelson Tours For A Higher Power

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In the Margins

Steve Mickelson was three when he started singing in public. Known as “The Mickelson Five,” he, his sister and three brothers sang at funerals, church events, community events and Farm Bureau meetings around Storm Lake where his family farmed. His mother taught them show tunes, hymns and gospel music.

Today Mickelson (’82 agricultural engineering, ’84 MS, ’91 PhD) tours with a professional gospel group when he’s not busy teaching or chairing the agricultural and biosystems engineering department. He has been singing with “Higher Power” for about 16 years at churches and community events around the Midwest.

The group performs more than 40 concerts a year, and they usually find time for a recording project each year. Although the group has been asked on more than one occasion to go full-time, they agree it isn’t for them.

“We want it to be fun. We have never wanted it to be a burden on our family, or to take away from our fulltime job responsibilities,” he says.

Music has always been a major part of Mickelson’s life.

“I grew up on the Oak Ridge Boys and the Statler Brothers. The Imperials was a gospel group I loved,” Mickelson says. “I remember seeing them at Estes Park at the age of 16 in Colorado and saying, ‘I want to do that.’”

While studying agricultural engineering at Iowa State, Mickelson made time for taking part in the Oratorio Choir, Chamber Singers and a VEISHEA play. He met his wife, Colette, a music education major, in Cardinal Keynotes, the university’s show choir.

Each of the couple’s five children have chosen to make music an important part of their lives as well. Mickelson says bus rides to gigs became a family tradition, “like camping, but in style.”

Mickelson says he feels blessed to have music as such a big part of his life.

“It’s still a tremendous passion for me. My wife will sometimes ask, ‘Do you really want to go out and sing this weekend?’ And I say, ‘I can’t wait.’

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