



Congratulations to **Kathleen Gagne** for many decades of support for the music and arts community in Worcester! What a friend we organists and music lovers have had with Kathleen Gagne at Mechanics Hall for the past three decades. Even before taking the helm in 2018, she has been truly committed to music and arts in the community and more so as a conservator of the historic facility and its instruments and expanding its outreach in Central Mass. Kathy's impact on Mechanics Hall cannot be overstated. She has been a true friend to all of us who have had the privilege of working alongside her. She has inspired us with her work ethic, integrity, and passion for the preservation of the Hall's history and culture. Below are just a few of Kathy's impacts for MH's historic instruments:

- She single-handedly lassoed a gift from the Fuller Foundation for the Hook's "second wind" – a second blower air supply (the organ had exhibited sagging full-organ final chords since the 1980s!)
- She instigated the staged process of refurbishing the instrument, division by division.
- She encouraged demonstrations and tours of the instrument for the public as well as for organists
- She wholeheartedly supported the hall's affiliation with Worcester AGO and its concerts
- She oversaw the continued maintenance of the Steinway D concert grands so they remained among the best on the East Coast
- Creating the MH YouTube Channel and featuring many Hook concerts therein
- Continuing exuberant cheerleading of the Hook during the pandemic by producing innovative concert videos with behind-the-scenes interviews with the performers
- Holding a round-table discussion of the Hook's history
- Creating and celebrating the positions of Principal Organist and Composer-in-Residence
- Continuing and refining the Brown Bag for Kids (BBK) concert series for area schoolchildren which featured the Hook with a chamber orchestra and voice and dramatic storytelling

In addition to the instruments themselves, she was responsible for:

- Creating, promoting, and scheduling the Club 321, a jazz club/coffee house in Washburn Hall
- Kathy's enthusiasm for bringing music into the lives of young kids is contagious! She was a strong advocate from its inception for "Conversations in Jazz", a live music program which brought more than 1,000 grade school kids to Mechanics Hall each year. The program evolved into the Mechanics Hall CultureLEAP through which every Worcester Public School 6th grader comes into the Hall and learns about the many facets of Jazz.

- On board with the digital age for social media and modern marketing campaigns
- “Care and Feeding” of hall volunteers who help with administrative and ushering tasks
- Nurturing hall donors
- Creating the Robert F. Kennedy Legacy Fund and the Norma J. Sandison Society for Planned Gifts
- Creating the Many Voices: Mechanics Hall Youth Singers community choir, and promoting it and its concerts
- Hall modernizations and upkeep include Promenade and Washburn Lobby upgrades.
- On-the-spot leadership for facility emergencies such as the wind-torn roof leak and HVAC mishaps
- Overall managerial prowess and insightful leadership with visioning for the future, including surveys and large-scale brainstorming gatherings with stakeholders and community arts/music leaders
- Critical and effective budget management during the 18-month shutdown during the pandemic: masterfully scaling back hall operations during the shutdown in order to preserve its future
- Continuing the highly visible Master Mechanic awards
- She led the initiative to commission portraits of 19th-century Black Americans for installation in the Great Hall gallery

A perspective of the hall that is often taken for granted is the hall’s light and sound (AV) department, headed by Joseph Chilorio, Technical Director, since 1977. Kathy’s support both in leadership and budget for all-things-AV has been crucial for keeping MH at the forefront of high- quality performances and productions. A/V makes all the performances and events shine both visually and acoustically! Joseph shares his perspective how Kathy has supported the technical aspects of the Hall:

"We are certainly going to miss Kathy when she retires as executive director this June. During her tenure, she was able to secure a huge amount of funding from state and local foundations to fund a much-needed modernization of our sound, lighting, and audio/visual systems. Under Kathy's leadership, we were able to successfully complete upgrades and modernizations of all of our AV systems including:

- a new Panasonic state-of-the-art 20,000 lumen laser video projector
- converting all incandescent lighting in the entire building to energy-efficient LED lighting
- all new theatrical scene lighting whose position (pointing) and color and aperture can be programmatically controlled
- a new EAW Adaptive sound system over the stage of the Great Hall
- improved sound coverage, fidelity, and clarity for all of the seating areas in the hall

Kathy knew the importance of having our own high-quality A/V production equipment in- house because she was heavily involved in producing the children's concerts and the Brown-Bag concert series in her earlier years here. She is also a performer herself, singing in our local choruses, and knows first-hand what works best for us here. I am so grateful to her for letting me oversee these major construction projects and help specify and approve the equipment purchased and installed, and wish her the best in her retirement endeavors." – Joseph Chilorio

We thank Kathy for her incredible leadership, and wish her the best in this next chapter in her life.

- Will Sherwood, ChM, AAGO, Emeritus Principal Organist

*References:*

[Kathy Gagne to Retire in June 2025](#) by Richard Duckett in Worc T&G Feb 2025

[Bridge to the Future](#) by Richard Duckett in Worc T&G July 2018

[Mechanics Hall Timeline](#) (fifth edition, compiled by Will Sherwood)

[Meeting House for Music - a preservation hall of another kind](#) - by Rick Howland

Reprinted from Audio Magazine January 1993.

[Joseph Chilorio: Interview: Mechanics Hall: extra-short version](#) Youtube interview

See more information about the Hook at [www.HookOrgan.com](http://www.HookOrgan.com)

[The Hook Book, second edition](#) (ed. Will Sherwood, Emeritus Principal Organist)