

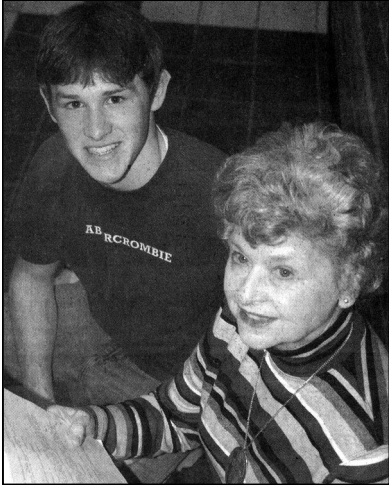
## CHS STUDENT FOLLOWS IN FOOTSTEPS OF THEATRE FAMILY

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By Lisa Brooksbank

When Cookeville High School senior Andrew Johns landed the major role of King Arthur in the school's upcoming production of "Camelot," he knew he could ask his grandmother to help him learn his lines.



*Pictured left: Andrew Johns learns his lines for his role as King Arthur in the Cookeville High School production of "Camelot" with the help of his grandmother, Dot Johns.*

Andrew, who has never been in a play before, had seen pictures and heard stories of his grandparents participating in musical theatre in Cookeville long before he was born. Dot and Gene Johns Sr. did their first musical together in 1967 and continued to do musical theatre over the next several years.

"We just loved musicals," Dot said. "I was in 13 musicals altogether."

Dot and her husband, Gene, who passed away last year, started their musical theatre journey together starring in "The Boyfriend" in 1967. It was held at what is now the Central Emmanuel Baptist

Church on Broad Street.

The following year, Dot said, Cookeville Summer Theatre was formed, and the two of them performed in "Finian's Rainbow," at what is now Avery Trace Middle School.

In 1969, Dot said, Gene played the lead, Emile de Becque, in "South Pacific," while their son Gene Jr. played another leading role, Lt. Joe Cable. Dot said she played, "one of the girls!"

Over the next several years Gene and Dot were in one musical after another, including, yes, "Camelot" in 1979. Dot's scrapbooks of their theatre experiences bulge with photographs, programs, newspaper clippings and autographs by cast members.

"We had so much fun in theatre," Dot said. "We met so many people we wouldn't have met otherwise and had such a good time together."

Two of their three sons, Gene Jr. and Steve (Andrew's dad), followed in the John's footsteps in musical theatre, performing alongside their parents in such musicals as "My Fair Lady" and "Oklahoma." Gene Jr. played Emile de Becque in Cookeville Theatre's 1990 production of "South Pacific," 21 years after his father had played the same role.

Dot's eyes sparkle as she reminisces about her experiences. And her eyes sparkle and her voice changes to match each character as she helps her grandson read his lines.

They rehearsed lines together on a recent trip to California as the family drove from San Francisco to Los Angeles. Dot read every character except Arthur, and they listened to the songs on the car CD player.

"I was surprised Andrew auditioned for the play," Dot said. "He had been so sick."

Andrew, who had never auditioned for a play before, heard about the auditions for "Camelot" last fall. He listened to the music from the play and liked it so much he decided to try out for a part. Although he'd never been involved in theatre, he enjoys singing and sings in the CHS concert choir.

"I was so sick," Andrew said, "that I missed the first audition nights, and only made it to the try-outs the last night. I told them I'd do any part, but I'd like to have a singing role.

And a singing role he was given – plus lots and lots of lines to memorize – which he works on between school and homework. He's enjoying himself, he said, and is trying not to be overwhelmed.

"I like musicals," Andrew said, "They really bring the character to life. I wish I'd done it earlier."

Director Bruce Anderson is happy to be working with another member of the Johns family. He's worked in the past with Gene and Dot on several productions.

"In the beginnings of Cookeville Summer Theatre," Bruce said, "Gene and Dot were mainstays of all the productions. I remember Gene designing and building two huge round towers for CST's production of 'Camelot,' which incidentally, opened the Cookeville Drama Center.

"Gene was a beautiful vocalist, and he's sadly missed since his death last year. He was such a beloved gentleman in Cookeville, and he did so much for our community in many areas, including, of course, in theatre and music.

"I'm so happy to be working with another talented member of the Johns family. What a wonderful gift to Andrew that his grandmother is able to help him memorize his lines and do it with such joy."

When Dot goes to see her grandson in the play, here's a good chance she'll be reminiscing about the years she and her husband were involved in musical theatre. And with the script reading she's done, she may have memorized some of the lines herself!

Cookeville High School presents "Camelot" in the CHS auditorium Feb. 24-26 and March 3-5 at 7:30 p.m., with an additional matinee performance March 5 at 2 p.m. tickets are \$5 and will be available at the door.

### **Eugene "Gene" Judson Johns Sr. Obit.**



**COOKEVILLE** -- Funeral services for Gene Johns, 83, will be held at noon on Tuesday, April 27, at First United Methodist Church. Burial will follow in Cookeville City Cemetery.

The family will receive friends from 5-8 p.m. today, Monday, April 26, at Crest Lawn Funeral Home; and from 11 a.m. until time of services on Tuesday, at the church.

Mr. Johns died on Saturday, April 24, 2004, in Cookeville Regional Medical Center.

*Pictured left: Eugene "Gene" Judson Johns Sr. & his wife Dorothy "Dot" (Fulton) Johns Sr. performing in one of the many musical theater productions they participated in.*

*\*See Johns Theatre Family: History, Putnam Co., TN.*

He was born on Jan. 18, 1921, in LaGrange, Ga. to the late Minnie Greene and Virgil Johns.

He attended high school in LaGrange and completed a year of college at West Georgia Military Academy before enlisting in the Signal Corps of the Army. Mr. Johns married Dorothy Fulton on Aug. 4, 1943, and they settled in Cookeville in 1946, opening the NAPA store in 1947.

He was active in the Boy Scouts of America for more than 10 years. Mr. Johns served as Scoutmaster and Assistant Scoutmaster of Troop 196 with Copeland Jared for 10 years. He was a recipient of the Long Rifle Award and the Select Achievement Award of the Wood Badge. Mr. Johns was a member of First United Church and choir for 57 years.

For approximately 50 years, his contributions to the improvement and excellence of the music of his church, in public events and programs and in private ceremonies won the admiration and appreciation of many citizens in the Cookeville Area. His abilities as an actor/singer in drama productions for community enjoyment are recognized far and near. He was known for his Christian leadership and dedication to his church and family.

His family includes his wife of more than 60 years, Dorothy Fulton Johns; three sons and daughters-in-law, Dr. Steve and Mary Linda Johns, Gene and Christie Johns, all of Cookeville, and Dr. T. Fulton and Kris Johns of Kingston; six grandchildren, Chandler, Mary Jennifer, Andrew, Rachel, Jason and Bryan; and six stepgrandchildren, Linlee Allen, Tyler Skelton, Amanda Michaels, Rachel, Amanda and Andrew Nixon.

Pallbearers will be family and friends.

Honorary pallbearers will be Backsliders Sunday School class.

Donations may be made to the First United Methodist Building Fund and the American Heart Assoc.

Revs. Jon Bell and Jim Rogers will officiate at the services.

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