

Bill Thom said the winters in South Dakota are quite a bit different than Southern Iowa's.

"It gets cold in November and stays that way until March. There aren't any warm-ups like there are here. The snow doesn't last long here compared to there," said Thom.

Born on a farm in South Dakota, after high school a good friend was going away to college, but his folks couldn't afford to send Thom.

"I was in FFA and had saved up money from my projects, hogs and grain," he said.

"So I said I'd go for one year. It was the University of South Dakota at Vermillion, about 80 miles from home. I was interested in vocational agriculture but they didn't offer any classes in that field. The only other thing I had any experience in was music, so I became a music major. And I fell in love with it. Then I didn't want to leave!"

His folks were able to help him a little, but he worked all the time in order to stay in school. He was a waiter and a cook in restaurants and a janitor anywhere there was an opening. He finally graduated with a bachelor's degree in fine arts.

Meanwhile, he had met his wife, Jean, during his sophomore year.

"She stayed in school only one year, but we continued to date. We got married just before I went to my first teaching job, which was in Gregory, S.D.,"



They had the old fire chutes on them," he said.

"I had been contemplating a change and I made one before retiring. In the 1990s I

Bill Thom talks about his long career in teaching, his love for music.

taught elementary math at Lakeview. I was called the Title I teacher. In 1996 I retired after teaching for 40 years, 33 of them in Centerville."

But that doesn't mean Thom left the world of music.

He directs the choir at the First Presbyterian

Church and has for over 20 years. He directed the Coal Minor Chordsmen and sang with several barbershop quartets.

"The second Sunday night of the month we have a Hymn Sing at the Historic Second Baptist Church where different choirs and groups perform. Then I lead the audience in singing songs and they seem to enjoy that," he said.

He also does volunteer work and plays golf. He announced track meets on the radio and helps with first grade reading.

"Since I am a senior citizen, I am on the board at the Golden Age Care Center and 18-80 Club. I'm also a delegate for the Older Iowans and work with the Iowa Legislature. I am on the board at the church and on the Foster Care Review Board.

"I have always had to stay busy, have something to do," he said.

His wife, Jean, worked at Iowa Southern Utilities in the accounting department for over 20 years. They have a son in Rochester, Minn., who works for IBM, and a daughter in Henderson, Nev., who works for Federal Express.

**By Patsy Cincotta
Staff writer**

when he received a phone call that changed everything.

Thom came to Centerville in 1963 after he was called by Superintendent Paul Forney about a teaching position.

"He asked me to come look at the position in Centerville. He found my name somewhere, I think through Drake University where I had done some work," Thom said.

"We came down and weren't too impressed with the town. It was during a

drought and the area didn't look too good. But we loved the people we met. We stayed at the Continental Hotel and not many can say that. It closed a year or so after we were there. It was kind of old fashioned, but nice."

He taught high school vocal music and also had music appreciation and a chorus class at the junior college.

"There was a chorus made up of elementary kids called the Choraleers. Garfield and Lincoln schools had pictures of them on the second floor. The elementary schools were old buildings at that time.

There's always a *song to sing*

he said.

He stayed there three years where their two children were born. He was the only music teacher, teaching instrumental and vocal. During his second year, he got some part-time help at the kindergarten through 12th grade school.

His next job was a step up for him. He taught only high school students and received more pay. He was there two years, but he and his wife wanted to be closer to their folks. So they moved to Dennison where he taught only vocal music.

He was considering making a career switch

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