

Richard Kole— A Texas Legend

Reagan Brumley, 2019-21 TBA Secretary

On October 18, 1920, a baby boy was born in Chicago. On its face, this is the least remarkable beginning to a story possible, with nearly three million other babies born in the U.S alone that same year. What is remarkable is the fact that this particular person, Richard Kole, is still with us in 2021. To wrap one's mind around the differences between 1920 and 2021, stark enough to seem like two separate worlds altogether, is difficult to grasp. Mr. Kole inhabited a world that existed before the advent of TV in the home, was born six years before the first "talkie" movie and forty-one years before the first manned space flight. Not only does he pre-date the internet, cell phones, and even the electric guitar, Mr. Kole lived for nineteen years prior to World War II and—this is really tough—occupied a world that had not yet come up with the concept of store-bought sliced bread! While the same streets and towns we now know would be unrecognizable in their 1920 incarnation, there is a constant force that runs the expanse of Mr. Kole's long and significant life: MUSIC. Why does this man's musical journey matter to any of us? Because of branches. (You will see, I promise.)

Richard Kole is a legendary Texas band and orchestra director who eventually made his mark in the Texas UIL and TMEA systems which still fuel our programs today—but that was not the original plan. Richard initially enrolled in Chicago Musical College, but had to interrupt his studies due to World War II which led him to audition for and earn a spot in the West Point Military Academy Band. One memorable assignment was performing in the funeral

procession for President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Richard's musical prowess developed to the point that his next step led him to study at the famed New England Conservatory, earning a master's degree in flute performance while taking lessons from then Boston Symphony principal flutist, Georges Laurent. Richard then secured a flute chair in the San Antonio Symphony, where he performed from 1951-1954. It was only at this time, simply because Richard and his wife Donna needed some extra money, that he accepted a part-time band teaching position at Northeast High School in 1952. The Northeast job led to his moving into a full-time band director position at Sam Houston High School, with his terminal high school position taking place at San Antonio's Jefferson High School, which he built into one of the finest bands in Texas. During this time, Richard also served as conductor of the San Antonio Youth Symphony, which he led to a TMEA performance. Richard's excellent work at the high school level led the music department at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi to seek him out for their vacant band position. Richard led this junior college band to a TMEA performance, the first and still one of very few such performances ever.

I am confident we can all agree that the career in music just recounted (and this was the greatly truncated version) is impressive, to say the very least. It is, however, the missing piece of the story, which happens to be the beginning of this musical life, that is relevant to all of us who share this profession.



**TBA
Board of Directors
2019-21**

**Phillip Clements
President**

Texas A&M University-Commerce
P.O. Box 3011
Commerce, TX 75429
903-886-5285
phillip.clements@tamuc.edu

**Roland Sandoval
President Elect**

Department of Music-UTSA
1 UTSA Circle
San Antonio, TX 78249
210-737-8929
roljack@satx.rr.com

**Daniel Allen
Vice President**

Franklin High School
900 N. Resler
El Paso, TX 79912
915-236-2266
dallene@aol.com

**George Little
Treasurer**

Lufkin High School
309 South Medford Drive
Lufkin, TX 75901
936-630-4134
glittle@lufkinisd.org

**Reagan Brumley
Secretary**

Irving ISD
Director of Performing Arts
2621 W. Airport Freeway
Irving, TX 75062
972-600-5088
rabrumley@gmail.com

**Christopher Yee
Sergeant-at-Arms**

Cedar Park High School
2150 Cypress Creek Road
Cedar Park, TX 78613
512-570-1200
christopher.yee@leanderisd.org

**John Morrison
Past President**

Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
Secondary Music
10300 Jones Road, Suite 724
Houston, TX 77065
281-897-4042
john.morrison@cfisd.net

**Michael Brashear
Executive Director**

Texas Bandmasters Association
1002 Central Parkway South
San Antonio, TX 78232
210-492-8878
mbrashear@texasbandmasters.org

Richard Kole—A Texas Legend

Richard Kole certainly was not born a virtuoso flute player. Like all of us, someone had to open the door to this incredible world of music-making and give him the tools to discover that world's many priceless riches. For Richard, that person happened to be the band director at Thomas Kelly High School of Chicago in the mid-1930s. Here is where the branches come in. That director's willingness to start young Richard on the flute led to a professional performance and education career that lasted 67 years, and enjoyment that lives on to this day. Yes, Mr. Kole, at age 100, still occasionally practices his flute decades after his high school band director left this Earth—with Richard serving as one of countless branches on *that director's* tree.

Then think about Mr. Kole's musical tree. Between his high school, college, and private students, the last of which he taught only three years ago at age 97, his branches number in the thousands, with many of those also having furthered the profession, and the joy, for many decades.

Our world is constantly changing, with the change sometimes occurring at dizzying speed. As we have all learned in the past year, sometimes the change is unpredictable and comes with frightening and depressing ramifications. Even in those bleakest of times, we music educators can take heart in stories like Richard Kole's, with the peace of mind that what we do matters, what we do brings joy and fulfillment, and what we do will transcend the changes of the world.

The branches keep on growing...

