Joy of Music Directors ready to pass the baton after more than three decades

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Wendy and Richard Ardizzone, director and associate director of the Joy of Music Program, are pictured in JOMP’s auditorium as it neared completion on Jan 14, 2016. The couple will be easing out of their leadership roles over the next year. *Paul Kapteyn/T&G File Photo*

WORCESTER — After founding Joy of Music more than 35 years ago, director Wendy Ardizzone is planning a transition that will bring in new leadership beginning this summer for the nonprofit music school.

Jennifer Sherwood Gaul has been appointed the Joy of Music's executive director. She is currently head of performing arts at Yew Chung International School in Shanghai.

Ardizzone said she expects Gaul to be on board at Joy of Music by around mid-July.

Wendy Ardizzone and her husband, Rich Ardizzone, Joy of Music's associate director, will stay through the end of the next academic year before retiring from administration.
"For a year Rich and I will be playing a support role," Wendy Ardizzone said in an interview. "It's kind of an extended overlap that we're having," she said.

Both Wendy and Rich Ardizzone are also faculty members at Joy of Music. Rich Ardizzone (trombone, jazz ensemble) said he intends to continue teaching. Wendy Ardizzone said she will continue to accompany students as needed.

Joy of Music, or JOMP, as it is popularly known, was founded in 1986 as a program of music and movement classes for preschoolers and has grown into a regional school serving children, teens and adults of all levels of musical development.

After many years at First Unitarian Church, a fire there in 2000 led to some relocation for the school. After a capital campaign, it moved into its own facilities at 1 Gorham St. in 2002. The Joseph & Jordan Shapiro Concert Hall was dedicated in 2016.

Wendy Ardizzone said JOMP was created as a nonprofit music school that would belong to the community, and it was her hope that the school would endure beyond her tenure.

“It's impossible to describe the peace of mind it brings me to know that the school will be in Jennifer's caring, experienced and competent hands. I couldn’t be happier!” she said.

In a letter to parents of JOMP students, Wendy Ardizzone said, "Rich and I will no longer be in the front offices, but we will still be at JOMP working closely with the team on ensuring the smoothest possible transition. The goals of the overlap are to share institutional knowledge and to maintain JOMP's mission, its commitment to financial aid, its culture and core sense of community, its philosophy of education and its approach to operations. You've seen less of me over the past few years because grant writing and donor relations have become my main focus. I will continue doing this during the overlap year."

Gaul has 27 years of executive, development and teaching experience including serving as Turtle Bay Music School's executive director from 2005 to 2010. She was the New York City school's director of development and marketing for three years before that. From 2010 to 2017, she served as director of Dana Hall School of Music in Wellesley.

She has lived in China since 2017, setting up and overseeing the development of new performing arts programs at Tsinglan School (Dongguan) and Wellington College International (Hangzhou).

Gaul responded to a Joy of Music job posting, Wendy Ardizzone said. Three interviews were conducted from China via Zoom.

"Jennifer’s appointment was unanimously approved by JOMP’s Board of Directors, who received unequivocally favorable interview reports from the Search Committee, the Staff, and eight members of the Faculty," Joy of Music said. "We are confident Jennifer has the extensive leadership experience and intrinsic qualities needed to lead Joy of Music forward into a bright future."
Wendy Ardizzone said, "My emotions — of course it's part of my dream come true. The school is in great shape and we're passing it along to someone we feel is a wonderful person and professional.

In the letter to parents, she said, "I hope you'll join me in viewing the 2022-2023 academic year as a time of celebration. Having my dream of being able to pass Joy of Music along to vibrant new leadership will be aligning with the year I'll be celebrating 80 trips around the sun. It's time folks!"

Gaul said, “I am genuinely thrilled to become part of this extraordinary music school. I was so impressed with the passion, dedication and heart of everyone I met.”