

LAKE PLACID NEWS

Lake Placid Rotary Club will keep Kate Smith's name on music award



Kate Smith (Photo provided — Lake Placid-North Elba Historical Society)

LAKE PLACID — During their weekly meeting Thursday morning, April 25, at the Courtyard by Marriott hotel, members of the Rotary Club of Lake Placid decided to keep Kate Smith's name attached to their annual high school music scholarship.

"We are keeping things the way they are," club President Susan Friedmann said by phone Thursday evening.

On Monday, Friedmann told the Lake Placid News that members of the club had a lot of discussions this past weekend about keeping the name of the award intact as the late singer's reputation was being challenged over racist lyrics in a couple of songs she recorded in the early 1930s. Those songs were "That's Why Darkies Were Born" and "Pickaninny Heaven." The day before — after the New York Yankees and Philadelphia Flyers had announced they would no longer be playing Smith's rendition of "God Bless America" during their games — the Flyers removed a statue of Smith in front of the team's arena.

At the time, Friedmann said, "We're just going to call it the Lake Placid (Rotary) Club Music Award and then go from there. ... The last thing we want to do is to offend anybody, so we're actually in discussion as to what to do with regard to the name." Asked a second time to confirm the name change, she had said, "Just for this year."

During the club's Thursday meeting, however, members took a vote and decided to continue calling it the Kate Smith Award. It's also been known over the years as the Kate Smith Music Award or Kate Smith Scholarship.

"It was a very strong feeling of the history behind the award, and we wanted to honor that," Friedmann said. "We don't want to mess with history."

In 1994, the Rotary Club handed out its first Kate Smith Music Award to Lake Placid High School student Heather Smith. On May 11, the News published a photo of Heather holding her award next to John Viscome, Bill Stowe, Connie Bonsignore, Kathy Briggs and Howard Baker at the club's May 5 breakfast meeting at the Ramada Inn. The breakfast was held to

celebrate Kate Smith's birthday on May 1 and to listen to Viscome, the former caretaker of the Kate's Camp Sunshine on Buck Island on Lake Placid lake, and Bonsignore, who was Kate's personal friend, share stories and memories of the singer.

The Kate Smith Award is given out to a deserving LPHS junior or senior interested in studying any form of music. It's traditionally been handed out around the singer's birthday. In 2018, then-junior Emma Bishop received a cash prize of \$1,000 to be used for college applications or other college-related expenses.

Although members had been meeting for months prior, Friedmann said the Rotary Club of Lake Placid was officially chartered on April 25, 1994 — exactly 25 years before their Thursday vote on the Kate Smith Award.
