



December Showcase Pushes GEF Arts Endowment Over \$200K Goal

By Barbara Cashman



Granby Education Foundation Chair Trish Percival, musicians Fred Wilhelm, Lori McKenna, Mark Erelli and Catie Curtis, Event Chair Susan Accetura

On a cool, clear December evening, a local boy brought home some friends for a visit of sorts. They seemed an unassuming group, who liked to talk and had easy conversations about weighty things -- topics like love, relationships, family, parenting; everyday topics that quietly underscore our lives, sometimes with barely a passing thought. Set those conversations to music and one might have background for a dinner party. But when those four friends happen to be master craftspeople who've written the words and music that tell the stories of their lives and ours, when they've worked and played together for years, when they've met to share those stories from a hometown high school stage simply for the joys of friendship and sharing their art, that's when magic happens.

So it happened here on December 4 when local boy, critically acclaimed singer/songwriter/musician Fred Wilhelm brought his fabulously talented friends Lori McKenna, Catie Curtis and Mark Erelli to Granby, filling the ears and hearts of 500 listeners with a soundtrack by which all might look at parents, partners, and children a little more clearly, hold them a little more closely, even if only for the few minutes that the sound of mandolin strings filled the air.

It was exactly the kind of evening that the Granby Education Foundation hoped to present in the "Songwriter Showcase," its most recent event held to benefit its Arts Endowment. The show drew a cross section of the community to the auditorium and all left the show with the feeling that they had engaged with the artists and had learned something about their lives and the experiences that shaped them. The Commons was packed at the after show "Coffee House," as CDs quickly sold out and the performers mingled with the Granby community and loyal fans who had traveled from across New England and as far away as Washington, D.C. to see these artists perform.

The GEF Arts Endowment was launched in 2004 for the purpose of bringing quality arts programming to the Granby community. Raising \$200,000 in a struggling economy proved difficult, but the GEF persevered by holding Arts fundraisers each year. Over the last six years, the GEF has hosted: Livingston Taylor, Tom Chapin and Friends, the Miami String Quartet, the Connecticut Ballet, Cliff Eberhardt, the Freestyle Repertory Theatre, and the Theatre Division of the Hartt School. Last year, the GEF, working with the Connecticut Ballet, produced The Nutcracker, an enormous undertaking which gave 140 local children the opportunity to perform alongside professional dancers in this timeless classic.

But it was the “Songwriter’s Showcase,” in which Fred Wilhelm agreed to put his weight behind the Education Foundation, that pushed the fundraising effort over its \$200,000 goal. GEF Chairperson Trish Percival, who has known Fred since High School, says, “Fred is not only exceptionally talented, he is exceptionally generous. When I asked if he’d be willing to do “something” for us “someday,” he immediately agreed and suggested the format that would work best for us.”

When former Susan’s Coffeehouse Owner and GEF Board Member (and yet another Granby native!) Susan Accetura got involved, the project really took off. “Susan poured so much of herself into the success of this project,” says Percival. “The GEF is exceedingly grateful to her.”

Many contributed to the success of the evening. The GEF would like to thank GoodWorks Insurance, Lost Acres Orchard, Granby Pharmacy, Squadron Capital LLC, Windsor Federal Savings, and the Granby Land Trust for their sponsorship of the event. Additionally, the GEF thanks Marcy Green of Dragonfly Events for the Coffee House décor, Bradford McDougall for photography services, the Friends of the Foundation for their continued supply of refreshments and labor, Starbucks, Stop and Shop, Big Y and Cosco for their donations, and Accetura, for her tireless efforts in this and countless other GEF projects. The GEF thanks the artists, who performed at reduced rates for a good cause. Lastly, the GEF thanks those who continue to support the Foundation through each ticket purchase, event attendance, and word of mouth endorsement.

To learn more about this event and the Granby Education Foundation, visit www.granbyeducationfoundation.org.