

Rock Band That Exists to Benefit Local Causes

By JAN ELLEN SPIEGEL

Published: Sunday, September 4, 2009
Metropolitan Section, page 10



TOGETHER Rob Fried, on bass, and Jerry Vigorito started the band.

THE unmistakable and very loud strains of “Southbound” said rock show. But outside the Quick Center for the Arts at Fairfield University here, the Red Cross van and Fairfield Fire Department ladder truck No. 1 hinted at something more.

The performers were Band Together, whose purpose is to raise money for those in need. This night — May 27, the fourth concert by Band Together this year — the beneficiaries were the Mid-Fairfield County Red Cross and the Connecticut Burns Care Foundation’s Children’s Burn Camp. The vehicles were part of the charities’ promotion.

“This is not an original idea,” said **Jerry Vigorito**, a harmonica player who created Band Together with his friend Rob Fried, a bass guitarist, three years ago. “Bob Geldof did it back in the day, you know? We’re just using local musicians to raise funds for local charities.”

Christopher Robin, a country rock guitar player and singer from Fairfield, was at the Quick Center for his third Band Together show, and Debbie Davies, a highly regarded blues guitarist and singer who lives in the Naugatuck Valley, was there for her first. “Hopefully I’ll get to do another,” she said. “It was just such a pleasure.”

A Sept. 24 show to benefit the Pilot House, a Fairfield organization that helps children with special needs, will include Blue Oyster Cult’s Joe Bouchard and the soul singer Gisele Jackson.

While the biggest local names — John Mayer, Michael Bolton, José Feliciano — have eluded Mr. Vigorito, he said requests from musicians outnumbered openings. The size of the band varies, and about 80 musicians have played with it over three years.

“To be perfectly honest, I pretty much begged him to call me if he thought I’d be a good fit,” said John Mamone of Shelton, a network engineer for Nasdaq and a vocalist-percussionist.

Mr. Mamone played his first Band Together show at the Quick Center on May 27 and pushed Mr. Vigorito for more. “I sent him an e-mail next morning: ‘I know you’ve got this event and this event and this event. Please, please use me,’ ” Mr. Mamone said.

Band Together, whose subtitle is “Helping Connecticut Families One at a Time,” plays a variety of covers. Its formation was more evolution than eureka for Mr. Vigorito and Mr. Fried, both of whom have day jobs. Mr. Vigorito, 51, of Fairfield, is a senior vice president at Atlantic Residential Mortgage in Westport, and Mr. Fried, 50, of Redding, is a marketing coach at Bridgewater Associates, an investment firm in Westport. Their overlapping music circles date back to high school in Fairfield, and both continue to play with bands for pay.

“You get to a certain age where you’ve taken care of your family, you’ve had your first foray in your career and you start to look outside, and you wake up to your community and the world,” said Mr. Fried. “We’re two guys who want to find a way to use our gifts to give back.”

Band Together’s first show, for Habitat for Humanity’s Youth Project House, was at the 120-seat Norfield Grange in Weston, which Mr. Vigorito and Mr. Fried rented for \$100. They printed the tickets themselves and served apple pie and ice cream at the break. As they have moved to bigger venues, the goal has been to keep what they like to call that “grangey” — homey — feel.

“Each move that we make is very well thought out, without losing our roots and our core,” Mr. Vigorito said, “but still attracting larger and more recognizable talent.”

Ticket prices run from \$20 to \$45. The people behind the scenes are volunteers or, like the musicians, are paid the bare minimum. The money flows directly to the recipient charities, which then pay Band Together’s expenses, about \$5,000 per concert. In 11 shows, Band Together’s charities have kept \$300,000 of the \$350,000 it has grossed.

Frank Szivos, executive director of the Connecticut Burns Care Foundation, said that besides the \$25,000 Band Together had raised for the charity in two concerts, he was impressed that Mr. Vigorito and Mr. Fried had visited the Burn Camp.

“They’re very passionate about helping people,” he said. “It’s not just a shtick. And they’re very passionate about playing music. It’s a good fit.”

Band Together has already helped the Pilot House raise nearly \$30,000. “It was probably one of the easiest fund-raisers and funnest fund-raisers to put together,” said Doreen Caruso, president and co-founder of the Pilot House.

Many participants and recipient charities agree that it’s not just the high quality of their music that makes Band Together work. “We can all go out and play benefits — that’s no big deal,” said Jay Stollman, an award-winning musician, vocalist and composer who grew up with Mr. Vigorito and Mr. Fried. “It’s the energy these guys have created.”

“The feel-good nature of this thing is indescribable,” he said. “Every musician walks away and says, ‘Oh my God — I need more of this. I need to do this again.’ ”

“Rock the House Again,” Band Together, featuring Joe Bouchard, to benefit the Pilot House, Sept. 24, 7:30 p.m., at Fairfield Theater Company Stage One, 70 Sanford Street, Fairfield. (203) 259-1036 or www.fairfieldtheatre.org.