

" Tracy Friars, Family and Friends Concert" A Sell-out Again

by Jane Barry, The Greater Saint John Community Foundation

Some families just seem to be born with a positive outlook on life and it's safe to say the Friars clan is one of them. Tracy Friars has been associated with the introduction of a program which has been integrated into local schools called "Celebrate What's Right with the World" speaking of the power of positive thinking. She and her community-minded siblings, who also happen to have a lot of musical talent, came up with the idea of a benefit concert. That was back in 2005. They have had such rewarding experiences every year in preparing and presenting it that once again, the " Tracy Friars, Family and Friends Concert" takes place Monday, November 29 at Saint John's Imperial Theatre. Sisters Betty, Darlene, Barb, Heather, Wendy, Jane and Lynn all sing in the show. Amazingly, all 800 plus tickets sold out in less than 3 hours.

The concert has quite a track record, having performed annually to sold-out audiences. They have been overwhelmed with the wonderful support of the community including that of their sponsors. The goal of the evening is to provide great entertainment at an affordable price, along with raising funds and awareness for worthwhile community causes. Over five years, through ticket sales, personal contributions and the generous support of sponsors, they distributed over \$100,000 through to local non-profit groups and charities: Saint John East Outreach Programs, Hospice House / Stephen Lewis Foundation, Alzheimer Society, Mindcare NB and the Saint John Learning Exchange.

The local musical community gives it full support. This year, a ninety member choir which Tracy describes as "without a doubt one of the finest choirs you will hear in the City", are giving their time and talent, practising for 6 weeks before show time. Bringing it all together is Director Janet Kidd and Accompanist Terri-Lynn Russell. "Truly the talent and energy that these two women impart is a delight to watch. The choir has so much fun that they hate to see the rehearsals come to an end" she adds.

The ensemble of Franco Cucinelli, Peter MacDonald, Jonathan Kipping and Rachel Kidd will be another highlight. Debbie Harrity, well known in locally for her wonderfully warm and very rich voice and guitar, has performed in all of the Friar family shows and participates in the choir. Father Clark MacAulay, a long-time family friend, brings warmth and graciousness to the stage, travelling from Toronto every year to perform. At 83, he has a strong voice which the appreciative audience loves.

Brad & Krista Trecartin a sister/brother act called Fiddlin' Keys, are life-long family friends and originals with the show. They provide a "delightful" fiddle/piano performance, contributing time and talent at many fund raising functions. Men & Music, under the direction of Mary Ann O'Hara, "will not only entertain but also leave you with a smile". FLO, a strings ensemble made up of young musicians, debuts this year under the direction of Fran Dearin.

Heather Stilwell, Tracy's sister, chairs the evening in between helping with grandkids and her Mom. She has given of her talents for many years through School District 6 in several capacities. "We truly felt that it was time to take a breather for a year or two. Our respite was short lived....requests from performers and the community ... asking us to continue. it didn't take much arm twisting... The greatest influencing factor was a phone call from a "Friend of the Concert" offering to be the major sponsor ... with a \$10,000 cheque. We are touched by the generosity and caring of this anonymous benefactor and thrilled to once again have an opportunity to entertain, inform and raise funds for a worthy recipient. This year we have chosen the local Crohn's and Colitis Foundation as the concert recipient" she states.

"The dollars raised will fund education events and programs right here in Greater Saint John," says Cathy Robichaud, member of the local Crohn's and Colitis Foundation (CCFC) chapter who has made volunteering a full time job. She adds, "These events are designed to help people with Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis manage their diseases, and to educate the community about the burden of the disease."

The CCFC will host an educational symposium in Saint John in the coming year, where healthcare professionals such as gastroenterologists and nutritionists - as well as patients themselves - speak about living well with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). Proceeds from the concert will also help CCFC launch a new initiative to increase knowledge and awareness about IBD in the workplace and to employers - the first of which will be launched in Saint John.



Tracy Friars, left, whose family and musical friends will present a concert Nov. 29 to benefit the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation and its work in Greater Saint John. Foundation representative Cathy Robichaud is shown on the right. Photo: K  t   Braydon/Telegraph-Journal

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Community Profile is a weekly column highlighting community causes and work done by non-profit organizations in the Greater Saint John area. It is contributed by Jane Barry, executive director of The Greater Saint John Community Foundation. Contact the foundation at 506-672-8880, sjfoundation@nb.aibn.com. To view other Community Profiles go to www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca