Music lovers band together to create foundation

By Rhonda Van Pelt

As anyone who’s spent any time in Manitou Springs knows, this city is a haven for live music. Being able to walk from venue to venue in a place that values the arts is a powerful draw for musicians and the people who love what they do.

One group of people, music lovers all, are collaborating to bring more attention to Manitou’s vibrant music scene and help support the talented people who perform here and the venues that welcome them.

“Early this year, myself and some other people were just talking about how great the music was in town. More talented people keep coming in and there are people who keep coming back,” said Steven Miller, a Manitou resident who’s been going to concerts for 47 years.

“We were thinking about how we might be able to support that, because we know they don’t make very much money and some nights, venues are lean on customers. So we were thinking, obviously there’s an oversupply, especially in the wintertime. There’s an oversupply of great live music.”

The group started growing, the ideas started coming and that loose gathering of music lovers became a board, then a nonprofit called the Manitou Music Foundation.

“We want Manitou Springs to be widely recognized as a music destination. And that’s state-wide, nationally,” Miller said.

The foundation’s board of directors and advisory board of musicians are working to keep music lovers coming to Manitou. They’re brainstorming ideas to raise awareness and funds — but more about that later.

Miller is the president of the board of directors, where he’s joined by musician/singer Kiera Lynn, David Walker, Abby Kosling and Mack Kitchens. Julian Dillon is the chair of the advisory board, which also includes Michael Edmiston, Kevin Kuonen, Teri Senior, Cameron McNerney and Marissa Feri.

In mid-October, Lynn joined Miller to talk about music and the foundation. She plays various stringed instruments and sings, and is part of the Barefoot Family Caravan band.

She vividly remembers when Miller approached her after listening to her and a bandmate perform at Kinfolk on New Year’s Eve.

“I’d never seen this guy before and he’s like, ‘Hey, I really like what you guys are doing and I’d like to help you out somehow. Here’s my card. Let’s go have breakfast, I’ll pay for you. Come have breakfast and just talk to me.’

“I walked away from that and I was thinking, ‘Who is this guy? What is he up to?’ I kind of was reserves about it at first and then we started talking. The foundation, I think, was already a twinkle in his eye because we were discussing how we could make this a reality.”

Lynn soon learned that Miller goes to every concert in town, even multiple shows in a night, because he loves it so much.

“I have this historical perspective, this nostalgic perspective, and I’ll be at Red Rocks listening to someone I was listening to when I was 12 or whatever, and I cry. It’s just an emotional experience,” Miller said.

Studies show that performing or listening to live music becomes a collective experience that’s good for your health, and Miller and Lynn can attest to that.

“I think there’s something really special about breaking down that barrier between the musician and the audience, just having that direct connection,” Lynn said.

The Barefoot Family Caravan spent a good chunk of 2018 touring the country and she enjoyed it, but she’s always happy to return to Manitou.

“I love the people and the vibe. We’re unique because of the people, I think. These people also make the music, make the scene,” she said.

Miller, who retired from the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, moved to Manitou from Colorado Springs about two years ago.

“Since my childhood, it’s the first time I’ve lived in a real community. I can walk everywhere. I see people I know any time of the day that I’m on the street. It’s just a strong sense of community,” he said.

So they’re hoping this community will support their efforts to put Manitou on the musical map. They’re raising funds through various events (see box) and by selling a 2019 calendar featuring photos of local musicians who are willing to — so to speak — show off their assets for a good cause.

“I told everybody it should be classy, but also funny. That’s how we’re going to sell them,” Lynn said.

“All these musicians are really well-known in town, everybody knows who they are, and they’re all pretty well on board for a partial-nude calendar. Everybody’s holding their guitars or other instruments.”

In the meantime, the foundation is looking for volunteers, especially someone to help set up a website that can be easily updated.

“We’re looking for volunteers of all shapes and sizes. Everybody’s got a talent they can contribute. We’re going to need a lot of volunteers to help us accomplish our fundraising goals,” Lynn said.

The MMF members know they’re not going to make a lot of money for the first few years. But their mission will remain musician-centric, helping them with travel expenses, networking, promotion and whatever they need.

“We are still wrestling with the definition of a ‘Manitou musician.’ We’ve asked the advisory board to give us some guidance. We do not want to be an exclusive club. We want to be inclusive,” Miller said. “So right now, it basically applies to anyone who has booked in Manitou on a regular basis.”

UPCOMING EVENTS

11 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 3: Yard sale at the American Legion Eber Dulco Post 39, 634 Manitou Ave.

6-10 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 29: Billy Strings and the Tejon Street Corner Thieves concert at City Hall’s Memorial Hall, 606 Manitou Ave.

3 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 15, to 1 a.m. Sunday, Dec. 16: Holiday Fine Spirits & Music Festival at various venues in downtown Manitou. Information is available on the Manitou Music Foundation’s Facebook page or by emailing manitousmusicfoundation@gmail.com.