

Bancroft United by Music at the Village Playhouse



By Mike Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The United by Music event on Jan. 19 at the Bancroft Village Playhouse was a huge success. Organized by journalist/educator/volunteer Stephen Petrick, who's a cabinet member for the United Way campaign for North Hastings, it featured the music of headliner Abe Drennan, Janet Whiteway, Appalachian Celtic, and the Shawashkong Ikwe Singers. All proceeds from the evening went to support the United Way Hastings Prince Edward to reach their 2023 annual fundraising campaign goal of \$2.2 million to continue the great work they do funding local programs and initiatives. Petrick approached Tim Porter, artistic director of Tweed and Company with the idea and they wanted to be involved with the United Way, so they made the Bancroft Village Playhouse available and sold tickets for them. Part of the reason Petrick wanted to do is he wanted to change the perception about the importance of United Way funding in North Hastings, highlighting that funds raised here stay here and fund local programs and services. After Petrick introduced the event, Brandi Hodge, executive director of United Way HPE spoke about their unwavering commitment to funding programs locally, both here in North Hastings and across Hastings and Prince Edward counties. Hodge said it's been great, and that Petrick had done a great job organizing the event during the mingling session before the music started at 7 p.m. "We're grateful for that support. I think he said it was close to being sold out so that's awesome. We're excited," she says. Three of the local agencies here in North Hastings that receive funding from them were also there that night; North Hastings Children's Services, North Hastings Community Cupboard and Youth Diversion-KAIROS program. Jessica Anderson, the executive director of NHCS, Monica Piercey, executive director of NHCC and Missy Baldwin, a counsellor with YDKP spoke between the music acts about the amazing work they are able to do because of United Way HPE's support. The performances by all the musicians were varied and catered to several different musical tastes, but all were outstanding, with the audience clamouring for more. The Shawashkong Ikwe Singers started the evening, followed by Appalachian Celtic, Janet Whiteway and finishing with headliner Abe Drennan. Drennan was joined throughout his set by his sister Ruth (a singer), his father Dave (a musician who played harmonica during the show), guitarist Brandon Humphries, bassist Kevin Taylor and percussionist Jesse Hammond. Drennan's "promoter" and lover of black licorice Fergie also made a couple of appearance to great comedic effect. All the musicians gathered on stage at the end to perform a song called "One Planet" while the Shawashkong Ikwe Singers finished off the night with "The Travelling Song." What was initially estimated to be an approximately two-hour show stretched out into four hours. However, to the credit of all the entertainers and the magnificent shows they put on, it sure didn't feel nearly that long. United Way HPE funds 42 agencies and 65 programs and collaborates with local organizations, businesses, the health sector, and individuals to increase the community's ability to respond to human service needs. They support one in three people in our community. To find out more, visit www.unitedwayhpe.ca. Petrick told Bancroft This Week that he didn't know how much the event raised as of Jan. 20, and that it would likely be a few days until he heard how much from United Way HPE and Tweed & Co. However, he thinks they had, if not a sell out, a nearly sold-out show plus the silent auction proceeds. "So, the event was very successful and will contribute to the United

Way's 'final push' to raise \$2.2 million. But again, to me the event was always more about raising awareness. Hopefully the people who attended will be more aware of the importance of United Way funding and heed the call whenever United Way puts out an appeal for support, as it's doing now," he says. Petrick says he honestly couldn't be more pleased with how the event went, and literally everything went to plan and it was really rewarding to see how engaged the audience was. "I thought the Shawashkong Ikwe Singers started off the night great and it was amazing to see them start and end the event in a way that pays homage to our Algonquin community. Seeing the energy in the building as they concluded with the 'Travelling Song' was just amazing. When Appalachian Celtic performed, they had the crowd in the palm of their hand. It was great to hear the audience clapping along. It was clear they're loved by the community. Then Janet Whiteway came on and delivered what I thought was a jaw-dropping performance. She writes such great songs and just has dynamite vocals!" he says. Petrick says that having Drennan come to do the show was really a unique opportunity as he's been raising his family in Inuvik, North West Territories, but this year he's doing a Masters' degree at the University of Western Ontario, so coming back to Bancroft was possible for him. Petrick thinks he seized on the opportunity knowing it was a rare one and the audience understood it was a rare chance to see a homegrown talent perform. "He didn't just come to Bancroft to deliver a performance; he turned his performance into a whole celebration of our community. He allowed great musicians here to reunite, he incorporated the Shawashkong Ikwe Singers into his act and he made a plan to get each of our acts on the stage for a big finale. He promoted the event and performed it in a way that was fitting for a United Way fundraiser. He even added comedy to his performance and kept us smiling all night. He really went beyond the call of duty," he says. On a final note, Petrick mentioned that the staff at United Way HPE really got behind the event and they discussed how they've created a new brand with United by Music. "So maybe we can do it again. Also, a lot of people have thanked me for setting this event up," he says. "I appreciate it, but really our performers, our agencies, and our audience turned the event into something I could not have imagined."