

Circle of Friends hits fundraising goal

By Helen Schmidling
Correspondent

The friends and donors of Circle of Friends in Sisters stepped up to the tune of more than \$100,000 Thursday night at the organization's annual fundraising dinner.

Like many nonprofit organizations, Circle of Friends relies on a combination of grants and donations to fulfill its mission of making a difference in the lives of children right here in Sisters. Money raised funds programs and operational expenses. The Circle formed eight years ago with just two kids in the program. Now there are 40, and a waiting list of 12 to 15 in need of mentors.

At the fundraiser, Executive Director Nicky Merritt told the story of one kiddo who, when he first joined, wouldn't make eye contact with anyone. It took his mentor and a staff member half an hour just to get him into the building for Lego robotics. But just three weeks ago, this same boy came running into the clubhouse with two friends, super excited. "When I looked down from the balcony, there he was, one of three little boys, dancing! Three years ago, we couldn't look him in the eye, and now he's dancing!"

"Many of our mentors have been here seven or eight years," Merritt said. "Thank you for sticking around." She also thanked the volunteers, parents, community partners, and board members "who are

part of the circle that makes life better."

"Tonight is about our future," Merritt said, "about how we're going to reach the kids we can't reach, who need our program and activities.

Developing social skills, interacting with other kids and adults, is one of the primary goals for Circle of Friends. It's a byproduct of activities like cooking, STEM, homework help, game nights, field trips, summer camps, and other supervised adventures.

Circle of Friends is the local affiliate of a national organization called Friends of the Children, begun in Portland 25 years ago by Duncan Campbell. Research says that the single most important factor for building resiliency in children who face the highest risks is a long-term, consistent relationship with a caring adult. While group support is good, a one-on-one relationship over a period of time makes a huge difference in a child's life.

Unlike Circle of Friends, Friends of the Children provides a salaried, professional mentor, called a Friend, for the entire childhood, from kindergarten through graduation – 12.5 years – no matter what. In all of the other communities where Friends of the Children operates, there are *paid* mentors. Sisters is the only community in the country where the organization operates with *volunteer* mentors. The local mentors are carefully screened and

trained before and during their service.

Eric Gabrielson retired from Weiden and Kennedy advertising agency, and now serves as the executive director for Friends of the Children across the United States. His wife, Carolyn Gabrielson, is a member of the Friends of the Children Board in Sisters. She was instrumental in securing a capital grant of \$75,000 from the Murdoch Trust, an announcement made at the conclusion of Thursday's event. The Gabrielsons live at Black Butte Ranch, along with many of the donors who attended Thursday's event.

The event featured a silent auction with nearly 100 items contributed by Sisters residents and businesses. This was followed by a buffet dinner for all 193 attendees, donated by Three Creeks Brew Pub. Then came the live auction, raising \$51,000 from a fishing trip, vacation stays at Black Butte Ranch and a luxury spot on the Oregon Coast, a wine tour, private dinners with Duncan and Cindy Campbell, and last but not least, an African safari photo tour.

Emcee and Board Chair Carole Zosel said "We give because we have more money than most, and we know these kids deserve the opportunity." Then she introduced a video produced by Zion Pictures. Eight-year-old Olivia is the star of this short movie. She's the daughter of parents who

are drug-addicted, and now serving time in jail. At age 56, Olivia's grandmother, Debra, adopted Olivia and her two siblings.

Annette is Olivia's mentor. "When I tell Olivia that Annette is picking her up after school, she says 'Oh, Boy!'" Debra says, and it's so real. "On those days when I pick her up, I drive to school and wait until she gets out," Annette says. "Then we go to the clubhouse."

“ I like coming here. It feels pretty special. — Olivia

"I like coming here," Olivia says in the video, while making blue and purple slime. "It feels pretty special." But as she learned how to create textured dough from cornstarch, water, and food coloring, she was also learning how to interact with other kids and with the adult friends around her. "I don't know how to say thank you enough," Grandmother Debra said.

As the evening wound down, the donors left FivePine Conference Center bearing handmade bookmarks from the children, and tiny succulent plants from the centerpieces. Those who could gave generously from their wallets. But everyone gave from their hearts.

Rhythm and Brews fest to offer single-day tickets

Early release tickets sold out for the 2019 Sisters Rhythm and Brews after 30 days. The festival is set for July 26-27 in Sisters.

In an effort to make this year's festival accessible to all, Sisters Rhythm And Brews has announced the release of a limited number of single-day tickets for this year's event. Two day Festival passes remain available at \$110.

"Last year over 60 percent of ticket sales came from outside of Central Oregon, with folks traveling from all over the U.S. to our small town, many for the very first time," said co-founder Joe Rambo. "The Festival has created the buzz they were looking for and are headed to sell out!"

Friday night's performances include: The White Buffalo; British blues phenom Joanne Shaw Taylor; the return of last year's stand-out Mr. Sipp; and Portland's SassaParilla.

All for \$45. Saturdays lineup features Larkin Poe; Eric Gales; Christine "Kingfish" Ingram; Mr. Sipp; Hillstomp; David Jacob-Strain; McDougal; and CJ Neary.

All-day passes are \$75. For information visit www.sistersrhythmandbrews.com.

CAMP SHERMAN NOW OPEN!
Open 7 days a week, 12-9 p.m. | 541-595-6420

REDUCE : IDEAS & INSPIRATION

IF YOU DON'T USE IT—
OPT OUT OF IT

Rethink about it!
Opt out of waste at home and work, including junk mail, paper bills, magazines, phone books and more. For more ideas and to learn how to streamline, visit our website and get started.

RethinkWasteProject.org **RETHINKWASTE**

JOSH RITTER
and The Royal City Band

CONNECTED CREATIVITY

OPENING SET - SLATER SMITH OF THE WEATHER MACHINE
JUNE 27 - 7PM

SISTERS HIGH SCHOOL CELEBRATING THE RELEASE OF HIS 10TH STUDIO ALBUM *FEVER BREAKS*

TICKETS - SISTERSFOLKFESTIVAL.ORG - 541-549-4979 EXT 3