

Oh, WOW

THE WOW HALL'S ANNUAL MEMBER MEETING REVEALS A SPLIT BETWEEN SOME MEMBERS AND THE NONPROFIT'S CURRENT BOARD

By Taylor Perse

The WOW Hall has been vacant of people and music performances these last few months; like other music venues it was dealt a blow by the COVID-19 pandemic. But even as the venue remains empty, the board of directors, some of its members and a third-party group are disagreeing on its future.

The third-party group, known as Friends of the WOW Hall, say they are advocating for the nonprofit venue to restructure its finances and diversify the use of the building, but other members disagree, not wanting to make drastic changes to the longtime music stalwart.

Tensions between members of the Community Center for the Performing Arts, as the WOW Hall is formally known, and the new group Friends of WOW Hall revealed themselves during a four-hour annual member meeting on Sunday, Aug. 9. The membership passed the annual budget and operating statement. But the planned election of new board members failed when a new voting system, brought in by one of the feuding factions, didn't work.

"The board members scheduled a meeting. But was pretty much run by Friends of Wow Hall acting as a 'shadow' board," member Mayo Finch says. Finch was also previously on the CCPA board, until around 2015, he says.

Finch also said that Friends of WOW Hall implemented their own voting system for the board election.

The system, which comes from a national software company called EasyVote Solutions, was intended to be used as a way to vote virtually. But Finch says that the voting system was not approved by the board, and that a board candidate had set it up.

Bob Fennessy, publicist for WOW Hall, says that the owner of EasyVote said during a Saturday night meeting that payment to use the system was coming from Friends



Photo courtesy WOW Hall

of WOW Hall, instead of using WOW Hall's money. A candidate for the board of directors called Fennessy before the meeting on Sunday morning, he says, letting him know that they would turn over the EasyVote account to him, as an administrator.

"I never got that account," Fennessy says.

In order to vote, Finch says that a moderator of the meeting said that people could also vote publicly for who they wanted to elect, or by email.

"They were creating the guidelines and procedures on the fly, which were not approved by the board of directors."

Friends of WOW Hall, on its own website, asks for a change of direction for the facility. The group is composed of current CCPA members who are unhappy with how the current board of directors are operating CCPA. A lot of them have not been members prior to this year.

"Most of the people who joined the suggestion of Friends of the WOW Hall have not previously been members or volunteers," Fennessy says. An individual can become a CCPA member by volunteering 10 or more hours or by donating \$15 or more.

In an opinion column published by *Eugene Weekly* on July 30, Friends of WOW Hall founder and former CCPA board member David Zupan alleges the venue struggled with financial issues at the beginning of the pandemic.

Friends of WOW Hall say they seek to reorganize the music venue, diversifying the performances and the target audiences. This includes adding more classes and hosting shows for different age groups. Zupan also wrote that the finances would be structured more modestly, focused more on "giving back to the community" through service.

In a statement to *EW*, Zupan wrote that the meeting brought hostility towards candidates over the voting system. He adds that without Friends of WOW Hall efforts in creating their own procedures for a voting system, nothing would have gotten done.

"A number of staff members and their supporters heckled, were verbally abusive and often defamatory toward anyone expressing a different perspective than the one they shared. This included statements asking candidates they disagreed with to drop out of the election."

Another WOW Hall member, Fran Chylek, who says she was at the annual member meeting, says that the meeting didn't seem to be well planned.

"There is a schism between this particular group calling themselves Friends of WOW Hall and a lot of WOW Hall supporters," she says. Chylek adds that she has also heard a lot of hearsay and misinformation about the struggles between different groups.

"Things were not clear on what people wanted," she says of the meeting. After the meeting ended and no one was elected, she says that people were not really allowed to ask questions and didn't get answers.

Though new board members were not finalized, Fennessy says that the board of directors will determine when a new meeting will take place to vote again, within 30 days. ■

HAPPENING PEOPLE by Paul Neevel

Willa Bauman

Born and raised in Eugene, Willa Bauman is the daughter of Dana and Colleen Bauman, who opened their Dana's Cheesecake Bakery booth at the Eugene Saturday Market in the summer of 1980. They opened a booth at the Oregon Country Fair two years later, and Dana's Cheesecake has been a treasured treat at both locations ever since. "I was a month and a half old at my first Country Fair," says Bauman, who was home-schooled through high school and also took courses at Lane Community College. She spent four years in Portland to earn a degree in English literature from Reed College, where her graduating class was 300 students, then returned to Eugene and resumed seasonal work at Dana's. She also worked with her dad to turn a 100-year-old barn on the family property into a house. "I moved in in 2014," she says. "I was into power tools. I built chicken houses and raised pullets." In 2018, she began a master's degree program in nonprofit management at the University of Oregon and also responded to a job listing as operations manager of the Eugene ToolBox Project, a community tool library that was started in 2015. "I got the job," she says. "It seemed like a good fit. I know how empowering it is to build something for the first time." Toolbox Project membership is open to all residents of Lane County over the age of 18 and provides access to a library of more than 1,500 hand and power tools. Visit EugeneToolBoxProject.org to learn about membership, to view an illustrated catalog of available tools, and to reserve tools by email or phone. Bauman received her UO nonprofit management diploma in June, as the Toolbox Project began to reopen after two months of pandemic closure. "It feels great to be open again," she says. "We're growing so much and taking on new projects. It's really a lot of fun."

