

Brann Family strikes a chord for local charities

By Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

If there's a local music event for the purpose of raising funds for charity, it's a solid bet that the Brann family is in the mix. The family often donates the use of their theater, the OK Theatre in Enterprise, as well as their considerable music talents — often both.

Darrell Brann is a relative newcomer to Wallowa County, having grown up in Maine. He became acquainted with the area after a marathon car delivery from Maine to Corvallis, finding Joseph and Imnaha during the return adventure. After return to the East Coast, Brann met his future mother-in-law, who told him she had bought ranch property in Joseph and invited him to work there for a summer.

Remembering the beauty of the area, Brann readily agreed. Over Thanksgiving weekend, Brann's future wife, Christi, came home to the ranch for a visit.

"That was it for me," Brann said with a laugh. The couple married the following summer in the year 2000.

As the Branns began having children, they started playing as a family in 2006-'07.

Darrell Brann got interested in the OK Theatre after watching several music acts and being impressed with the sound.

The Branns spent several years both organizing and performing at benefits while bringing such diverse artists as Eric Bibb and The Infamous Stringdusters to



Steve Tool/Chieftain
Darrell and Christi Brann with children Alden and Isabella.

the area. Eventually the theater went up for sale. After it sat on the market for a year or so, the Branns purchased it in 2013.

"We started looking at it as viable even to rent the space out to other people so community events could happen in there again," Darrell Brann said. "By December, we had the school back in there again, and people started renting it right away."

Although the theater regularly hosts benefits and shows by both the Brann family and outside interests, the Branns know their name is associated with the theater and try to ensure all its events meet a certain quality standard.

"We're starting to have events where we're drawing 20 to 40 people from as far away as Seattle," he said. "Those people rent hotel rooms and eat out — it's good for the community."

Part of the goal of the Brann family is to bring in types of music not readily available to local listeners. For example, Darrell Brann and his brother Craig played a well-attended acoustic blues set at the

Rimrock Inn earlier this summer, as well as a follow-up concert at the OK Theatre later the same week. "We also try to work with local musicians. We appreciate what they do," Christi Brann said.

Although the Branns hope their theater does well and point out that well-attended shows are a benefit to local businesses as well as themselves, they look at it as a community asset. Both Darrell and Christi Brann say they enjoy seeing the theater used for events such as the firefighter/Red Cross benefit. Other nonprofits including Creating Memories and Divide Camp use the theater as well.

"We're really trying to build up the theater because we look at it as being for everybody, community wide," Darrell Brann said.

The Branns also volunteer at their church, help elderly neighbors get firewood and tutor at Classical Conversations, a local alternative to public school.

"We just try to pitch in wherever we actually can," Darrell Brann said.