

Performers raise money for children to Make-A-Wish

Hali Ledford

HLLEDFOR@UNCA.EDU
STAFF WRITER

Musician Mickey Hayes helps make wishes come true for children with life-threatening illnesses in Western North Carolina through the annual Asheville Make-A-Wish Benefit Concert.

"To me, the mind can do a lot of things, and if you put a kid in a good frame of mind and a family in a good frame of mind just for a week and grant their wish, it changes their whole perspective on what's going on," Hayes said.

After spending years touring with musicians such as Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings and Warren Haynes, Hayes moved from Nashville, Tenn., to Asheville to raise his two sons, who were born with major medical problems.

He said he found an abundance of support from the community and organizations similar to the Make-A-Wish Foundation. He said Make-A-Wish was an organization he strongly believed in because of his own experiences with his children, so he decided to become involved with the charity.

"I thought, 'You know, if I'm going to do something for a charity, I want to do it for something I believe in, not just pick one out of the phonebook,'" Hayes said. "I researched Make-A-Wish and found out what they were all about, and it kind of struck home with me because I felt lucky after meeting some of the kids and some of the serious illnesses they have, life-threatening illnesses. It made me think that these guys are doing a great job, so I felt it was a natural thing for me."

Hayes has promoted the show in Asheville for 10 years, but this year marks the event's third year as the official Asheville Make-A-Wish Benefit Concert.

"I wanted to be more closely aligned so people would realize from the name of the show what we were doing," Hayes said.

Since he took over the music jam, more than \$80,000 have been raised for the charity. The Orange Peel will host the concert on Thursday night with 100 percent of the proceeds going to the Make-A-Wish Foundation of WNC to grant wishes to children in the area.

"Without them, I don't think I could have raised what I've raised. I knew



photo courtesy of Micky Hayes

Crowds cheer on performers at The Orange Peel during last year's Make-A-Wish Benefit Concert. All money made during the concert goes to the Make-A-Wish foundation of WNC to fund wishes in the area.

that I had to have a really top-notch venue to put on a show that will generate enough excitement to bring in good crowds every year," Hayes said.

Hayes began working on the show in September, contacting bands and lining up entertainment. This year, the show will include music from Matt Stillwell, the Rock Academy Kids, Avyntra, Contagious, the Sharkadelics, Ironside, Crocodile Smile and DJ Moto.

"I've been working for the last couple of years trying to bring a national act in, and I finally succeeded this year with Matt Stillwell," Hayes said. "He's a fast, up-and-coming country star, originally from Sylva, so he's a North Carolina boy."

Sharkadelics guitar player Alton Eddins said the band is happy to play in the concert each year to give back to the community.

"It's a great cause to raise money for the kids. We've been doing it 10 years and it's really a good thing," Eddins said. "We don't play too many charities, but this is one well worth playing for. Hopefully, every time we play it

affords each child an opportunity to get one of their wishes granted, and if we can be any part of that then we're all about it. It's just such a joy to see the look on their faces when they're out there."

The Make-A-Wish foundation of WNC has completed 40 wishes in the past year for children between the ages of 2 and 18 who have life-threatening medical conditions. On average, a single wish costs \$6,000 to fulfill, according to **Make-A-Wish Regional Director Carolyn Harrison**.

"I would like everyone to know that we are a local charity and we're hurting too. Our funds are down \$30,000 from last year," Harrison said. "Wishes are funded through contributions. We don't have any government assistance. It's strictly companies, corporations and individuals that donate money."

Harrison said most young children wish for a trip to Disney World while older children choose shopping sprees, cruises, a computer, college tuition or a room makeover.

"We try to fulfill their wishes whether they want to be a cheerleader at Car-

olina or the Cowboys or they want to become a model," Harrison said.

According to Harrison, Make-A-Wish of WNC does not deny a wish as long as the child is eligible.

"They know upfront we do not do underground pools. That child just has to come up with another wish, but we will do a hot tub and we will do aboveground pools," Harrison said.

The WNC native said she has thoroughly enjoyed working for Make-A-Wish for the past seven years and looks forward to many more years with them.

"It's always sad to lose a child, but it's also so rewarding when you know you have given a memory to a family," Harrison said. "It involves not just the child, it's the whole family. It takes them away from thinking about doctors and shots and hospitals and treatments. We take care of the whole family, we don't just take care of the child who has the illness."

The Asheville Make-A-Wish Benefit Concert will begin Thursday at 7 p.m. It is open to all ages and admission is \$10.