

United by Music festival Jan. 19 will help out United Way



By Mike Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

A music festival is coming up on Jan. 19, presented by Tweed and Company, that will be a celebration of North Hastings and Community and will help United Way HPE reach its annual fundraising goal of \$2.2 million and the work they do. The doors to this event will open at 6 p.m. at the Village Playhouse in Bancroft. Tickets are \$25 plus HST and are available at www.villageplayhouse.ca/united-by-music. Jennifer Smith, director of donor relations with United Way HPE, Stephen Petrick, journalist, educator, volunteer and creator and organizer of the event, and two of the musicians performing that day, Abe Drennan and Janet Whiteway, comment on this music fundraiser. United Way HPE issued a media release on Dec. 19 about the United by Music festival, which will have a host of musical talent assembled at the Village Playhouse to raise money for United Way HPE's annual fundraising campaign and to raise awareness of United Way HPE funded agencies in North Hastings. Smith says the presence of United Way HPE in the North Hastings area has a direct impact on the well being of the community. "Without United Way's support, the agencies relying on funding would struggle to provide their vital services, potentially leaving vulnerable populations without the necessary assistance they require. This is a great way to raise awareness," she says. An award-winning folk artist with Bancroft roots, Drennan will be headlining the show. More information can be found at www.abedrennan.com. Drennan told Bancroft This Week that it's an honour to support United Way in achieving their fundraising goals. "After many years away, I am thrilled to return home and reconnect with old friends and see familiar faces again. I cannot wait to set foot on the playhouse stage where I found my passion for performance many moons ago. See you soon Bancroft!" he says. Whiteway, a solo artist and a member of the Coe Hill Girls, will be taking the stage on Jan. 19 as well. More information can be found at www.jdwhitewaymusic.com. Whiteway told Bancroft This Week she was thrilled to be part of this fundraiser and hopes she can help bring awareness to our community of all the great services the United Way provides. "It's going to be a fun night featuring local musicians and there's no better way to spend an evening!" she says. Also, on the bill that evening is Appalachian Celtic, featuring John Foreman, a band that's a North Hastings music scene staple, and the Shawashkong Ikwe Singers, performing Indigenous music and celebrating North Hastings' strong Algonquin community. Smith told Bancroft This Week that this is the first year for United by Music and the idea was brought about by 2023 campaign cabinet member Petrick, who wanted to introduce a fundraiser to the Bancroft community that would bring the community together while also raising awareness about United Way funded programs in the area and the important work they do. "We hope people will attend this first of its kind event! This is a hyper-local event with local bands performing and proceeds staying 100 per cent local, supporting United Way HPE's annual fundraising campaign. We would like to thank Stephen Petrick and the Village Playhouse for including United Way HPE in this exciting initiative!" she says. Petrick came up with the idea of having this event on Jan. 19 and said that as a cabinet member, he's tasked with having fundraisers to support the United Way campaign and build new connections. Initially he said he didn't know what fundraiser to do,

but says he plays guitar and thought 'why not try and do a music show?' He says it was a way to get to know people in the music community locally and raise some money. He says this event was born out of emailing everyone he could think of with a connection to music in Bancroft. 'The really interesting thing is I never thought this event would become what it has become; an event in the best venue in town with a headliner from northern Canada. I thought this might be a glorified open mic, but with each piece of advice I was given, I learned more and more that if we do it, it has to be done properly,' he says. Petrick says he 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 to them and are selling tickets for them too. He says he realized it had to be a ticketed show for them to make money and they needed a good headline act to draw people in, with of course Drennan providing that headlining act. When Petrick pitched the idea to United Way HPE and the people in the music community, they were very supportive and he knew this event would work. And between acts, people from United Way funded agencies will be talking about their programs and why United Way funding is so crucial to them. 'I really want this to be, not just a celebration of music, but a celebration of our non-profit sector here in Bancroft. For instance, one person who's agreed to speak at the show is Melissa Baldwin, who works as an addictions counsellor based out of [North Hastings High School] and her employment is through [a Youth Diversion program called KAIROS], funded by the United Way. So, I am thinking, wouldn't it be great if 200 people come out to the event and get a chance to hear about the importance of her work? If that doesn't support the United Way, nothing will,' he says. Petrick believes that if each non-profit really gets behind the event and encourages their supporters to buy tickets, they'll pack the Playhouse. He emphasizes that when you buy a ticket, you're supporting the United Way HPE's campaign, and supporting local musicians. He also wants to give a big shout out to the United Way HPE staff in Belleville, who gave him the green light for this event and have been very supportive all the way. 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 part of the reason he really wanted to do this is that they need to change a perception about the importance of United Way funding in North Hastings. 'I've spoken to people who think that the United Way is a Belleville agency and a donation to the United Way means money is leaving the community. It's actually quite the opposite. We have several non-profit agencies in our community that rely on United Way funding. There are non-profits that could be United Way funded in the past or United Way funded in the future. Really, when United Way campaigns are successful, they have the ability to gain financing for programs they could not afford, or could not fundraise for, on their own. Part of the reason I thought this should even be called 'United by Music' is because I really want those agencies to unite together, to have an opportunity to tell the community 'Hey, we need your support,' he says. Petrick says that if anyone reading wants to reach out to him, they can do so at stevepetrick@hotmail.com. He says he's also hoping they can have a silent auction to raise a little more money and would love to have area businesses donate products. 'Also, if anyone reading this has a connection to the United Way and I haven't been in touch with them, please reach out,' he says. 'I've tried to connect with everyone I can think of, but I could have missed someone.'