



For Immediate Release
June 15, 2020

Media Contact: Keith Martin
KeithTMartin@gmail.com

Behind the Scenes of a Community-Based Fundraiser Re-Energize Watauga: LIVE from the Appalachian Theatre!

It is a rare occasion during these pandemic days when *need* meets *opportunity* through the *arts*, but that is exactly what happened in the creation of a unique fundraising event titled, "**Re-Energize Watauga: LIVE from the Appalachian Theatre!**" A collaboration between the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce and the Appalachian Theatre of the High Country, this virtual event takes place from 5 to 9 p.m. on Saturday, June 20 and involves live performances by prominent regional artists on stage at the Appalachian Theatre of the High Country (ATHC).

But what took place behind the scenes of this community-based fundraiser is noteworthy.

As happens frequently in the High Country, Boone Chamber President/CEO David Jackson was the catalyst for the creation of the Re-Energize Watauga Fund, which exists to provide a rapid source of financial assistance for our Watauga County-based businesses that have been negatively affected by COVID19. Joe Furman of the Watauga County Economic Development Commission jumped on board with the Boone Chamber and Chris Grasinger of Mountain BizWorks offered to administer the fund through his non-profit community development organization.

Danny Wilcox of Appalachian Mountain Brewery serves on the board of the App Theatre and has produced a series of virtual events at the brewery involving local musicians. He mentioned the theatre as a possible location for a fundraising event to Jackson who called ATHC chair John Cooper, and the wheels were set into motion for this unique event.

ATHC Executive Director Laura Kratt put the "fun" in fundraiser by lining up the top talent for the virtual performance, leading off at 5 p.m. with Todd Wright and Friends, another App Theatre board trustee and the "Ambassador of Jazz for the Carolinas." They will be followed at 6 p.m. by the Harris Brothers, at 7 p.m. by Darin and Brooke Aldridge, and at 9 p.m. by the Jeff Little Trio. Their performances will be live-streamed from the Appalachian Theatre courtesy of Wayne Sumner of Jackson, Sumner and Associates via local access cable, a dedicated YouTube channel, and Facebook Live. Online donations can be made throughout the broadcast and a call center will be set up to receive donations during the benefit performance.

Speaking on behalf of all the musicians scheduled to appear this weekend, Wright said, "The arts play a crucial and sometimes unnoticed role in uplifting all of us. Healing arts help light the pathway along life's journey. Since art expresses and reflects human emotion, it's a logical progression to bring talented artists together to do what we do best; to entertain by taking the audience on a journey of deep reflection all the way to joyous laughter."

Wilcox noted that, "Boone has always been known as a town that gives generously when people are truly in need. I know with the virtual show at the new App Theatre, we will be able to demonstrate to the world how well we come together, this time to help local businesses in our community."

According to Jackson, local sponsors who have stepped up to date to help the Re-Energize Watauga Fund include the Appalachian Theatre, Blue Ridge Energy, the Boone Chamber, Deal, Moseley, & Smith, LLP, First Horizon Bank, the High Country Impact Fund, Skyline/Skybest, and Wells Fargo.

Jason Triplett, Northwest NC Community Bank President of First Horizon Bank said, "We are honored to support the Re-Energize Watauga Fund and the Appalachian Theatre. Small businesses as well as the arts are the lifeblood of the High Country and is what makes our community special. They have certainly been through a challenging time these last three months and now is the time for us all to step up to support them. We all can come together for an entertaining evening to bring much needed capital to our small business community to help them get to brighter days. I hope others will join us in supporting what makes our community thrive and contribute to the Re-Energize Watauga Fund."

First and foremost, the event is about supporting local businesses with low interest loans that can provide capital to meet the most pressing needs and successfully navigate around the pandemic. Applications will be accepted as long as funds are available and businesses will need to be prepared to complete an online application, including submission of provide tax returns, profit and loss statements, and bank statements.

Grasinger, High Country Regional Manager of Mountain BizWorks, said, "Companies in Watauga County that are applying for this fund are indicating a need for a cash cushion that will help them float into normal business again; you can call it "working capital." The three months of COVID impact has lessened the business' income and/or increased their expenses. This has eaten up a great deal of savings for businesses around the state and especially in our county. Our Watauga County economy is reliant on hospitality, retail, outdoor, and tourist industry.

"Hospitality and other tourism related industries have been bleeding money out of their bank accounts. This has been primarily due to the state placing restrictions on their operations or a general lack of sales because travel has been limited for much of the US population. Many rural small businesses either missed the opportunity to receive federal funds or did not receive ENOUGH funding from federal relief programs.

“Not only has Watauga County been impacted by the lack of tourism-based commerce,” said Grasinger, “but the local university was forced to remove most of the student body from campus, due to COVID. In addition to providing a great supplement to our local market, students also attract sports fans and family to visit and spend their money here, while enjoying everything Watauga offers. Watauga offers a feeling of freedom, adventure and community. We are a retreat and have been lodged in the minds of millions of individuals and families that have visited our mountains. They either remember staying here at a cabin, visiting an attraction, staring across the blue ridge from an overlook, graduating from an incredible university, or eating an outstanding local food place.

“All of those experiences have vendors and businesses that support this activity: electricians, plumbers, print shops, design teams, consultants, builders, makers... all types of supplies, vendors, services, etc. That is our economy and it all feeds into creating unbelievable, magical experiences, for families and individuals. The impact of COVID-19 has put many of the small businesses that create those experiences at risk. This not only affects the business itself but the entrepreneurs and employees behind the business. The individuals and families that have chosen Watauga as their home and rely on typical commerce to survive and thrive here.

“The loan terms are simple and straightforward. An applicant that qualifies and can provide us the required documentation should be able to have funding in their bank account within two weeks or less of application. We need to spread the word and get this financing to as many local businesses as possible,” said Grasinger. Further information and applications available at www.mountainbizworks.org.

In summing up this unique community partnership, musician Wright said it best, “We are delighted to come together with other musicians to benefit local businesses during these challenging times. Local businesses help to keep the community on sound footing, and now's the time to help them maintain a solid foundation. I sincerely hope the community will join in, and call in, to ensure this concert will be a success.”

For more information, visit www.apptheatre.org or www.boonechamber.com.

###

Re-Energize Watauga: LIVE from the Appalachian Theatre! Biographies of Featured Artists and Performance Schedule

Todd Wright and Friends at 5 p.m.

Todd Wright, an Ambassador of Jazz for the Carolinas, joined the Hayes School of Music faculty at Appalachian State University in 1990. As Director of Jazz Studies, he has been responsible for directing instrumental and vocal jazz ensembles and oversees the course of study for the Jazz Certification Program. Wright was selected a winner of the Jazz Fellowship Award given by the North Carolina Arts Council, and in 2014 was nominated to represent Appalachian State University to receive the O. Max Gardner Award. He is an active jazz saxophonist and is president of North Carolinas' High Country Jazz Society.

The Harris Brothers at 6 p.m.

Reggie and Ryan Harris are a real brother duo born and raised in Western North Carolina where they were exposed to a wide variety of music from an early age. The Harris Brothers started playing string instruments and singing as small children and are part of a musical family that still gets together to play. They have been playing professionally as a duo for more than twenty years, showcasing their unique style. The intuitive nature of their interaction, in regard to both playing and singing, can only be achieved via the relationship between brothers. Reggie sings and plays guitar, banjo, and a kick-drum suitcase for percussion; Ryan sings and plays the bass.

Darin and Brooke Aldridge at 7 p.m.

The North Carolina Rounder Records recording duo Darin and Brooke Aldridge has spent a decade amassing a fan base, reaping awards, becoming Grand Ole Opry favorites, and issuing a string of well-received albums. But the release of their latest album, Inner Journey, is a diploma of excellence for the team. The album garnered the duo their highest chart debut to date, entering the Billboard Bluegrass Album chart at #2. Brooke recently took home the International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA) award for Female Vocalist of the Year for the third consecutive year. In 2017, Darin received the IBMA award for Mentor of the Year.

The Jeff Little Trio at 8 p.m.

Jeff Little is an award winning musician from the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. He has not only been recognized as a critically acclaimed musician but also a true innovator in acoustic music. Jeff stays busy traveling the country performing concerts with an energy and dedication to his music that is evident at every show. Performances include The Smithsonian Institution, The National Folk Festival, American Piano Masters, Merlefest, and many festivals, performing arts centers and music venues throughout the U.S. In 2014 Jeff was inducted into the Blue Ridge Music Hall of Fame.



BOONE
AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE