

Why support UPAF?

Performing arts go far beyond simple entertainment

GUEST OPINION

By Tim Stewart

When I was tapped to be one of the three co-chairs for this year's United Performing Arts Fund Campaign, I was both honored, and ready to help tell the community why supporting the performing arts is so vitally important.

I've been involved in UPAF for a few years, as a supporter of the arts and a member of the UPAF Next Generation Council, a group committed to introducing the wonders of performance to younger professionals.

For me, involvement in UPAF is personal. Today my family and I live in Waukesha County and I practice law at the Brookfield firm DeWitt LLP.

There's a magical place in Milwaukee called the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center, home to First Stage and the Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra.

My family and I have spent a lot of time in this building. Both my daughter and son have taken First Stage Academy classes there for years. Like a parent watching a child at a sporting event, I have spent countless hours in MYAC and watched

and listened to the kids gain poise and confidence under the steady hand of caring and knowledgeable instructors. I often say that MYAC is quite possibly the most important building in our community. Why? Because the magic that happens under its roof projects kindness, empathy, understanding, acceptance, enthusiasm and youthful energy.

We have heard a lot lately about bullying in our schools and the lack of acceptance on the part of some for people and their differences. Even as a child, I was not immune from some of this and was on the receiving end of some cruel taunting on a consistent basis from third through tenth grade. As a young person, it was hard for me to process this and I didn't have an outlet like MYAC to find solace from this.

What happened to me many years ago is still happening in our schools today, and in many cases, worse thanks in part to social media. MYAC and the professionals working with our kids are in fact, a road map to defeating bullying. The performing arts are an antidote to the cruelty that bullying injects into our children.

The performing arts are accessible to all and the UPAF member groups that educate and train our young people open minds, inspire and soften hearts.

In the performing arts space, you are accepted for who you are, and your differences are celebrated regardless of skin color, gender, home address, economic status or artistic ability. Everyone who enters the doors at MYAC is treated with respect. And it's a respect that these young people will pass on to the next generation.

Your support of the UPAF campaign certainly helps fund the 14 member groups and the incredible (and locally based) music, theater and dance that residents of Waukesha County enjoy. Your donation to UPAF also makes it possible for our children to come into MYAC and other UPAF-supported performing arts venues and play an instrument, sing a song, dance, learn how to do improv ... and be celebrated for their differences.

(Tim Stewart is a co-chair of the 2019 UPAF Campaign and is an attorney and partner with the firm DeWitt LLC.)



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