

Their best work is inspiring

Tommy from 1B

Springsteen has written a lot over the years about people reaching to find the best inside themselves. We hope the folks you'll meet today inspire you to do the same.

Jen Band

The kids don't just act in the play - they sell the tickets and design the posters and do the publicity. And the profits go to charity.

Band

Jen Band's creation.

Jen, who's 28, works in the education department of the Children's Theatre of Charlotte. Two years ago she started Playing For Others on the side as a way to raise money for nonprofits. That first year she partnered with LifeSpan, which works with the developmentally disabled. Playing For Others did "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown" and hoped to raise \$5,000.

They raised \$23,000.

This year's production of "A Year With Frog and Toad" raised \$25,000 for the Down Syndrome Association of Charlotte. Not only that, the kids in Playing For Others buddied up with kids from the Down Syndrome Association - culminating with a walk down the red carpet on opening night.

"Our kids get to do what they love to make a difference in someone else's life," Jen says. "It's like creating a small little family every time you do a show."

More information: <http://playingforothers.org>

Amy Cervantes

Charlotte found ways to help homeless kids at Christmas, Amy figured. But what about on their birthdays?

That was the start of Birthday Blessings, a nonprofit that Amy and her husband, John, started in 2005. Since then she has thrown birthday parties for around 175 homeless children, and more than 1,400 kids have come to the parties.

Amy now holds parties at three Charlotte shelters every month, and just started a partnership with A Child's Place to have parties at Charlotte schools for homeless kids who don't live in shelters.

More than 30 sponsors help out - clowns donate their time, bakeries donate cakes, toy stores donate gifts.

Amy wants to expand Birthday Blessings to shelters in other counties around Charlotte.

"Some of these kids have never had a birthday party before," she says. "It's just amazing to give them one thing in their day that makes them smile."

More information: <http://>

birthdayblessings.org

Ed Duncan

Ed Duncan had to retire from the Concord Police Department because of a back injury - one that led to 11 operations. He wasn't sure what to do with himself.

His wife, Marion, had a friend who asked her to come to a class on foster parenting. Ed came along, just on a whim.

You can guess what happened next.

Ed and Marion have taken in close to 40 foster kids and have adopted seven. Most of the children have mental and physical disabilities. The ones now in their home range in age from 3 to 23.

Ed and Marion raise the kids together, but Marion nominated Ed to get the attention.

"Ed has walked hundreds of miles comforting these babies," she said. "We have been Springsteen fans all along. But I am the biggest fan of Ed's."

Ed, who's 58, is more understated.

"The good thing about it is, you never know what's going to happen one day to the next," he says. "It just takes patience and love."

Rachel Humphries

Two years ago, Rachel met the Montagnards. And now she's helping them meet others.

Rachel was teaching English as a second language at Central Piedmont Community College when the school asked her to teach a group of Montagnards - refugees from the mountain country of Vietnam.

She discovered over time that the refugees needed help - not so much with clothes or food, but with things like practicing English or learning how to work a cell phone. Mostly, they needed friends.

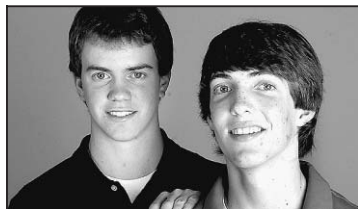
So Rachel and a Queens University of Charlotte student named Lauren Moore started Refugee Support Services of the Carolinas. Its key program is Fruitful Friends, which connects refugees with volunteers who commit to spending time with them.

"It struck me somewhere along the way how important my family and my neighborhood is to me," says Rachel, who's 45. "Doing this made me see that other people need that, too. This is a hard volunteer sell - we're asking people to make friends with a stranger. But when it works, it really makes a connection with our larger community."

More information: <http://refugeesupportservices.org>

Drew and Michael Ryan

They do it to honor their mother. In 2005, Laura Ryan died of melanoma - skin cancer. Drew and Michael decided they wanted to do something to raise



Drew and Michael Ryan

money for cancer treatment. But they wanted it to be something their friends would enjoy.

They picked paintball. They charge \$50 a head for a four-hour paintball frenzy. The first time, 50 kids showed up. Now they've done four events, with everything minus expenses going to the Blumenthal Cancer Center at Carolinas Medical Center. In all, they've raised more than \$8,000.

They also created a tabletop display about skin-cancer prevention that's intended to be shown at swim clubs and swim meets.

Both brothers go to Charlotte Catholic High School - Drew is 15 and a freshman, Michael is 17 and a junior. They also play in a rock band called Refugee, Drew on vocals and Michael on drums.

"We're just trying to do a little something," Michael says. "Just something to make people aware."

More information: <http://www.shootoutforskinccancer.org>

Sherrie Hartsoe Sigmon

A few years ago, Sherrie found out that one of her former students at West Iredell High had a chance to play pro basketball in Spain. It turned out that two exchange students from there had lived with Sherrie over the years. She made a few calls.

And 48 hours later, her former student was on a plane to Spain with a place to stay.

Sherrie has taught at West Iredell for 27 years, starting out teaching English and now teaching Spanish. She also works with a program called Teacher Cadets for high school students who think they want to be teachers. Her former students teach all over the state.

And she's a big Springsteen fan who used his song "The Ghost of Tom Joad" to help teach the John Steinbeck novel "The Grapes of Wrath," which Springsteen used as inspiration.

Sigmon lives in Hickory now, but in her hometown of Rhodhiss - a mill town 65 miles northwest of Charlotte - Sherrie is the unofficial town historian. She's been collecting stories and photos of the town since sixth grade and now has more than 300 photos of life in the community.

"No matter what else I do, I'm always the girl who grew up on a mill hill in Rhodhiss," she says. "Every time I hear (the Springsteen song) 'My Hometown,' that takes me right back home."

More information: ttomlinson@charlotteobserver.com; 704-358-5227; Tommy's Table blog http://ttomlinson.blogspot.com

ON WWW.CHARLOTTE.COM/news
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UNION COUNTY

Marvin council to discuss annexation

Proposal likely to face opposition from affected residents

By RYAN BASEN

MARVIN - Village of Marvin council members plan to discuss an annexation plan that would add 1,855 western Union County acres and almost double the town's population.

It's the town's third annexation effort this year, but this one is different. This annexation is likely to face substantial opposition.

"They're not looking to build a community," said Patricia Bradshaw, who lives near Rea and Crane roads, in the Providence Downs neighborhood. "They're looking to get at our wallets."

Marvin plans to annex land stretching east from its border at Marvin School Road to the town of Weddington, and north from its border at Bonds Grove Church Road to Rea Road.

The land ranges in density from developed half-acre lots in The Reserve neighborhood to undeveloped tracts.

Home values range from \$150,000 on the northern part of Crane Road to 21 homes valued at \$1 million and more in Providence Downs.

Citing the 2000 U.S. Census, a town report says the annexation would add about 3,200 people and \$600,000 in annual revenues to the town of about 4,000. Opponents say numbers are low because the census is outdated.

Marvin leaders say the point is to fill in Marvin's borders and build community. "I don't think council has ever approached annexation from a revenue standpoint," Mayor John Ciaramella said. "A lot of those folks participate in Marvin events."

That would foster the addition of community aspects that Marvin has few of now, said Mike Cognac, a former mayor and councilman. He cited a sense of a home town, recre-

ational facilities and more local events.

Village leaders said the annexation would also help put Marvin's stamp on the community: a rural area with amenities such as the aesthetic viewshed buffers along Joe Kerr Road. "We have a vision for what Marvin looks and feels like," Ciaramella said. "That's what people moved down to this area for."

The annexation would give Marvin zoning control over undeveloped land and farms.

Some of that land belongs to Michael Wingard. Wingard said his family has lived on Wingard Plantation, just south of New Town and Providence roads, since 1932.

"We ought to be able to vote on this," Wingard said.

The village would contract two new full-time police officers, in addition to the one it has now, to serve the area. It would also provide planning and zoning services.

People in the annexation area don't need Marvin's police services, other opponents said. And they did not ask for its planning and zoning services.

Scott Melin, who lives in

Providence Downs and is running for county commissioner, said Marvin should suspend annexation until it either can provide more services or lowers its tax rate.

Tax revenue is an issue because, according to the report, the annexation would provide Marvin an additional \$400,000 beyond expenses. (Opponents say the surplus would actually be \$600,000 to \$700,000 because they estimate the town would actually take in about 4,500 people.)

"We want to know where that money is going," Bradshaw said.

Marvin leaders have not decided what to do with it, Ciaramella said. One idea is to put more money into parks and greenways, but they aren't far enough along in the annexation to discuss it. "I think it will come up in conversation Thursday," Ciaramella said.

Although the leaders say they expect to meet on the annexation plan Thursday, no meeting had been called by Friday afternoon.

Details: www.marvinnc.org or town hall (10008 New Town Road).

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