

Boosting The Arts with HEARTS in Port Washington

By Adina Genn
November 1, 2011

A grassroots organization aims to support music and arts.

In economic downturns, funding for the arts is often at risk. But a group of local residents aims to keep music and arts alive and well in the Port Washington Public Schools.

This group has formed HEARTS, "Helping Enrich the Arts." The organization hopes to "add meaningful value to children's lives" and the Port Washington community by "supporting, promoting and enriching the performing and visual arts programs" in the school.

HEARTS founder Damon Gersh said he wants to "enlist some support to build a core group" to fulfill this mission.

The thinking goes something like this. If the Athletic Association of Port Washington can raise enough money to build a turf field at Schreiber High School and the Port Washington Education Foundation can provide grants to local schools to enhance programs, then why not a similar organization to enrich the arts?

Gersh, a New York entrepreneur, and school liaison Sheri Suzzan, director of creative arts for Port Washington public schools, spoke before a group of about 80 residents at H on the Harbor on Tuesday, Oct. 24, to tell them about HEARTS.

While the district is supportive of the arts, Suzzan noted, there are additional programs that teachers would like to bring into the schools. "There's only so much money we have," Suzzan said. An organization like HEARTS, she said, would enhance what is already a "wonderful, exciting environment."

Asked about budgetary impacts on the arts in Port Washington schools, Suzzan said she would deliver a full presentation at Tuesday's school board meeting at Schreiber, which begins at 8 pm.

Already, HEARTS is planning PortFest, an outdoor celebration slated for Saturday, May 19, 2012. The event will promote Port's history and feature live music from student and local performers, and enable artists to exhibit and sell their work to raise money for the organization. Also in discussion, a campaign to renovate the Schreiber auditorium into a premiere performance space, where donors can sponsor seats, the soundboard, and more.

Now Gersh is actively seeking volunteers to serve as executive director, fundraising chair, events chair, promotional chair, legal chair, and other positions.

To get involved, visit heartspw.org, or email heartspw@gmail.com.

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