

## **Headwaters Council for the Performing Arts brings a world of culture to Eagle River**

### **Story by Timi Eckes**

Since its founding in 1982, Headwaters Council for the Performing Arts (HCPA) has been on a mission to bring quality family entertainment at affordable prices to Eagle River. The organization continues to do just that this concert season, with a string of fantastic performances lined up for audiences to enjoy.

While many in the area are familiar with the HCPA, it seems likely that few people realize just how much effort goes into bringing high caliber acts to the Northwoods. The truth is that a group of dedicated volunteers work hard and put their hearts into providing world-class entertainment to Northwoods audiences.

As they talk about their work with the organization over beverages at Eagle River Roasters, it quickly becomes apparent that Norma Yaeger, Sue Waggoner and Gail Nebgen enjoy each other's company as much as they do their involvement with HCPA. The three women have different responsibilities as board members: Norma is the current president, Sue serves as secretary and Gail is in charge of hospitality and grants. All enjoy music, all share a common interest in the performing arts and all are happy to talk about why HCPA plays an important role in Eagle River.

"I think it's important for a community to have cultural opportunities," Sue says.

"I think it's also good to keep cultural awareness and music alive for the young people in a community," Gail adds.

Promoting cultural awareness and music requires a lot of work and people with the skills to do that work. HCPA board members bring a variety of abilities to the table, among them skills in finance, marketing and other areas.

As the person responsible for hospitality, Gail, who worked on a congressional staff and for the Department of Veterans Affairs, sees to it that performers are served snacks and meals, and takes care of requests they may have.

Sue, a former licensed practical nurse and human resources director at a large multi-specialty clinic, records meeting minutes and performs other secretarial tasks. In addition, she says, "I help out wherever I can."

For Norma, who worked as an office manager and administrative assistant, this is her busiest time of the year with HCPA. Among her many responsibilities, she also prepares agendas, facilitates board meetings, schedules performances and is the organization's "chief encourager." A board meeting is held prior to each show, and she's already currently working on talent and contracts for next season.

In addition to their own tasks as board members, Norma says, "Everybody is responsible for soliciting ads." She's referring to the advertisements in the HCPA playbill, a significant source of income for the organization.

HCPA concerts are held at Northland Pines High School, with Woodland Strings of the North or Northland Pines High School music students opening for the headlining acts. HCPA board members all pitch in the night of each show, putting up posters, ushering and handling other tasks as needed. They also promote and sell season tickets, prepare print materials and publicity, sell CDs at shows, clean up afterward and may even help performers unload or load equipment before and after shows. Summers are spent working on the playbill for the upcoming season.

Coordinating several shows over a period of just a few months is not without its challenges. Some performers offer small windows of opportunity for booking. The talent agencies the HCPA works with

have a rule that a particular act can only be booked once every two to three years. In addition, when scheduling acts, Norma must find a balance between the different types of performances available and what audiences want to see.

“The diversity of our interests, we hope, is reflective of the diversity of our audiences’ interests,” Norma says. In general, people travel to Eagle River from within a radius of 40 to 50 miles to see performances. HCPA board members take a keen interest in how audience members feel and what they want to see.

“Audience feedback is very important,” Norma says. In her “Message from the President” printed in the playbills that audience members receive, she asks for opinions about performances. The responses are taken into account when planning future concert seasons.

Norma, Sue and Gail readily point out that the HCPA’s success is the result of a community effort. One of the organization’s biggest sponsors is Eagle River Roasters, which is the official ticket outlet for HCPA performances and which also provides space for board members to sell tickets and do other HCPA work. Another is BMO Harris Bank, which is the HCPA’s 2018-19 series sponsor. Many other local businesses lend support as well by donating products or services, or by purchasing playbill ads. In addition to support from the business community, season ticket purchases are another main source of income for HCPA.

Of course, the performers themselves are also critical to HCPA’s efforts. When performers take the stage in Eagle River, they have already been screened by the talent agencies representing them. Some have appeared in Broadway productions or on television programs such as “America’s Got Talent.” Many not only endear themselves to their audiences – they also impress HCPA board members with their kindness and down-to-earth demeanor.

“The people [the talent agencies] have brought in are just normal, nice people,” Gail says.

When they arrive in Eagle River, “We encourage performers to have dinner with our board members,” Sue says, explaining that it’s a way of helping the entertainers get a sense of the area and what the audience will be like.

The people behind the HCPA are very good at lining up great acts for Northwoods audiences, but their success hasn’t made them complacent. Instead, they’re continually looking for broader community support and opportunities to present shows of even higher quality.

They’re also enjoying the role they play in promoting cultural opportunities in the Northwoods.

“I enjoy the people very much. This board is very compatible,” Gail says. “It makes me feel good to feel like I’m doing something good for the community.”

*For more information, visit [hcpapresents.com](http://hcpapresents.com).*

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The HCPA’s 2018-19 concert season runs through May 4 and promises to live up to this season’s “Magical Moments” theme. Although this year’s concert season is already in full swing, there are still plenty of shows coming up.

- Saturday, Dec. 1 – Quartetto Gelato: The Magic of Christmas
- Saturday, Feb. 23, 2019 – Babes of Broadway

- Saturday, March 23 – Masters of Soul
- Saturday, May 4 – Brad Ross: International Star Illusionist

Auditorium doors open at 7 p.m.; performances begin at 7:30 p.m.

The cost is \$25 per adult and \$10 per child ages 17 and under. For information about individual show ticket sales, call Eagle River Roasters at (715) 479-7995. Individual tickets may be purchased at the NPHS auditorium the date of the performance (subject to availability).

Season tickets cost \$100 per adult and \$45 per child age 17 and under. A season ticket for a family of two adults and two children costs \$240. For information about season ticket sales, call (920) 676-3621.