

School Opens Doors to Creativity and Imagination

Todd Schmidt, WSMA Board Member

Here is the scenario... You have a beautiful sunny Thursday afternoon in mid-June. You are in Waunakee; a lovely little Wisconsin community of 12,000 people on the north side of Lake Mendota with a view of the capitol dome as it rests on Madison's isthmus. Some of you may be thinking to yourselves, "Ah, yes, the *only Waunakee in the world*," which is expressed on the village's welcoming entrance signs.

A first-ever event is about to take place – scheduled for 3-9 p.m. – and will be held indoors at Waunakee High School. Dubbed *Waunakee's Imagination Celebration*, the event's name itself leaves much to the imagination. Word had gotten around town about the event, but neither you nor any of your neighbors really know what to expect.

So what do you do? Enjoy one of the nicest evenings of the summer and spend it with your family doing outdoor activities? Or, head over to the high school for an unknown and untested event.

Amazingly, for approximately 1,500 Waunakee-area citizens, the choice was to come and experience the village's first ever *Imagination Celebration*. Upon walking through the door, attendees found a gathering of 60 exhibitors (all local citizens or businesses) showing off their creative sides. This was not your typical "craft fair." Exhibitors were not allowed to sell anything. Rather, they were asked to answer the question, "What is it that makes you creative?"

The diversity of exhibitors demonstrated that creativity comes in many forms: candymaking, jewelry design, watercoloring, taxidermy, woodworking, quilting, chiropractic treatment, architecture, photography, cooking, physical fitness, cosmetics, dancing, videography, drama, model railroading, musky lure making, accordion playing, singing and so on... One exhibit included a take-your-own-photo booth, while another had a design-your-own t-shirt machine. A group of middle-school girls even showcased their abilities to create everyday items out of duct tape (easily one of the most popular booths on the floor).

Kids enjoyed visiting a petting zoo (that is, an interactive instrumental petting zoo). Demonstrations were held on floral arranging and cake decorating. Musical groups meandered among the crowd showing off their talents. The evening was then capped off by a Waunakee Community Band concert.

As Waunakee's village administrator I learned something important from this event. Citizens are eager to rally around creativity, imagination, connection, artistry and innovation. It feeds passions and generates energy. All of these things are useful to enhance a sense of community, and give people the chance to connect with where they live in ways that have never been harnessed before.

My message to you, the music educator, is really quite simple. Celebrating all that is creative in your community IS DOABLE.

What we did in Waunakee could be done anywhere. And when you reveal the creative side of a community, you start to energize the community's character. You also start to generate awareness for the arts and appreciation for creative talent. This dovetails perfectly with who you are as an artist and educator.

On top of what it can do for community, there is power in what this can do for your school and music programs. Randy Guttenberg, Waunakee's district superintendent, mentioned to me that he was pleased with the opportunity for citizens to see the school facilities in a whole new light. Some, he said, had never been into the schools before. The positive exposure is a means to generate new support from the general public for the schools and, even more directly, arts-related programs.

Consider encouraging the local government officials in your city, village or town to take notice of the creative side of the community. Encourage them to explore it more deeply with a goal of uncovering something that few ever knew about. The outcome will undoubtedly be good for community, good for schools, good for music programs, and, most importantly, good for the people we serve.

Learn more about Waunakee's Imagination Celebration at www.waunakee.com/celebration.

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Did You Know?

The first full-time WSMA executive director was Richard Gaarder who served for 24 years, from July 1, 1964 to 1988. Henry Wegner, who was part-time, served from 1932 to 1964.