

THE LANTERN

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Festival turns tabs into charity contributions

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With the summer music festival season drawing near, it can be difficult to decide which of the area's favorite festival traditions to attend. There is a rich array of weekend getaway opportunities, but there's one such festival poised not only to provide a good time, but to use every last cent to provide comfort to families with sick children. This stroke of festival genius is Tabfest, and it will be held July 23 and 24 at the Mendon Speedway in Mendon, Ohio.

Tabfest began just outside of Columbus seven years ago as a fundraiser for a close friend diagnosed with a rare kidney disease.

"He went to different places to get treatment and a bunch of my friends at the time were trying to find a way to show our support," Tabfest founder Curt Albers said. "We started collecting tabs and we thought of Ronald McDonald House mainly because it supported kids that had different ailments and their families."

The Ronald McDonald House is a "home away from home" for families who have to travel to get treatment for their children and is run entirely on donations.

"What we try to do is keep whole families together during a time of really great stress both financial and emotional," said Sharon DiLorenzo, development associate at the Miami Valley RMH. "A lot of people think we're funded by the McDonalds corporation or the children's medical center and that's simply not true."

To fill their \$400,000 per year budget, aside from monetary donations, the RMH asks people to collect the pull-tabs from aluminum cans. "The tabs, that's a wonderful thing. They collect so many tabs at Tabfest and we collect those tabs because there's more pure aluminum in those tabs verses the whole can," DiLorenzo said.

Plus, tabs are more easy to manage than the full can and are widely available -especially to the beer-drinking college types. Thus they spawned Tabfest.

The first couple gatherings were just huge parties until the third year when music became involved. Albers has a strong connection to local institutions The One-Eyed Show and Grasshopper Pie and the bands had been meaning to throw a festival.

"We thought about the fact that Curt already had a built-in crowd that came to this party, and it was a fantastic cause that we were all into as well," said Mike Wilson, Tabfest co-founder and One-Eyed Show member.

The founders now have their own foundation, Harmony for Ohio, and the seven of the start in January with conference calls to make this happen.

"We're actually really lucky because the group by coincidence has different people who are good at different things we need," said Mike Switzer, Grasshopper Pie and Harmony board member.

One of the things they needed once they decided to include music was a venue that could accommodate their ever-increasing crowd. Out of relative obscurity came the Mendon Speedway. One of the Harmony members suggested it, knowing that it was a long-time motorcycle racetrack, no longer in use except for the occasional biker party. Its isolated location makes it a perfect spot for camping and loud music.

"I can't think of a more ideal place to have a festival, especially our size. It's super cool," Wilson said. "Where the racetrack was is all grass so we put a stage up with a tent (at one end) and everyone can just gather in the infield. Around the track itself we run a pick-up truck shuttle that goes from the parking lot to the woods. It's laid out just ideally for what we do."

And the owners have been more than accommodating.

"I can't say enough about the people that run and own the place. They're the salt of the earth and real cool to work with. They love us, they love Tabfest, they love the whole cause and idea of it, so they've been real great," Wilson said. "Each year we find things we can do better with Tabfest and each year they see new things that they can do better to make it work better for us too - it's a great partnership."

It seems as though everyone who helps out is more than eager to do so and most have been helping at Tabfest since the first one.

"You don't even have to ask them each year, everyone just expects, 'When's

Tabfest?' 'When's the first meeting?' and everybody loves it, loves helping out," Wilson said.

The cause has since happened to benefit one of their own volunteers who was met with the misfortune of having a child who needed special care. The family wound up staying in the Miami Valley RMH, the very house that receives the Tabfest donations.

"This organization helped them stay there as a family and helped them get their baby well, and it was really neat for me to hear about the charity that we support helping one of our own," Switzer said.

That Tabfest is a not-for-profit event is what he believes drives people to attend.

"I hope people can realize that none of the money's going into our pockets even though we're putting hundreds of hours of work into it, and the more successful the event is, the better we can help the charity," Switzer said.

The Ronald McDonald House has taken to visiting Tabfest.

"Usually, whoever's heading those efforts from RMH Miami Valley will come up with their family and wonder around, check everything out, and give a speech," Wilson said. "We were honored to receive the RMH charities of the Miami Valley "Heart of the House" award last year. They're great people there, they're fired up for Tabfest."

It's no wonder their charity of choice is enthusiastic about the event. Just in the last three years they've received over \$12,000 and 1,000 lbs. of tabs from Harmony for Ohio, 415 lbs. last year alone.

"Four hundred and fifteen pounds of tabs, you wouldn't think how much that is until you see it. One tab is just so light so 415 lbs, that's just inspiring right there," Albers said.

Switzer is convinced that things have gone so smoothly for the in the past because of their good deeds.

"I've really felt that the fact that we're a non-profit has been good karma for us and has led to some of the fact that we've had good weather and people have just showed up. We've built an organization that helps people and we have this event where the tickets are not that expensive, but you get this weekend in this great place to camp with really great music," Switzer said.

This year's musical selections incorporate traditional Tabfest groups The One-Eyed Show and Grasshopper Pie with Dickey Betts and Great

Southern, the Shantee, Guest, JiMiller Band, Skeleton Crew, Four Ohms, and more.

"If you don't want to be up by the music, there's separate parties going on out in the woods. People just grab their coolers, their dogs (yes, dogs are welcome but only if they are friendly and arrive with responsible owners), haul it up to the stage area, throw out a lawn chair and spend the afternoon until they're tired. They can go take a nap, do whatever they want," Wilson said. "It's my favorite time of year."

Each year keeps getting better and better.

"The whole thing has just sort of snowballed," Switzer said. "It blows my mind that it works so well and a byproduct of that is helping people."

Further information and advance tickets are available at www.tabfest.com

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There will be a pre-Tabfest fundraiser 8p.m. Saturday at Little Brothers with Grasshopper Pie, the One-Eyed Show and Skeleton Crew. Admission is \$5.