

Community

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Fashion show to help clothe 6,000 students

BY TRIBUNE NEWS STAFF

An upcoming fashion show and luncheon by Assistance League of East Valley will support Runway for Hope to help provide new school clothing for about 6,000 elementary students whose families are struggling.

The show will be March 1 at the Marriott Phoenix Chandler, 1600 S. Price Road, Chandler.

Several retired schoolteachers from the Tempe Elementary School District are among dozens of women who have been working for months to organize the fundraising event.

"It's rewarding to see the children's smiles when they get new clothes for the first time," said Janifer Gorney, who taught in Tempe schools for 30 years. "I can't think of a better way to spend my time. You know you're making a difference in people's lives."

Fashions from Macy's featuring 21 models will also highlight the event, which begins with boutique shopping and auction at 9:30 a.m. followed by a luncheon at noon.

Among the models will be Rosa Inchausti, Tempe city manager; Robyn Arredondo-Savage, president of the Tempe Chamber of Commerce; and Joel Navarro, firefighter and former Tempe councilman.

Simone Cuccurullo, reporter at Arizona's Family 3TV & CBS5, will emcee the event.

Auction items will include tickets to Gammage Auditorium, Phoenix Suns, Chicago Cubs and Chandler Center for the Arts, in addition to jewelry, wine tastings, beauty products and a hotel stay.

Assistance League of East Valley also provides 14 college scholarships, 3,700

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Retired Tempe schoolteachers Lois Eitel, left, and Janifer Gorney put in many hours volunteering at the Assistance League of East Valley thrift shop and preparing for the upcoming March 1 fashion show and luncheon. (Sarah Auffret/Tribune Contributor)

Tempe rocker shares in Grammy nomination

BY ANNEISE MAKIN

Tribune Contributor

Nakota Hunts-in-Winter, a 19-year-old Mesa Community College student from Tempe, got a taste of the Grammys this month.

He played bass guitar for a revised Alice Cooper song on the Solid Rock Revival album nominated for Best Children's Music Album. It contains cleaned-up versions of Cooper's songs.

How Nakota got on the Grammy ticket was a little "crazy."

"I was hanging out at Alice Cooper Solid Rock Teen Center, playing music, when the engineer came up to me and asked if I wanted to record a song," Nakota recalled. "It happened to be 'No More Mr. Nice Guy' turned

into 'Now I'm Mr. Nice Guy.'"

The Grammy nomination landed Nakota a television interview at Arizona CW7 for the Daily Mix morning show, where the teen bassist played it like a hard rocker.

Since age 15, Nakota has played at Alice Cooper's Solid Rock Teen Center, where he learned to express himself through music. He has shared the stage with greats like Brian Welch from Korn.

Few people know he is autistic.

Though the Grammy went to someone else, Nakota had no time to watch the ceremony anyway: He was playing a gig.

Nakota attended Pomeroy Elementary and Stapley Junior High schools

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The Hunts-in-Winter Family not only are Nakota's biggest supporters, but also his roadies, including, from left, his sister Keya, mom Veronica, and dad Tim Hunts-in-Winter. (Special to the Tribune)

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Nelly Korda

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before hitting a rocky road in high school with his special needs.

He found a home at Banner Academy with basically one-on-one instruction that he said brought him on track for adult life.

By then he was already a bassist, a skill he picked up in fourth grade.

"That's a funny story," he said. "One day they took us into the orchestra room to pick our instruments. I didn't pay much attention, but I wanted to play the biggest instrument, which I thought was the cello.

"They brought out the 5-foot upright bass instead. Boy, was I surprised. And me being a kid, I didn't speak up for myself, which I'm glad I didn't. Because I ended up with a wonderful instrument."

From then on, Nakota played orchestra all the way through high school. In his sophomore year, he got into jazz on the upright bass, then added the electric bass during the pandemic.

And not much later he found Alice Cooper's Solid Rock Teen Center. "That's where my electric bass career launched," he said.

"When I started out in high school, I was not in the greatest state," Nakota said. "But once I found Alice Cooper's Solid Rock, I made lots of friends there. The staff are very kind and friendly. That's what really launched me."

The Solid Rock Foundation provides a music and art haven for troubled teens. It also pushed Nakota to success.

After high school, Nakota enrolled at Mesa Community College., where he is in his second-to-last semester in the audio production technologies program.

"I'm studying the recording and the live sound mixing aspect of music," he explained.

When he is not at the college, he performs or practices – or records his own album. He also plays coffee shops around the Valley with a group called JNX.

At every gig, the whole Hunts-in-Winter family, "Team Nakota," gets on the bus. His dad Tim, mother Veronica, and sister Keya work as roadies.

They carry cases and amplifiers, set up microphones, and make sure it's all

put together right. Mom also ministers to Nakota's calm state.

Younger sister Keya, a talented writer, said having a rocker for a brother is "very different from having a regular brother.

"Our house is usually full with music," she said. "And sometimes he entertains us personally. I think it's really cool."

Although the Grammy passed him by, Veronica Hunts-In-Winter thought the nomination was more than cool.

"This showed Nakota that not only can you reach for the high goals, but you can also accomplish them," she said. "When he recorded this song, he sure wasn't expecting he could possibly get a Grammy."

She is also full of praise for Solid Rock. "They gave him responsibilities and called him out on stuff to follow through. He would listen to them more than us parents."

"Rock music gives Nakota a lot of meaning and purpose in life," his father added. "One time, he wrote to Elton John because his sensory issues overwhelmed him.

"Elton sent a message back through his manager that he cares much about the autism community and that he is happy that his music makes a difference in his life." That was major encouragement for Nakota.

While Nakota was disappointed that the album didn't win a Grammy, his father said, "But either way, it is a huge accomplishment at his age. He was probably the only Native American and the only musician with autism nominated this year."

Nakota added, "Growing up in the Native American community, and in the autism community, has shaped my view of music.

"As Native Americans we are taught that there are songs for healing, for birth, for love, and each song means something to me. And in the autism aspect, these songs calm me down and make me feel like I can be myself. I love to move on stage.

"I am not a bass player who just stands there. I go as wild as I can." ■