

‘Country Against Cancer’ is a Crescent City family endeavor

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The way Billy Lund remembers growing up country, it was out at his grandfather's house where he was first exposed to the musical genre.

"I'd hang out at Grandpa's house, playing country music on the radio," Lund recalled. "I played it so much, I converted the rest of the family."

However, his mom, Nancy, remembers an altogether different influence the music had on her son. "Leanne Rimes was on the radio when he first started listening. He's always been passionate about country music. He couldn't get his homework done, but he knew all the words to all the songs," she said.

These days, the Crescent City natives are on the same page as they promote the sixth-annual "Homegrown Country Against Cancer" fundraiser Nov. 2 at Elk Valley Casino.

In 2010, Lund started his band, Whisky Weekend, named after the first song he ever wrote. “It’s a song about things I used to do - drink whisky, have a good time.”

Then, in 2013, he expanded his growing country music roots into a good cause for the fight against cancer.

“The fundraiser was for these three families with girls, all under the age of 10, with cancer. I don’t remember hearing about that sort of thing when I was young,” Lund said. “So, I reached out to Bicoastal Media and got Elk Valley Casino on board. It was a team effort.”

The next year, Lund expanded the fundraising efforts to a bigger charity, St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital.

Over the five years of the charity concert, Lund said, they’ve raised more than \$75,000. This year, he’s thinking bigger. “The goal this year is the \$100,000 mark. I’d like to blow it away,” he said.

To draw in the music fans, this year’s performances will be acoustic, featuring Lund and two other locals, Jessie G and Camryn Ciara.

“Jessie has played shows in the past. She’s killing it, opening for Lynrd Skynyrd on their farewell tour,” Lund said.

“She went to Nashville six years ago, hit the ground running. She opened for Gretchen Wilson. She’s just very, very, very talented. She’s on the way up.

“Cameron is also insanely talented. She obviously didn’t have the connections Jessie did, but she’s still one of the best female singers I’ve ever heard. It’s just a matter of time before she gets her break.”

In addition to the entertainment will be live and silent auctions. Lund’s mom is helping him twist local arms to donate items to bid upon. “It’s a family effort. Mom has lived in Crescent City since I’ve been alive. She’s well connected and doesn’t mind going around hitting up everybody,” he said.

While the final list of biddable items is still incomplete, Lund said his mother has secured donations from realtors, insurance agencies, beer companies, soda companies, anyone she could get to fill gift baskets and gift cards to keep people shopping local. His mother also auctions off her popular, hand-crafted Raggedy Ann dolls.

“Everybody seems to have a lot of fun. There’s a lot of activities,” she said. “It’s something to get people out of the house. Everybody who goes seems to have a good time. And there’s enough auction items for something in everybody’s price range.”

To fill out the auction items, Lund has twisted a few arms of his own in the country music industry. As an event venue booking agent and through his work in management companies, Lund has made contacts throughout the industry, getting country music stars to donate signed auction items.

He said he’s not above sending out 5,000 to 8,000 emails soliciting the biggest names.

“This year’s biggest donations, for me, were signed guitars by George Strait and Dolly Parton. You don’t get much bigger than that,” Lund said.

“The country music community is very receptive to anything, especially to St. Jude.”

Lund said there’ll be something for everyone, regardless if it’s for the music, the auction, the food or the games. “You should definitely come out. If nothing else, it’s for an incredible cause.

“Don’t feel obligated to spend anything at the auction. The price of the ticket also goes to the cause,” he added.

Tickets to the sixth-annual “Country Against Cancer” are \$25 before the event online at <https://bit.ly/31ziT0r>, or in person at BiCoastal Media, 1345 Northcrest Drive, until Nov. 1.

Tickets are \$30 the day of the event and available at the door of Elk Valley Casino, 2500 Howland Hill Rd.