

Nick and Lisa Rail: Community Commitment, Financial Endowment

By Pam Abrahamsson September 3, 2026



Following the 2019 sale of his chain of music stores, it took only minutes for Nick and his wife Lisa to pledge every penny to the performing arts in public education along the Wild Rivers Coast, where music first entered his life, which led to the formation of PPA, the Partnership for the Performing Arts, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit:

“It didn’t take long to realize that the proceeds of the sale wasn’t our money. It belonged up here, where I grew up, to create the same kind of opportunities for our youth that put the color on my canvas back in 1959 when I joined school band, which eventually led to a highly successful career in music retail.” (Nick Rail)

Our Future is Only as Good as the Opportunities We Provide for Our Youth

Investing in the community where he grew up, Nick and Lisa Rail have, through PPA, underwritten musical performances, enrichment opportunities for area youth, and provided hundreds of top-quality instruments for

local school band and orchestra programs. PPA also spearheaded the renovation of Crescent Elk Auditorium and funded a band instrument repair shop at Del Norte High School to maintain the district's growing inventory while providing vocational opportunities for students.

Generations of students have had no choice but to play their concerts in the gym at the high school. An 800-seat hall built for music, theater, and dance will be nothing less than transformative. The Wild Rivers Performing Arts and Civic Center will sit on the Del Norte High School campus adjacent to College of the Redwoods, readily accessible to all across Del Norte and Curry Counties. An independent feasibility study measured the project against five peer venues in rural markets and gave it high marks across the board, built on a multi-use operating plan that PPA will run. The campaign video on the homepage of PPA's website returns time and again to one line from the people who live here: My Future is at the Center. In August of 2026, the Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation signed on as the Center's first charter member, to soon be joined by other organizations across the region.

Why a Center Matters

- A place for students from both counties to perform, whether it's band, choir, theater, or dance, and for community nonprofits and touring artists to bring the world to our door.
- A regional event center hosting town hall meetings, corporate retreats, wedding receptions, fundraisers, and conferences.
- A safe gathering place for the public in times of emergency, inside the city limits but outside the tsunami zone.
- Economic upside: the Center will generate a minimum of \$1.9 million annually in economic activity, benefiting the hospitality industry most during the shoulder and winter seasons.

This project has moved from concept to reality, and our representatives helped get it there. A \$2.5 million state appropriation secured with the support of Senator Mike McGuire funded the design and planning work now under review with the California Division of the State Architect. Rep. Jared Huffman secured \$1 million in federal funding. PPA was also the recipient of a \$268,250 grant from California Jobs First/Redwood Region RISE. These grants, coupled with invaluable help and support from a host of individuals and elected across Del Norte and Curry counties comprise the extended family that will make this dream a reality for all of us.

Most of the construction funding will come from state, federal, and private foundation sources outside the county. Many of those programs score applications on demonstrated local commitment, and pledges to PPA's Legacy Club count toward the matching funds those applications require. Residents can sign the support petition, join the Legacy Club, donate, or volunteer at community events where PPA will be presenting.

Check out ppadelnorte.org, and stay tuned for a town hall meeting with in-depth updates this fall. The Center is on schedule to open its doors in fall 2030.

