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SwingShift and the Stars hopes to set new records at 2014 Finale

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TRAVERSE CITY – With just one dance left, SwingShift and the Stars Dance-off for Charity’s dancers and pros are preparing for the 2014 season finale. With individuals and the group striving to beat past records, it could be another record-setting year for the local fundraiser.

Last month, the six charities raised more than \$67,000, with Mariposa Pathway bringing in more than \$26,000. Jen Mac, a facilitator for Mariposa, said they knew there was the possibility to raise that kind of money, but the one-night total surprised them.

“We’re an organization full of pretty optimistic women, but we’re a small team,” said Mac. “We knew it was possible because it’s a great organization, and we knew people would give if they knew about us, but that was a pretty big amount. It was very surprising.”

Mariposa Pathway is a program for women ages 18-24 who have little support in their lives. The week-long events offered by the organization gives them the opportunity to step away from that life and claim a different future for themselves.

Originally started in Texas, Michigan is only the second location for the Pathway, and Mac said the funds raised will help them make the Pathway available to more young women.

“Everything is covered during the retreat – all the food, supplies, everything. In northern Michigan we can get a retreat location relatively inexpensively, but it still costs \$2,000 per girl, per week. Most of the money raised will be used to pay for that.”

So far Mariposa has raised nearly \$40,000. Mac, a graduate of the Pathway, is excited for the opportunities these funds will provide for other women.

“I can’t express enough the power behind Mariposa Pathway,” she said. “The women just transform. Mariposa means butterfly, and each day of the retreat is a step toward that transformation.”

Another group that will have the opportunity to touch more lives is Building Bridges with Music, a Michigan-based,

multi-cultural group of jazz musicians who shares the message of open-mindedness, mutual understanding and respect with students.

To help them prepare for the season finale, the Building Bridges group is hosting a happy hour celebration and dance party on Monday, Dec. 15 from 5-7 p.m. at Cambria Suites in Traverse City. It will give guests the opportunity to meet dancers Jeff Haas and Meghan Daigh, as well as kick-off the last week of fundraising.

Karen McCrary, executive director of the organization, said very few schools now have the extra funds for an event like Building Bridges with Music. All of their funds raised during the dance-off will go toward covering those costs.

“One-hundred percent of funds will help us get our music and our message into area schools. We have a wait list of schools who want to bring us in, but they can’t afford it. Every \$1,000 gets us into another school or two, so this could be big for us,” she added.

The group has currently raised \$20,000. McCrary hopes the increased exposure will help them raise even more funds during their final outing.

“There’s a huge fundraising piece of SwingShift, but the other part is bringing awareness to small organizations like ours. Nothing can compare to the awareness that an event like this brings to us.”

Currently in the dance lead is the Leelanau Christian Neighbors team of Troy Broad and Pam McCormick. With 26 points, they are followed closely by the Mariposa team of Heather Rassel and Cliff Shanoski with 25.6 points and the Building Bridges with Music team of Haas and Daigh with 25 points.

Broad, president of Team Elmer’s, is hoping to not only win the dance contest, but also beat last year’s individual charity record of \$105,835 raised, set by Dan Brady and Habitat for Humanity.

To help Broad meet that goal, the Leelanau Christian Neighbors covered an Elmer’s concrete mixer with Broad and McCormick’s picture to raise awareness and encourage donations. With \$100,631 already raised, it’s possible a new record will be set.

The entire group is also hoping to set a new record, beating last season’s total of \$284,000. With a current total of \$227,871, it could be another record-setting season for SwingShift and the community it supports.

The 2014 season finale will be Friday, Dec. 19 at the City Opera House in Traverse City. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. with audience dance lessons at 6:45 p.m. The dance-off begins at 7:15 p.m. For more information on the event, or to find out about ticket availability, visit www.swingshiftandthestars-tc.com.

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