

Alzheimer's Family Services Dinner Showcases 'Susan's Desk'

Written by Editor

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The dueling piano duo of Marty Richardson and Greg Cloninger (aka El Grego) are once again bringing to Port Royal a night of music, laughter, and hopefully a bit of charitable giving. On Friday, June 15th “the show will go on” again. Dueling Pianos, sponsored in part by CBC National Bank, is Alzheimer's Family Services' eleventh annual dinner theatre and their major fundraiser of the year. The agency, a local non-profit, provides education, support and respite to area caregivers of persons with Alzheimer's disease.

“Not to cast a shadow on such a fun and lively evening,” says Executive Director Arlene Heape-Hull, “but if you haven't been touched by this terrible disease or seen it first hand, you might not realize how devastating it is and the toll it takes on the caregivers.” Alzheimer's is the third leading cause of death in the United States and of the top ten causes, it is the only one with no cure. The agency relies heavily on support from the community and their fundraisers to provide the services they do to caregivers.

The doors at the Shed in Port Royal will open at 6 pm for a night of fun, food, music and memories. The evening offers an open bar sponsored by Gilbert Law Firm, dinner from 12 local chefs, a live and silent auction, a retro photo booth to record your memories of the night and as much music as can be packed into the evening.

Included in the live auction is the much talked about “Susan's Desk,” handcrafted by **Steve Lanier,**

retired aerospace engineer who makes furniture as a hobby.

Susan Shaffer,

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whom the desk is named for, worked with Alzheimer's Family Services several years ago. Here, in his own words, Steve explains why the desk has been named "Susan's Desk" . . .

"One year ago, I was in my car at the stoplight at the intersection of Sea Island Parkway and Sam's Point Road. The traffic was fully stopped and as the lights repeatedly cycled I grew increasingly frustrated that anyone would have the nerve to delay my grocery shopping trip. I was alone in the car and have no idea if my screamed wishes of ill will were actually verbal or near-evil thoughts erupting to the conscious. Clearly those utterances are not something to be proud of or easy to even admit. However, a few minutes later I was figuratively dope-slapped as I observed a rollup wrecker hauling a tarp draped, badly crushed car. Instantaneously I knew that something horrible had happened and that only minutes earlier I had been mad as hell that my shopping trip had been delayed. That wasn't to be the last slap.

"A week, maybe two weeks later, while reading through the newspaper, I mentally crumbled as I

was introduced to Susan Shaffer, no longer an obscure traffic accident victim – her small car crushed by a FEMA trailer collecting debris from Hurricane Matthew – but now as a beautiful human who loved life and lived it to the fullest. And here I was, a selfish bastard, angered at being temporarily delayed. To say that I felt like crap is a gross understatement. I couldn't take back the words – words heard by no living soul but me – but I could begin trying to change some of my personal weaknesses. Irrational anger is not an easy thing to change. I not only needed to do a bunch of introspection by I also needed to do something to atone. Perhaps with a guiding hand from God, I believe that the convergence of several items has provided me with just that opportunity. Hang with me as I describe those intersecting items.

"First, I am a retired aerospace engineer (PhD University of Virginia) but I usually describe



myself as simply a furniture maker who loves to make beautiful pieces – especially 18th century reproductions. I give away about 90% of what I make, either to friends or as gifts to charities. There are two rules in my shop. If I build a piece of furniture for you, the price is non-negotiable – it's zero. The second rule is that the piece will be ready when it is ready! Woodworking is my hobby and I will not let it become my job and I'll not allow anyone to own my time. My remuneration is seeing the joy in the recipient's eyes and knowing that I've used my talents to create something that will live long beyond my remaining years on this earth.

"The second item is that one of the potential final-fates that greatly scares me is Alzheimer's. Here in the Lowcountry we have charities that address two aspects of this horrible disease. The first is the Rotary club's CART Fund, which raises seed money for cutting edge research looking for an Alzheimer's cure. The other is Alzheimer's Support Services of Greater Beaufort, a charity directed by Arlene Hull providing support to the caregivers of Alzheimer's patients. Arlene's group has an annual fundraising dinner theatre which includes an auction of donated items. For the Alzheimer's Family Services 11th Annual Dinner Theatre, I built a reproduction of small desk originally built somewhere between 1795 and 1805 in Wilmington, NC. The original is in the MESDA collection at Old Salem. Both Hepplewhite and Sheraton referred to such pieces as Lady's Desks because of their small size and the fact that the delicate tapered legs are remindful of a ballerina on toe. This piece I've built includes a slant front with a full gallery of drawers and cubbyholes.

"Now let's tie all three together. The original of the Lady's Desk was made of mahogany but I've chosen a different wood with a much more direct connection to the Lowcountry, Beaufort, Hurricane Matthew and to Susan Shaffer. Hurricane Matthew felled thousands of trees in Beaufort and the majority of them were hauled off by FEMA to be burned. Among the thousands were a few cherry trees that a local Beaufortonian, Mike Murphy, managed to save from the burn piles and to prepare for future use as furniture. Mike slabbed up the trees, stickered them to air-dry and graciously sold me a few of those cherry boards that I've used to build my reproduction. After talking a bit with Arlene, we agreed that there is but one way forward. The desk to be auctioned on June 15th will be referred to and forever known as "Susan's Desk." Maybe, just maybe, Susan's legacy can live on in the forms of a beautiful Southern Lady's desk, made from a tree that survived Matthew and the FEMA trailer. Also, maybe I've taken a lasting step in atonement."

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It is the hope of both Steve Lanier and the Alzheimer's Family Services, an agency that Susan Shaffer worked with in 2010, that this desk will be a legacy for Susan and will always be used with her and her love of life in mind.

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Tickets for the event are \$65 in advance and \$75 at the door. Tickets can be purchased online at www.afsgb.org or by calling the office at 843-521-9190.