

Constructing a Spencer Bohren Art and Music Residency

Thermopolis, Wyoming

October 2009

Population 3,000 Elevation 4,325 feet
Home of the World's Largest Mineral Hot Springs
Art Budget - Zero

In October 2008, following a successful two day visit by musician and artist Spencer Bohren, we re-booked him for a week the following October.

Now what? Procrastinate? Panic? No - Plan and Persevere!

The mission of the Hot Springs Greater Learning Foundation, run by volunteers without an underlying fund, was to have Spencer reach as many sectors of our community as possible, offering a combination of art and music, while at the same time finding ways to cover his fee.

First point of attack was the schools, which were already familiar with Spencer from October 2008. This time we needed a new approach. For the 2009 proposal, support for a program in the schools was achieved by approaching the Superintendent prior to contacting music teachers, a lesson learned from first time around. With his support behind us, and an agreement that the schools would help cover the cost of Spencer's time there, gaining teacher co-operation was much easier. This is what we ended up with:

- Elementary Students - Spencer used the time with each grade 2 through 4 to demonstrate his instruments and the variety of sounds that could be achieved from each. The students were quickly joining in with rhythm, and word of what they had seen and heard spread rapidly throughout the whole community.
- Middle School History of Rock Class - Spencer performed *Down the Dirt Road Blues*, the history of a song. History and English students who had classes at the same time were also invited to attend.
- High School Music Students - Spencer treated these students to a set of protest music, along with the historical backdrop of each song. Two classes of history students also attended.

Spencer's week was also chosen to coincide with a short school day so we could provide a performance for the over 100 students who attend an after-care program. Spencer successfully adapted *Down the Dirt Road Blues* to cater to the lower elementary students. In all, Spencer's music in the classrooms reached about 300 of our students, almost half of our student population.

Next on the agenda was the decision as to what other sectors of the community we could reach with music. Thermopolis has an active Bluegrass Academy with up to 40 folks of all ages meeting weekly to play together. While Spencer is not Bluegrass, just to have a professional

musician join that group, initially to show some instrument techniques but then to join in with the playing, was a treat for all concerned.

Our Senior Center services about 100 seniors for lunch each day, hence the decision to have Spencer perform for those folks. A free Honky-Tonk country concert was arranged to immediately follow lunch one afternoon, drawing some seniors from neighboring towns. The Senior Center has already asked if we can have a repeat performance.

The Greater Learning Center had already decided upon a public concert in the auditorium on the last evening, with which to help raise some funds; but we still had to come up with another way to use music to raise more funds. Our home is an old converted church so we have a large open-plan living space with a high ceiling, ideal for small concerts. We were thrilled when Spencer graciously agreed to perform a private concert in our home, tickets for which were first offered to the board and supporters of the Greater Learning Foundation. The intimate audience was treated to an evening of outstanding entertainment in an unusual setting with the knowledge they were helping support Spencer's other activities in the community. Upon leaving, many requested we do it again, even monthly if possible! A whole new realm of fund-raising opportunity has been opened up.

In addition to his musical presentations, Spencer produces fascinating shadow boxes, each telling its own story. He offers workshops to teach others how to make such art. Our first priority was to arrange an exhibition of Spencer's art in our museum and cultural center. As Spencer was already in the area, this opened a few weeks prior to the residency with a "meet the artist" reception, enabling us to heavily promote the residency from then on. A few moments were found for Spencer to cut a radio ad, and an interview was recorded for broadcast during Spencer's tenure, all designed to raise awareness of the residency.

A public art workshop was scheduled for community members, with the fee contributing towards cost. Art was then offered to the schools. Due to Spencer's flexibility we were able to accommodate the enthusiastic instructor who teaches art at both high and middle schools. Four of her classes had two art sessions each, enabling Spencer to work with 60 art students. Our museum has agreed to display the students' work for the month following the residency, thereby continuing the impact Spencer's residency has had on our community. This will also generate visitation to the museum as family and friends go to view the students' work.

We didn't quite raise enough funds from these activities to cover the entire fee but other fund-raising activities and grant money helped cover the remainder. Spencer was a pleasure to work with and all evaluations returned were positive, and the benefit to our community from such a successful residency is immeasurable.

I'd be happy to answer questions or provide more information and can be reached at work on 307-864-4070 or at home on 307-864-2662

Jacky Wright, October 2009