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Great Northwoods Gala for the Gulf

Music festival, art sale to benefit hurricane victims Sunday at Moondance Fairgrounds

As Hurricane Rita tore up the Gulf Coast, flooding homes and property along the Texas and Louisiana shoreline, many northwesterners were stunned. From the safety of their living rooms, Minnesotans watched in disbelief as their Southern neighbors once again began coping with devastating loss — just weeks after Hurricane Katrina destroyed much of the same area, including the city of New Orleans.

Great Northwoods Gala

A group of northwoods musicians, artists, volunteers and the president of an events and adventures company have taken up the cause to aid hurricane victims.

The group is pooling their talents to extend assistance to families displaced by the two horrific hurricanes by producing a day-long music festival and art sale. The music festival will kick off at noon Oct. 9 at the site of the popular northern Minnesota music festival, Moondance Jam.

The planned event is the brainchild of Pastor Duane Brown of Longville Community Church.

Who ya gonna call?

Brown enlisted the aid of nationally-renowned wildlife artist and musician Sherry Heitz, who picked up the phone and started dialing.

Heitz's first call was to Kiki and Greg Webb of the acoustic duo, dancing Light. The Webbs agreed to help by organizing the festival and booking talent.

"The musicians responded immediately and jumped on board," said Kiki. "Some are even pulling double duty by helping out as volunteers and organizers."

Although the regional event will raise only a small fraction of the

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resources need to rebuild so many lives, Webb was optimistic.

"In the great scheme of things, the proceeds from our music festival will be a drop in the bucket, but the ocean is vast and deep because of many small drops."

Willing to help

"There's strength in numbers," Heitz commented. She also made a call to Marey Hanson, owner of the Artisans and Crafters Mall in Walker. Hanson invited each of the mall's artists to donate artwork to be sold at the event. Once again, the response was decisive and unanimous.

"We have 100 percent participation from our artists," she said. "Some are even donating more than one item. There are watercolors, oil paintings, jewelry, all kinds of artwork. These are caring artists who jumped at the chance to help out."

Bill Bieloh, owner and promoter of Moondance Jam, was waiting with open arms and open doors to offer his Moondance Saloon and Grill, located on the music festival fairgrounds near Leech Lake.

"I was happy these guys contacted me," said Bieloh. "I've been wanting to help out with the hurricane relief effort, and this gives me an opportunity to pitch in."

Where? When?

Moondance Jam Fairgrounds and Saloon are located just east the intersection of Highway 200 and 371 in north central Minnesota between the towns of Walker, Hackensack and Longville.

Admission to the Great Northwoods Gala is by a free-will offering. The event runs from noon to 9 p.m.

During the gala, food and beverages will be available by ordering off Moondance Saloon and Grill's menu.

Art sale, raffle

More than 100 works of art and community donations will be displayed, raffled off and sold. All donated items will have a "Buy It

Now" price for those who want to make sure they get a specific item. Items not sold earlier will be raffled off at the end of the evening. Additional sale items are welcome. To donate items for the benefit, contact Sherry Heitz at (218) 547-4955.

Entertainers, schedule

The concert will feature the talents of numerous northern Minnesota musicians and entertainers, with Ryan Pels as master of ceremonies.

At noon, Donny Williams, Kristi Morris and Jeff Kellogg, and Jim Burt will take the stage.

At 2 p.m., it's Country Special: Isabel Karom, Jeanette Brown and Will Mutch; Duane and Nettie

Brown; Sherry Heitz and Co.; and Steve and Doyle.

At 5 p.m., listen to the Celtic band Northwind Crossing; Drew Hines; pianist Nina Burke with Heather Dougherty; and dancing Light and Friends.

At 8 p.m., The Woodtick Theater of Akeley's own Woodtick Band will round out the evening.

For more information ...

For more information about the benefit, visit the Web site, www.dancinghighmusic.com/katrina.

All proceeds from the Great Northwoods Gala will go to aid hurricane survivors and their families through the Salvation Army and the Presbyterian Church USA.

