

O Culver City OBSERVER

Vol. 15. No. 28

Santa Monica Observer • Del Rey News • Palos Verdes View

February 1 - 7, 2018

Rx For Healing: A Visit From The CC Strummers

By Sandra Coopersmith

For those served by Mattel Children's Hospital UCLA, it could be said that the January 23, 2018 bimonthly visit from The CC Strummers, the ukulele group headed by Cali Rose who teaches two classes a week at the Culver City Senior Center and can be reached at info@calirose.com, was just what the doctor ordered.

Participating with her were Ed Daniel, Mollie Wine, Ann Cooper, Barbara

Kernochan and Michael Kohan. Their rehearsal consisted of "Carpool Ukulele" in Kohan's van as they drove north on Westwood Boulevard toward UCLA.

Kohan, who described himself as also being the unofficial tech for The CC Strummers, told how their involvement with the hospital originated.

"The class pooled money as a gift to me for helping with technical matters, but I felt it should be used for charitable purposes," he said. "Following discussion it was turned over to the Ukulele Kids Club (theukc.org)."

Its mission is to harness the healing power of music by supporting music therapy programs. It gives ukuleles to hospital-based music therapy programs so that children in need can be sent home with the gift of music for life. To date over 5,000 ukuleles have been gifted to hospitalized children.

"Following the donation I was contacted by Corey Bergman, who initiated the club after his young son died," Kohan continued. "Mattel was one of the places he suggested where we could entertain sick children." And the CC Strummers began bringing smiles to the faces of those children toward the end of 2016, the hospital's music therapy program, which is funded through philanthropic means having



Cali Rose, Mollie Wine, Ed Daniel, Ann Cooper, Barbara Kernochan and Michael Kohan

started earlier that year.

The different techniques utilized in the program include therapeutic lessons with instruments, singalongs, live

music for relaxation and guided meditation, and music improvisation. The music therapists are board-certified

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members of a multidisciplinary care team working to achieve specific clinical goals aligned with the children's care plans. These are children with serious, chronic or life-threatening illnesses, and long or repeated hospital stays are typical.

Upon arrival the group was joined by Jenna Bollard, the hospital's music therapist, who can be reached at (310) 267-9426 and jbollard@mednet.ucla.edu.

With Bollard wheeling a cart containing ukuleles, tuners and songbooks to be given out, the group started doing the rounds and brought welcome diversion to several children and family members. Rose introduced the children to the instrument and had them accompany the group, making for special moments that evoked moisture in the eyes of some of the adults present.

When a patient is in isolation the group plays outside the door; otherwise, they enter the patient's room and gather around the bed to talk and sing.

They don't touch the child or let the child touch the group's ukuleles. When teaching patients how to play Bollard will touch them and guide their fingers.

"I find it to be an immensely gratifying experience because in most cases we're brightening the day for kids who

are going through some very traumatic circumstances," Kohan commented. "Almost always the children get a big smile on their faces, especially when we hand them their own uke.

"Not only does it uplift the child but we also see how it lifts the spirit of the family members who are there. I've had a good amount of experience in hospitals for my own ailments, so I'm able to look past what the kids are going through and focus on the greater good we're doing."

The group is very much involved in volunteering.

In addition to the bimonthly stint at Mattel Rose stated that "every other month we play for the seniors at Opica Adult Day Care Center in West Los Angeles. With the help of the able staff we get folks dancing and singing along in a very robust way. We are doing music therapy. The seniors experience rhythm, melody, harmony and the blessings of community because we all sing and dance together! Several of our members also volunteer at the Marina Del Rey Middle School."

Describing the effectiveness of collaboration, Cooper added that "many group members became LAUSD volunteers in order to work with the students. Beginning in fall of 2016 we started a

ukulele club that meets once a week during lunch. The club was the inspiration of Lillian Jenkins, a longtime supporter of the school where her children attended. She found a teacher sponsor, Naomi Roth, to provide the room and space to keep the ukuleles. Lillian recruited the volunteer teachers, now numbering about 7. She purchased most of the ukuleles, with some donations of both ukuleles and money.

She also plans the schedule to keep things moving along. Last year we had about eight students and this year we have 15 attending regularly. They all learn basic ukulele skills and chords and have fun playing songs together."

With the conversation returning to Mattel, Rose had high praise for Bollard, stating that "with the help of the music therapist, whom I swear is an angel incarnate, we brought the ukulele to the intensive care unit at Mattel. Doing something like this changes you. Our entire group has been transformed because we are all part of this journey whether we set foot into the hospital or not.

"As of August 2017 we have donated over \$1,000 to the Ukulele Kids Club. That's a lot of ukuleles . . . and a lot of smiles. And I must mention that we owe our lives to the Culver City Se-

nior Center and especially our fiercest advocate there, Debbie Cahill, Senior Program Specialist, for supporting us and our work in the community."

Rose was thrilled to share that "last year we were presented with a beautiful scrapbook of all the visits we have made to Mattel including some very kind words, as well as a 'thank you' ukulele painted by one of the patients."

Although they mostly give ukuleles away to the young patients, they have also given them away to parents who learn to play and can then play for their children and teach them how to strum. "We want 'making music' to be a family experience," Rose said.

"We know how music heals," she added. "It may not cure, but it changes something inside and that gives us a chance to 'be' with ourselves – and the world – in a different way. It gives us a second wind, a fresh start, new eyes to see and an open heart to feel and love."

It was apparent from the expressions on the children's faces during this visit that the music, compassion, camaraderie and pure joy radiating from The CC Strummers immediately provides a large measure of relief for whatever ails you – and this prescription causes absolutely no negative side effects!