

Souza benefit meets Miami Beach Rock Ensemble on May 2

Central Valley — On May 2, at 7 p.m. at the Central Valley Elementary School on Route 32 in Highland Mills, the Robert W. Souza Scholarship for the Performing Arts offers its latest presentation: "Miami Beach High School Benefit Rock Show."

Directed by Monroe-Woodbury graduate Doug Burris, the show will include performances by Miami Beach High School's award-winning rock, classical guitar and jazz ensemble groups.

A member of the extended Amy Bull Crist family, Burris graduated more than 30 years ago from the M-W district, where he was introduced to music and first learned to play trumpet and baritone horn. His family association with late family matriarch Amy Bull Crist is what led him and several siblings into teaching - three of the four Burris children are teachers. His brother Dave is also a music teacher in Florida and graduated from M-W in 1975, where he had Bob Souza as a music teacher.

Burris still maintains close ties with childhood friends in the area, one of whom is Ronnee MacDonald, a member of the Souza Scholarship Committee.

"Doug and his guitar quartets, jazz band and rock ensemble will be competing the following day in the New York Music Festival in Staten Island," MacDonald said. "He called me some time ago and offered to donate the time and talents of his music groups to benefit our performing arts students, and to provide his students with a warm-up in front of a live audience for their juried Saturday performances at the competition."

One interesting sidelight to this event and the man behind it - Burris conducts and teaches guitar from a wheelchair, only able to move his head after a long affliction with multiple sclerosis.

"We want to express Mr. Burris our deep gratitude for his most charitable gesture, across the miles, to help our aspiring musicians and performing arts students," Souza chairman Bob Curtis said. "In that spirit, a portion of our proceeds from the event will be donated to the local Southern New York chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society in the name of this very special teacher and generous person."

Awards earned by Burris include: The National Multiple Sclerosis Society's 2003 National Achievement Award; Florida's Opperman Citation For Outstanding Accomplishment In Teaching And Leadership, 35 Years Of Dedication to Music Education at Miami Beach Senior High School, presented by The Miami-Dade County League of Cities in 2006; and a Town of Surfside Proclamation: June 12, 2007 as Doug Burris Day, "In recognition of his commitment to the musical education of the students of Miami Beach Senior High School."

The Souza scholarship was established 28 years ago in memory of Bob Souza, a beloved musician and music teacher in the Monroe-Woodbury School District. His range was broad from the time he joined the district in 1966 until his death in 1980. He was an instrumental music teacher, served as stage band director in both the high school and middle school and was a music team leader.

A "terrific trumpet player," according to his peers, he also arranged music for Jimmy Sturr's orchestra in addition to his work in the school district.

Awards are made annually to worthy Monroe-Woodbury students in grades 6 to 12.

"I believe that Bob Souza would be very proud to have this concert presented on his behalf," Curtis said. "Mr. Souza and Mr. Burris both represent the same outstanding qualities of excellence, dedication to music, and most of all, of other-centered service."

Show time is 7 p.m. on Friday, May 2. Tickets are \$5 for adults, children and seniors. For more information about "Miami High School Benefit Rock Show" performances and tickets, call 928-2613 or 782-0453.