

The Chickens' Ball and its community impact

San Mateo Journal - March 3, 2020

The San Carlos Chickens' Ball 2020 is celebrating 80 years of production with its upcoming March shows. What started as a way to fund "milk money" for students in 1939 by a teacher from Central, Howard Demeke, became a longtime tradition for the San Carlos community.

As a PTA-based fundraiser, Chickens' Ball profits go directly back into the local schools to provide for the students' cultural and arts education. But this is not a typical fundraiser. This organization's ability to draw people from all walks of life each biennial year is not a miracle. People who join the outfit are just as eager to help, as they are to perform. With its turn of the century theatrics, volunteers range from various experiences and expertise. Amateurs who might have been former drama majors or musicians, or carpenters, or retired teachers, or engineers, all come together to create one spectacular show. It is full of lively and colorful costumes that might have been designed by folks who could have easily gone on to compete for "Project Runway"; nonetheless, they all show up with the consistency and dependability of a Swiss clock.

Besides the theatrics, CB is also deeply rooted in tradition and authenticity, going as far back as the early days of the Barbary Coast era (circa 1889 to 1918). The entr'actes and melodrama skits are submitted by clubs like the Arundel/TL/Sports Skit Group, Friday Night Funnies, White Oaks Skit Group, The Terpsichorean Skit Group, BCP/JMs Skit Group and the Lions Club Skit Group; all show off their uncanny ability to entertain, shock and delight audiences. Boos and cheers are all part of the show. Everyone is encouraged to join, and anyone can make a difference — be they teachers, students or even grandparents. Folks come together under the roof of the Mustang Hall come showtime. These are what set CB apart, along with a dazzling show set to contemporary music. CB's strong community foundation started 80 years ago, yet it is as strong today as it was then. Teams form from an organized Steering Committee to manage the many facets of producing the show, to choreographers who dedicate their spare time instructing enhancing, and encouraging the troupe. This admirable spirit of volunteerism is catchy, and ages range from teens and up all share one common goal, "To raise funds for our local schools' art programs."

School funding is a big issue in California. The majority of funds for K-12 education come from the state at about 58%, according to the Public Policy Institute of California. However, it does not cover all the costs of running a successful school. According to the San Carlos Elementary School District: "The level of school funding provided by the state of California is one of the lowest in the nation, and the SCSD is one of the lowest-funded in the state and San Mateo County. The efforts then fall onto local funding that helps to fill in the gap." Seventy-five percent of funding comes from local efforts (like CB) because the state is not funding the schools accurately. And costs are rising.

How are the funds being used? From the 2018 ball alone, Mariposa Upper Elementary School installed a beautiful mural to brighten the halls with their Chickens' Ball funds. Tierra Linda

students acquired a ceramics class, supplied with clay and glaze. From this year's 2020 ball, proceeds are expected to enhance the band and orchestra programs at Arroyo, Central, Mariposa and Tierra Linda by either funding repairs or buying new musical instruments. Funds will also continue to support the arts throughout the elementary schools. CB efforts may not be enough, but its significant contributions are welcome. This is why it's here to stay, and Chickens' Ball continues to be called the "Longest Running Show in the country." The 2020 ball is also offering a free opportunity raffle on opening night March 13. Everyone who attends will be eligible to win prizes ranging from \$30-\$150 gift cards, all courtesy of local restaurants and businesses. Additional shows are March 14, 15 and March 20, 21 and 22.

Tickets are now on sale at chickensball.org/buy-tickets.



Gina Wintermark is a full-time mom and homemaker. Her background is in public relations and marketing. When Gina is not doing volunteer work for the schools and community, she often travels with her family. Gina can be reached at 2020chairs@chickensball.org.

--The San Mateo Daily Journal