

## A vision realized, a dream come true

By: Joan Crawford

It began as a vision shared by Garrett County native Kathryn Sincell, a lyric soprano, and Erick Friedman, violin virtuoso from Yale University, whose dream was to have a classical music festival in the mountains of western Maryland. The idea was articulated and discussed over coffee, at bridge tables, wherever a few lovers of music would meet in the community.

It reached the Garrett Community College campus in the fall of 1986, about the time the new college president, Dr. Steve Herman, arrived. When Steve heard of the interest in a summer festival he asked me to call a meeting of appropriate persons to discuss the possibilities. We met on a November afternoon in the Oakland Center of the college. Among those present were Don and Ben Sincell, brothers of Kathryn who was living in New York and unable to attend.

As Steve spoke of Garrett County's heritage with the Chautauqua programs during the early 20th century, interest piqued. Everyone agreed that we could rekindle the Chautauqua spirit and present the musical programs within a cultural series that would include drama, dance, puppetry, story-telling and other performing arts. From that first meeting a steering committee of 22 persons was formed. That was 20 years ago.

We met through that first winter at Steve's home and decided that the name for the new organization would be Garrett Lakes Arts Festival and that the first season would be 1987. After much discussion we formulated GLAF's mission: to present a diversified program of affordable entertainment that will attract visitors to the area and preserve local culture. Steve agreed to chair the committee through the year. Diane Thayer would head the program committee, Helen Earles would serve as secretary. Ben Sincell would do the technical staging for GLAF events, and I would do publicity. Everyone would be involved in fund raising. Following a luncheon for prospective donors, 41 founders came forward, each contributing a minimum of \$500. Advertising in the printed program would bring another several thousand dollars. Additionally, a grant of \$10,000 would come from the Garrett and Maryland State Arts Councils.

That first season featured seven different events, including the dramatic production "Harvey," classical music concerts, the Bob Brown puppets, clog dancing, highland piping, storyteller Gamble Rodgers, and a magic/mime performance. Total attendance for the summer was over 2,000.

And so it began. GLAF had presented a season of diverse entertainment for the community. Four evenings of classical music had been presented with Erick Friedman as musical director and conductor of the symphony, 16 year old Marika Inaba as featured violinist, Dale Stuckenbruck as concertmaster, and Kathryn Sincell as executive producer. Here in the Western Mountains, the vision was beginning to take shape.

Encouraged by the community's reception of their offerings, members of the program committee, now including Gail Herman, Dottie Leighton, and Nancy Learey, turned their attention to planning future seasons of performances in the newly-air conditioned auditorium of the college. A board of Directors replaced the Steering Committee, and a Benefit Committee headed by Ferne Belmonte, Ann Englander, and Diane Thayer was formed. In a continued effort to increase funding from individuals, businesses, and government agencies, levels of funding were established and contributors

recognized in the printed programs. Grants from the arts councils and the Maryland Humanities Council continued to be the main source of funding. Garrett College contributed to the fledgling organization by providing facilities and support staff.

In 1997 the Sprenger-Lang Foundation made a significant contribution of seed money for programs and workshops, and season sponsors had come on board. GLAF's future was looking bright. The Board of Directors amended the mission statement to include an educational component so that summer workshops would become a permanent part of the seasonal program.

Today, as we reflect on the two decades of GLAF's existence, certain individuals need to be recognized. First are the persons who have served as chairpersons of the Board of Directors: Steve Herman, Bill Henderson, Sandy Flanagan, Jim Harvey, Marcene Huebner, Wayne Johnson, and Moe Turrentine. Then there are the executive directors: Fred Stemple, Beth Johnson, Sarah Gerichten, and now, Lucinda Williams. Volunteers too numerous to list have helped with the benefit gala. Indispensable among them were those who helped Hannah Sincell feed and house the musicians who came to perform in the symphony each year.

Contributions from individuals, businesses, and government agencies have enabled GLAF to present first rate professional entertainment at affordable prices. Season sponsors, the Sprenger-Lang Foundation, Wisp at Deep Creek Mountain Resort, Coldwell Banker Deep Creek Realty, Garrett County Chamber of Commerce, Garrett County Arts Council, Maryland State Arts Council, over 20 events sponsors, and the annual gala benefit have been the main source of funding. Last year for the first time GLAF received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. With this financial support, GLAF has been able to fulfill its mission.

What began as a modest listing of summer entertainment has developed into an impressive diverse cultural and educational series of programs for Garrett County residents and visitors. The classical music series, now with David Wroe as artistic director of Music on the Mountain, has established itself as a leading professional orchestral festival that now attracts national attention. From the thrilling notes of the symphony to the lively beat of jazz and ragtime, and the blended voices of the choral groups, GLAF's musical performances have had broad appeal. The Chautauqua programs under the tent on the college lawn have brought former presidents and other famous persons to life again for the delight of 21st century audiences. The piano recitals, the week-long workshops for young people in art, writing, dance, acting, and voice, and the annual talent show have assured GLAF's place in the future.

Now, as we hear strains of Beethoven floating on the summer wind and feel the cannon boom from the William Tell overture echo through the hills around Marsh Mountain, the vision of Music on the Mountain has become a reality, the dream has come true.

Reflecting on GLAF's progress since that first meeting 20 years ago, Steve Herman recently stated, "Gail and I feel privileged to have been here at the very beginning of GLAF and now are so proud to see that it has become the mainstream of the arts in Garrett County."