

Lullaby project touches lives of those who lost loved ones

by Pamela Lawson
Staff Writer

The best illustration that “Lullaby for Columbine Project” Founder Michael Tamburello could think of last week to explain a fundraiser that’s taken years longer than he expected to reach it’s goal, was a movie by Steven Spielberg.

Tamburello was hosting an awards banquet for 75 people at the Mount Vernon Country Club where \$42,000 was handed out to organizations and families impacted by the 1999 Columbine High School tragedy.

“How many of you here saw ‘Close Encounters of the Third Kind?’” Tamburello asked the audience.

Most shook their heads “yes” as Tamburello made his point.

“People from all around the country had this image,” he said, referencing the movie. “They were all drawn together for one common purpose--unbeknownst to them--that was eventually revealed.”

The common image in the case of the Columbine incident—that cost the lives of a teacher and 14 students--was not about spaceships, however, it was about the healing and recovery of a community and nation.

The Lullaby for Columbine Project was one of many that sprang up some four and a half years ago, as a way to gather dollars for families of the victims and community, the founder explained.

It was launched a day after the tragedy, by Tamburello and his daughter Nina--then an eighth-grader. Nina wanted to dedicate a song her father had written her to the cause. The father/daughter team planned to produce a single of it.

But the idea mushroomed into a full CD project that includes 17 songs, and features the Cohen brothers’ “Friend of Mine” along with songs by other talents including vocalist Rachel Lampa.

The network of strangers and friends that formed to complete the CD project was vast. From individuals like Jason Hickman who produced the Cohen’s single to large corporations like Sony Disc Manufacturing. Star Wars artist Drew Struzan granted use of an image on the CD’s cover.

“We began to make discoveries throughout the network,” Tamburello explained. “It was more along the lines of obvious to us these people were supposed to be part of what we were doing.”

Eventually, about 1,000 music stores across America offered the CD. Two local news stations--Channel 7 and Channel 4—reported on the project, along with a national Christian network.

What Tamburello thought would take only a few months, though, turned into years with regards to receiving money and researching ways to distribute it.

“A few months?” laughs Tamburello. “It was just not knowing what the bigger plan was, things were really being controlled from somewhere else.”

Other opportunities were triggered, he said, along with a group of volunteers.

A web-based newsletter (www.lfcnews.com) was developed and adults and teens voiced their views on a variety of topics. The nonprofit group helped sponsor “The Gathering,” a program developed by the Ontario, Calif. Police Department that brought together families of school tragedy from other states.

In addition, they made it possible for families who wanted a copy, to receive the 10,000 page Columbine Report released by the Jefferson County Sheriff’s office. And they helped sponsor a mission outreach in New York City shortly after 9-11 and distributed CD’s to families of victims there.

On November 14 at a banquet ceremony at the Mount Vernon Country Club Tamburello, flanked by his daughter Nina, handed out certificates of appreciation to a number of people who, unbeknownst to each other, had made the project possible. They came from as far away as Texas to receive them.

And he handed out checks.

The corporate sponsors and donors listed in the banquet program totaled 24. A special thanks was given to 66 people followed by the acknowledgements of 45 others.

Tamburello admits the time and **in-kind donations** by all involved producing and distributing the music CD surpassed the money that was earned. **There were over \$250,000 of in-kind donations.**

But those who told stories at the banquet about their “common image,” in this case, healing and not science fiction, believed it was worth it.

Nina, who has now graduated from high school and will soon enroll in college, is no longer a fearful teen.

“Sometimes, there are things that happen in your life that affect and transform you in a major way,” Nina said. “Columbine was a tragedy, but many good things have come from it.”