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HLWW may face statutory operating debt if future levy fails

By Caroline Wigmore
Staff Writer

Auditors from Conway, Death, and Schmiesing attended the Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted School Board meeting last Monday, and stressed the importance of conducting and passing a future referendum.

According to Superintendent George Ladd, a possible referendum would be asked in 2009, and funds obtained through the referendum would be applied to the 2010 school year. This levy would be an extension of the present levy that is currently in place, and would not be a new levy.

The school district was praised by the auditor for being under its expenditure budget, as well as keeping steady enrollment, however, a lot of revenue would be lost if the next referendum failed.

The board was told that there would be no reserves

about the importance of the referendum, the report was positive, overall.

The district was asked to make changes concerning being up-to-date with requirements that have been made by the state of Minnesota regarding activity accounts and how they are classified, making sure that staff and bills are coded correctly, and improving communication between staff and hired consultants.

In other business, High School Principal Mike Day and Middle School Principal Brad Sellner reported slightly lower parent attendance for the parent-teacher conferences.

Sellner believed this may be due to the fact that parents can now access information regarding their child's progress online, and perhaps didn't feel the need to attend the meeting.

Further discussion will take place to determine whether

Mike Fasching of Winsted releases his first CD, 'Grandcrafted'



Photo by Linda Scherer

At his home in Winsted, playing his Steinway D concert grand piano, Mike Fasching is already recording again as he works out ideas for a future album.

By Linda Scherer
Staff Writer

Walking into the home of Mike and Diana Fasching of Winsted, you can't miss the 9-foot Steinway D concert grand piano on stage in their living room.

The piano is not just for show. Mike and his piano, which rates a status close to a family member, have been in tune and pretty much inseparable for the last few years while Mike has been producing his first CD, "Grandcrafted."

The album of classically-influenced jazz piano has 13 songs which are "cover tunes" – songs written and performed originally by other people.

"One of my central goals in creating this album was that I didn't want it to sound like just another piano album," Mike said.

He spent a long period of time getting the sound that he wanted, which is dependent on a combination of many factors, including the kind and number of microphones used; their position relative to each other; the orientation of the piano and the room; the use of acoustic panels; and playing the piano with the lid on or off.

"Basically you have all of these variables that I have been changing methodically," Mike said.

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HAPPENINGS

Lester Prairie turkey giveaway underway

The turkey giveaway sponsored by Lester Prairie merchants is underway. Participating businesses will accept registrations until Tuesday, Nov. 25.

Winsted Winter Festival buttons now on sale

Buy a Button for \$2 and win \$100, \$75, or \$50 in Winsted Bucks. McLeod County Food Shelf will receive 50¢ for each button sold. Button winners will be announced in the Dec. 8 Herald Journal.

Buttons can be purchased at: Flagship Bank Winsted, Glenn's SuperValu, Keaveny Drug, The Pantry Cafe, Winsted Hardware

Mike Fasching's 'Grandcrafted' CD is now available

FASCHING, from 1A

"It has taken about two years of experimentation with all of the different pieces to get a recording that I was happy with."

"Not only did I want to make the music I played unique, but I went through great lengths to capture the sound of this very special instrument," Mike said.

The "special instrument" he was alluding to is his Steinway. The album title, "Grandcrafted," taken from the word handcrafted, also refers to the piano.

The Steinway piano purchase was a major step forward in producing the CD. It was the result of Mike traveling around the country playing and learning about many different pianos before he felt he had enough experience and background to choose his "ultimate" piano.

By the winter of 2005, both he and Diana felt ready to buy the perfect piano.

They first decided to try a refurbished Steinway from Schmitt Music. Schmitt is the Steinway dealer for Minnesota.

Then, at one point, they had two Steinways in their living room at the same time – the refurbished 9-foot Steinway D up on the stage and a rented 7-foot Steinway Model B in the sunken living room.

"We were analyzing the difference in sound of the two different-sized Steinways in our home to help make our decision as to which size we really wanted," Mike said.

"This is the kind of thing Diana puts up with. She has been a huge supporter of mine, and she loves piano."

The couple didn't know if they should buy the refurbished piano and save money, or take a chance on getting a new one, not knowing what the sound would be. So they talked to a lot of different people, did some more research, and decided, in the end, to try a new one.

This meant a trip to New York and the Steinway factory for Mike, Diana, and Mike's piano technician. Besides getting a tour of the factory, Mike had eight hours to make his selection from five Steinways.

"When we narrowed it down to two, they put the pianos side by side so I could just hop back and forth and do comparisons," Mike said.

So how much does a Steinway cost? Mike will only approximate: "More than a car and less than a house."

One reason the pianos are expensive is the length of time it takes to build one and the number of workers required to make just one piano.

"More than 200 people worked on creating my piano at the Steinway factory," Mike said. "Steinway handcrafts about 4,000 pianos (uprights and grands) each year. Yamaha makes more pianos in a week than Steinway makes in a year."

Before the Steinway arrived June 24, 2005, Mike's brother Max, who happens to be a wood truss salesman, procured extra floor trusses to make sure the living room stage was rock solid.

The Steinway weighs about 1,000 pounds and Mike had been staying up nights worrying about it falling through the floor.

Owning any piano requires upkeep. The Steinway is not any different. It is recommended to have a piano tuned twice a year. While Mike is recording, he has the piano tuned about every two weeks. When he is not recording, he likes to have it tuned about every six weeks.

He also waters it. Under the piano there is a built-in humidifier which

keeps the humidity constant at 42 percent so the soundboard doesn't expand and contract and make the piano go out of tune.

Once Mike was able to get the sound he was looking for, he began getting up in the early hours, 1 to 5 a.m., to record and select his music. He liked the hours because it was the quietest time of the day, and without a soundproof studio, his sensitive microphones would pick up on any sound, both outdoors and inside the home.

"I had dozens of songs to choose from. I went through a lengthy review process of the songs, listening critically to each song before making my choices."

"Grandcrafted" has been dedicated to the memory of Mike's parents, Stan and Jeanne Fasching.

Although Mike credits his grandfather, John J. Littfin, for initially encouraging his parents "to get that boy lessons," it was his parents who supported him through his early years learning to play the piano and the organ.

Like the time Mike was supposed to learn "Good King Wenceslas."

"I wasn't happy," Mike said. "I didn't want to play that song and I didn't want to learn it. I remember my mom sitting there with me, making sure I kept practicing until I got it right."

Mike began taking piano lessons when he was seven years old. His first piano was an old player piano in his grandmother, Marcella Fasching's basement.

Sr. Jean Marie Farrell, his first piano teacher, introduced Mike to Bach.

"I was consumed," Mike said. I really liked this music. I would read the biographies of artists – Bach, Beethoven, and Chopin – and I was fascinated with these people."

After about a year of lessons from Sr. Jean Marie, Mike began taking lessons with Mark Ochu. These piano lessons continued over the course of about five years.

"Mark Ochu is an excellent teacher. He really taught me that playing even the simplest classical piece had so many nuances – so many ways to explore the meaning of the music and how to play it. I never really got that sense with any other teacher," Mike said.

"I guess the lesson there is that no matter how well you think you know a song or how well you think you can play a song, there is always room for improvement."

In the fall of 1978, Mike began taking organ lessons with Norm Gray, who was an organist for North Star hockey games and he played at a place called Diamond Jim's.

The organ gave Mike the opportunity to play popular tunes, which was part of its attraction, but he never lost his love of classical music.

After taking organ lessons with Gray for several months, Mike was ready for his first organ contest in the spring of 1979.

Some of the songs Mike had to memorize for these competitions were up to 20 pages long. It would sometimes take him several months to learn and memorize the more difficult pieces, playing them over and over and over again.

"I think my mom was concerned how stressful it was for me. My dad thought it built character. I am not sure what the verdict is. Maybe a little of each," Mike said.

He won his first organ competition at the Hippogriff.

It is still emotional for Mike to talk about winning that first competition and how proud his parents



Submitted photo

Winning first place in the 1979 Yamaha Organ Festival, Mike Fasching, 10, was pictured in Winsted Journal's May 10, 1979 edition. It was one of many organ competitions throughout the Midwest Fasching won in his younger years, studying organ under Norm Gray of Milwaukee.



Submitted photo

Mike Fasching's CD, "Grandcrafted" is now available at CDBaby.com and Keaveny Drug in Winsted, and digital downloading is available on the web at Amazon, iTunes, and CDBaby.com.

were of him.

"Norm Gray had told my parents and me that my goal for entering the competition was just to get some experience. There was no expectation I would win anything," Mike said.

Organ competitions took Mike all over the midwest, and he continued his lessons with Norm Gray until he was about 17.

Looking back, Mike recalls a key moment in his life when Norm Gray and his dad sat down with him and talked about the prospect of a career in music. It was dismal news. Not because he was lacking in ability, but because of the intense amount of competition in the industry.

"That was really heartbreaking because I guess I really did like music. It was kind of this moment of coming of age and becoming an adult," Mike said.

Prior to his senior year at Holy Trinity, Mike already had enough credits to graduate. Instead of attending Holy Trinity, he chose to spend the second half of his senior year enrolled in the aerospace engineering program at the University of Minnesota.

It was a difficult decision for him to make because he was co-captain of the varsity basketball team at Holy Trinity and he left the team midway through the season.

He returned to Holy Trinity High School to graduate with his class in

May 1986.

Although Mike's father had died in 1985, Mike followed through with his father's career advice, attending the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD after graduation.

"It was very tough. For 12 weeks of officer training we could not listen to any personal music. That was probably tougher than all of the physical disciplines," Mike said.

The officer training at the academy was an eye-opener for Mike. It made him realize he was there to please his deceased father, and he needed to look at what he really wanted for himself. He left the Naval Academy and attended Berklee College of Music in Boston for a semester, January to May 1987.

Mike continued his music education the year of 1988, attending and graduating from the keyboard instruction program at the Grove School of Music in Los Angeles.

He returned to Minnesota in 1989, where he took a job in software development at a downtown Minneapolis law firm and at the same time, completed a degree in philosophy at the University of Minnesota.

The first piano Mike bought was in 1990, at the age of 22.

"It was a Yamaha upright. I was living in an apartment and I had limited space and finances," Mike said. "But it was like part of me was missing. I was challenged at work, and I



Submitted photo

In April 2005, at his home in Winsted, Mike Fasching tests out the sound between two different size Steinways – a refurbished 9-foot Model D and a 7-foot Steinway Model B.



Submitted photo

In May 2005, Mike Fasching, with his wife, Diana, and his piano technician, traveled to New York to the Steinway factory. Mike was given eight hours in the Steinway selection room to determine which one of the five Steinways he would purchase.

was doing all of these things, but it was the music I really needed. Then, I could relax. It sort of completes you in a certain way."

Mike has chosen the piano over the organ because he sees the control possibilities as endless.

"The fascination for me with the piano over the organ is the ability to play any key under any finger louder or softer relative to all the other keys being played by all your other fingers at the same time. This gives you much more control over subtle dynamics and phrasing. Also, I very much enjoy feeling the entire 9-foot instrument vibrate through my fingertips on the keyboard, even when playing softly," Mike said.

He married Diana, who is originally from Chippewa Falls, WI, Oct. 10, 2003.

They bought Mike's mother's home in 2004, and moved back to Winsted.

When they bought the Steinway, it was moved to the exact location the organ had occupied as Mike was growing up.

"It's very rewarding being in that same physical point in space playing the piano, where I used to get so much enjoyment when I was a kid,"

Mike Fasching's CD, 'Grandcrafted' is now available

The CD "Grandcrafted" is now available at CDBaby.com and Keaveny Drug in Winsted.

Digital downloads are available on the web at CDBaby.com, Amazon, and iTunes.

Mike's web site address is www.MikeFasching.com (or www.Grandcrafted.com).

Mike said.

The Faschings will soon share more good news. They are expecting a baby in December.

Will the baby be a piano player?

Mike is not willing to make any predictions, but one thing he does know for sure, "the baby will certainly hear a lot of piano."

Mike's CD, "Grandcrafted" is now available at CDBaby.com, and Keaveny Drug in Winsted. Digital downloads are available on the web at CDBaby.com, Amazon, and iTunes. Mike's web site address is www.MikeFasching.com (or www.Grandcrafted.com).