Inspired to do More

By Mary Brotherton

Sponsored by Matthew Kinnison | Photos courtesy of Act of Kindness Cabaret

Hilary Ann Feldman didn’t intend to establish a 501c3 organization that would help raise more than $300,000 for non-profit organizations in Chicagoland.

She said, “I never planned on it becoming an official organization. It was inspired by a story I’d seen on Oprah and thought I’d do this kind of thing once or twice a year. Early in 2001, we did this for an organization in Wisconsin, then later that year for an organization in Evanston, Illinois.”

“This kind of thing” became Act Of Kindness Cabaret, a volunteer-driven association of professionals, affectionately known as AOKC, which operates in Greater Chicago and its suburbs, and a few other areas. AOKC performers and technical artists are passionate about providing professional cabaret performances as fundraising events for other nonprofit organizations.

Cabaret is an intensely personal evening of songs and stories, suitable for all ages, delivered in a simple, honest way.

Hilary said, “In 2003 I took time off to take care of a friend dying of cancer. I started to look at things in my life that gave me joy and a purpose.”

What gives her joy and purpose is using her time and talent as a well-known cabaret artist to create treasures for other nonprofit organizations.

“We help nonprofits, while keeping a fragile art form alive.”

She said the organization’s mission is to help others raise money and put the art form on the radar for people who didn’t know about it.

AOKC incorporated in 2002 and in 2018, hired Nicole Seidlitz as executive director.

Nicole said, “AOKC is philanthropy at its finest. We do what we do, almost entirely free of charge. We ask for reimbursements, never more than $400, and hope to have the ability to not charge all in the future.”

Now, instead of once or twice a year, the organization’s goal is to do 10 to 12 performances a year. Since their inception, they have done 70 performances for 50 groups.

Nicole said, “Many organizations use us to raise awareness, a stewardship that comes to them later. Donors come over to see a show and have fun. Stewardship and cultivation events are so important for an organization and may not generate large donors – at that time – but do generate more income for the organization down the road.”

Hilary said, “We have a dual mission. We serve the non-profits and keep modern cabaret alive.

Nicole said, “There’s a certain joy in exposing new audiences to the art form. Cabaret breaks down the fourth wall. It’s remarkable – the talent of AOKC’s performers. You have to experience it in person.”

The Fourth Wall

The Fourth Wall is a theatrical term for the imaginary wall between stage actors and the audience.

Since this invisible wall does not exist, performers pretend they can’t see or hear the audience. Part of the fun of cabaret is when the fourth wall is broken and the performers interact with their audience.

Both women agree the greatest need for their organization is to broaden their donor base so they can continue to do the good work they love.

For more information about Acts Of Kindness Cabaret, call 847-419-7664 or visit www.aokcabaret.org. You can follow AOKC on Facebook.