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COMEDY CLUB 2020

GIVING INSTEAD OF GATHERING

For many years, the MMF's largest annual fundraising event has been an evening of laughs and friendship at Governor's Comedy Club in Levittown, NY. This year, because of COVID-19, the MMF is NOT holding the event, in order to preserve the health and safety of our supporters. If you normally attend the MMF Comedy Club event and wish to make an additional donation to help us meet our fundraising goals despite the pandemic, we would be so grateful!



FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Fellow MMF Supporters:

"Unprecedented". Like so many other organizations in 2020, MMF found itself in uncharted waters this year. Over our 26-year history, so much of what we have done has relied on in-person social activity – interviewing high-caliber fellows, networking with worthy causes, and hosting receptions & fundraisers to nurture our community.

And yet, like all of you, we persisted in the face of Covid-19.

Thanks to Zoom, we virtually interviewed and evaluated over 20 exceptional candidates to join our Fellows program now numbering over 120 amazing individuals. The 5 wonderful college students we selected are performing ground-breaking research in science, promoting health & literacy in rural Africa and bringing the theatrical arts to life. We are proud to provide them with life-changing opportunities that will pay dividends for them – and others – for decades to come.

Similarly, we found that the organizations benefiting from our charitable grants had a remarkable ability to virtualize their activities. As Covid created uncertainty, our long-standing relationships allowed us to step up quickly and confidently with much-needed support. I hope you take a minute to read about the creativity and versatility that makes us so proud to support Friends of Karen, DreamYard and Back Country Jazz.

And, in the theme of leveraging technology, we're delighted that MMF has partnered with Amazon Smile. Just register at smile.amazon.com and select The Michael Manzella Foundation as the charity you wish to support. A portion of every purchase will go to support MMF!!

Despite all of this success, our greatest disappointment has been our inability to interact directly and personally with each of you. Unfortunately, this year we suspended our annual Comedy Club Fundraiser, but, we were so grateful for our Yale-Harvard game Reunion where we were able to see so many MMF faces and the SOBs before the pandemic struck. With friendship and camaraderie as a critical part of our mission, you can mark my words that MMF will be back in action as soon as possible.

Until then, save up the hugs that were my brother's trademark and be prepared to break them out in full force when safety permits!

Last, while our activities are temporarily virtual, our impact is permanently real. So please provide any financial support you can to help us continue changing the world through education, cancer research, children's causes and the arts.

Frank J. Manzella

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MMF Summer 2020 Fellows

Despite the pandemic wreaking havoc with their anticipated plans, these five exceptional students pivoted to conduct meaningful summer projects, funded by a \$17,000 investment from the MMF

EDUCATION



Sam Brakarsh
*Promoting Health
Access and Literacy
in rural Zimbabwe*

The MMF was proud to support Sam for a second time in 2020, after having named him a MMF Fellow in the summer of 2018. A native of Zimbabwe, Sam was forced to remain in the US when in-person classes ended abruptly at Yale and COVID-19 quarantine travel restrictions were imposed. Fortunately, Sam has spent the years since 2018 developing key partnerships with colleagues on the ground in Zimbabwe and he was able to manage his project remotely. The goals of the Chikukwa project center around providing access to adequate health/hygiene and educational/employment opportunities for people in the rural, extremely low-income and under-resourced Chikukwa district of Zimbabwe, with local leaders integral to the design and implementation of the initiative. In addition to ensuring access to sanitary pads for women and girls in remote regions despite pandemic-related supply-chain interruptions, Sam and his Chikukwa-based partners helped train the residents to manufacture their own sanitary and personal protective equipment in the community. Sam writes, **"I realized the new and vital need for masks to help contain the COVID-19 spread... In the space of two weeks, we identified a supplier for industrial sewing equipment based in Harare, I transferred money, we organised a truck to travel the 7 hours to Harare, and we arranged for all necessary legal permits to do the travel. I sent designs for mask production and they are now also producing 1,000 masks a week that are being purchased across the district."** Sam also compiled a

comprehensive community health worker COVID-19 guide to help educate the local community about the disease and prevention. In addition to these health-related accomplishments, Sam's efforts in Harare since 2018 are contributing to the creation of Chikukwa's first library. He notes, "The structure is now entirely complete, covered in murals and the internal carpentry and tiling is finished. We have also transported over 1,000 books from Harare into the community."

CANCER RESEARCH



Jacqueline Knobelsdorf
*Cancer Research with
the Dana-Farber
Cancer Institute*

Due to COVID-19, Jackie's plans to work on-site in the lab in Boston changed to a virtual position, but the distance did not diminish her achievements. She notes, "I can say that, even while interacting with the lab remotely, I have learned so much more than just the scientific mechanisms of cancer." Jackie's varied experiences with the Walensky lab of Dana-Farber Cancer Institute extended to **"proposing a new cancer protein target and project for the lab to investigate...and working alongside the group's science writer to write a review paper applying some of the lab's approaches to COVID-19."** As is the case with so many of the budding oncologists that the MMF fellowships have supported over the years, Jackie's experience was enriched by a strong mentor. She notes, "I'm particularly grateful to have had the chance to interact with Dr. Loren Walensky, the principal investigator of the lab and a pediatric oncologist with Dana-Farber and Boston Children's Hospital. He has provided wonderful mentorship in terms of how to approach clinical research and his career path in general, which has

helped me really solidify my desire to go into pediatric oncology. He has consistently shown how committed he is to his patients and to his work to make their lives better, and it's been nothing short of inspiring to see his care and dedication and know that I want to be that committed to my patients in the future."

PERFORMING ARTS



Saphia Suarez
*Summer Intensive
Participant in
Playwrighting at Cape
Cod Theatre Project*

Saphia was accepted to the program in Cape Cod, MA, but due to COVID-19, the entire program was held virtually. Remarkably, despite this change, Saphia notes, "The four weeks I (virtually) spent at Cape Cod Theatre Project were, quite honestly, more impactful in my formation as a theater artist than much of my Yale education." During the month-long program, Saphia worked closely with renowned playwrights, directors and actors. Saphia explains that this summer experience is helping to shape her future plans, writing, "The hands-on experiences in tandem with master classes with the playwrights and directors each week as well as the personal coaching we received from the intern coordinator...in our personal work helped me build a post-grad plan and outline my next play. I now know exactly which playwrights' labs I will be submitting to this year, am well into my submission play, and I have built connections with multiple artists who have offered to help me when I arrive in New York. I cannot thank the Michael Manzella Foundation enough for supporting my time at the Cape Cod Theatre Project. I know it is one of those pivotal artistic experiences I will look back at and point to in my journey as a playwright and actor."

MMF NURTURES & INVESTS IN LEADERS OF THE FUTURE



Lilian Wenker
*Comedy for a Cause,
and Acting
Remotely*

Lil was the only applicant in 2020 who had outlined several contingency plans for how she would spend her summer if COVID-19 should affect any one of her options. As it turned out, despite Lil having been accepted to a number of extraordinary theater programs both in the US and abroad, all of these options were cancelled due to the pandemic. As a student of improv comedy, Lil improvised a summer full of worthwhile artistic projects instead. Noting that her improv group normally holds a Spring event to celebrate the end of the school year, Lil poured herself into coordinating a video-version of the comedy show instead, with an online fundraising aspect to benefit a New Haven charity. Lil writes, **"Over 3,000 people tuned in to watch the show, and we raised over \$2,000 for New Haven Area Relief fund by encouraging viewers to donate. If the show had been at Yale, fewer than 150 viewers could have fit into**

the theatre. We have had the show viewed by the head comedy critic of the New York Times and used the sketches for a joint show with Cambridge University in England." Lil, who was also a MMF fellow in 2019, was hired this summer to act in a reading of a new play as part of the Portland Theater's annual festival, a connection that came as a direct result of a contact made during her 2019 MMF fellowship experience. Being able to perform a play with a theater group in Maine, while remaining safe in her home in Minnesota, was a prime example of the creativity Lil employed this summer to advance her dreams despite the pandemic.

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Simon Rabinowitz
*Summer Producer at
the Cape Cod Theatre
Project*

When COVID-19 forced all theater to either shut-down or "go virtual," Simon discovered some of the silver linings that can be found in tough times. For instance, he writes, **"In a normal summer we could**

have never had a cast like Paul Giamatti, Corey Stoll, Nina Arianda, Pedro Pascal, and Arian Moayed who all appeared in our final show. This pandemic has meant that we were able to support creative teams who typically would not be available for an entire week on the Cape, but who could find time with a **freeze on all other forms of production."** Simon gained important experience in theater production and adapted to the virtual environment, noting, "I studied the ticketing services we had in place, developed and tested alternate ticketing systems, and figured out ways to replicate a front of house experience into a digital platform." In reflecting on the pandemic's effects on his summer plans, Simon gratefully acknowledges, "I was pretty much able to complete everything I had hoped to do, and more. I was able to study administration and dramaturgy, while also pioneering an entirely new way of experiencing theater. **Maybe, despite everything, this summer has been more rewarding than a typical summer ever could have been. We'll never know. All I can say is that I am incredibly grateful to have taken this journey."**

FURTHERING OUR MISSION

Friends of Karen



\$5000 grant to provide emotional, financial and advocacy support for families with children battling cancer or other life-threatening illnesses. MMF's grant was particularly helpful to FOK's Family Support Team in the development of various video communication platforms during the pandemic.

DreamYard

\$5000 grant toward collaborating with Bronx youth, families and schools to build pathways to equity and opportunity through the arts. With the COVID 19 pandemic, DreamYard adapted to provide multifaceted supports to their various



school programs. They moved their school programs online, distributed 100,000 free meals to community members and partnered with other schools in the Bronx to distribute 1,000 hotspots and Chromebooks. Additionally, they continue to support social change through the arts!

Back Country Jazz

\$5000 grant toward transforming young lives and building community through the power of music. BCJ adapted to COVID 19 by moving both the tuition-free music

education program and the academic year program to remote learning. The Summer Music Camp transitioned to a hybrid education with some in-person workshops. With grants and community support, students continued to receive individual lessons with prominent jazz masters, master classes and group workshops.





OUR MISSION



Michael Manzella
(1971 - 1993)

Michael Manzella, a gifted scholar, musician and athlete, succumbed to a two-year battle with cancer in 1993 at the age of 21. He left behind a legacy of music, love and inspirational courage. This Foundation was conceived to honor that legacy.

The Michael Manzella Foundation is a not-for-profit corporation dedicated to activities in education, children's causes, cancer research and the arts. We support those individuals and institutions that demonstrate the leadership and potential to make significant contributions in these areas. These goals are consistent with the struggles and achievements of Michael's life.

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Check out the MMF website at themichaelmanzellafoundation.com



Michael Manzella Award 2020

Congratulations to ELAYNA GARDNER, recipient of the 2020 Michael Manzella Award at Timothy Dwight College, Yale University. The Manzella Prize is awarded to the graduating senior in Timothy Dwight College who, through the qualities of kindness, dedication and courage, most inspired his/her classmates.

Keep in Touch! To hear more about MMF events, please provide us with your e-mail address on the enclosed form.

If you wish to support MMF, you may send a tax-deductible donation to:

Michael Manzella Foundation
412 Woodbridge Road
Rockville Centre, New York 11570

You may also donate on-line at www.themichaelmanzellafoundation.com.
This option is available under the "About" tab. Thank you for your support.