



## **Summer Stage Supporters Call on Community Support to Secure Long-Term Future and Viability of Award-Winning Program**

UPPER DARBY, PA (October 11, 2021) – Leaders of the Upper Darby Arts and Education Foundation, a non-profit 501(c)3 charitable organization that raised more than \$500,000 in donations this summer to ensure the future of the award-winning Upper Darby Summer Stage, questioned the sincerity of public claims of support by the Upper Darby School District and Upper Darby Township and called upon both entities to match their words with action.

“The words of support by Upper Darby School District and Township officials are nice, but they aren’t consistent with our discussions or their own actions,” said Terry Tracy, President of the Board of the Upper Darby Arts and Education Foundation. “If they really want to show the community that they value Summer Stage, all they need to do is agree to some simple basic requests that will enable the program to grow and flourish for years to come, such as providing access to the Upper Darby Performing Arts Center and allowing for the program to operate independent of government to maximize fundraising efforts.”

Specifically, Tracy called upon the School District and Township to demonstrate their support by:

- 1) Allowing Summer Stage to remain in the only home it has ever known, the Upper Darby Performing Arts Center.
- 2) In exchange, the Upper Darby Arts and Education Foundation/Summer Stage will pay rent to the school district to offset costs (something that Summer Stage has never had to do in the past as it was considered part of the school district’s “support” of the program.)
- 3) The Township maintaining its commitment to equitable access to the program by continuing its 46-year history of funding the existing scholarship program for those Upper Darby residents in need of financial assistance.
- 4) Allowing the program to operate as an independent non-profit entity – not as an arm of the township government – consistent with IRS requirements and to maximize philanthropic fundraising efforts.

“We are asking alumni and supporters of Summer Stage in the local community to attend and make their voices heard at the School Board meeting on Tuesday October 12<sup>th</sup> and Township Council meeting on Wednesday, October 20<sup>th</sup>,” said Brian McFadden, Vice-President of the Foundation and a Class of 2005 Upper Darby High School graduate. The community deserves answers about why the township and school district won’t agree to some simple, basic requests needed to secure the future of Summer Stage.”

Steve DeMott, treasurer of the Upper Darby Arts and Education Foundation, stated that the assertion by certain unelected officials that the Foundation is seeking to “privatize” Summer Stage is disingenuous and misleading. He noted that the Foundation is an IRS-approved 501(c)3 non-profit organization that operates as a Public Trust and is fully accountable to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s Bureau of Charitable Organizations. “The Foundation has been a funder of Summer Stage since its inception and stepped forward to further support the program after the Township and School District disbanded the Upper Darby Recreation Department and its robust staff,” said DeMott.

Tracy also noted that Harry Dietzler, the founder of Summer Stage who was recognized by the Tony Awards with an Honorable Mention for the Excellence in Theatre Education Award, felt he was being pushed out of his position as Executive Director of the Upper Darby Performing Arts Center. Tracy said that was when the Foundation stepped forward and offered to be the new organizational home for Sumer Stage.

“I don’t understand how the school district and township can claim to support Summer Stage and pledge to continue it when they dismantled the department that supported it without consulting any of the key stakeholders,” said McFadden. “All parties agreed that having the Foundation serve as the operational home for Summer Stage was the right thing to do to keep the program going. But now suddenly they are making off-base, false claims about a non-existent privatization scheme.”

“Meanwhile, the school district is so tight on funding that it is asking Summer Stage to pay rent, which we are happy to do, and the township is saying it won’t provide any financial support to the program as it has in the past,” said McFadden. “So after disbanding the joint department that used to run the program because they didn’t think its was a proper role for the township or school district, they are saying they want to run it themselves even though they have no staff qualified to do it and no financial resources to make it happen. It just doesn’t make sense.”

McFadden noted the Upper Darby School Superintendent [Dan McGarry told the Philadelphia Inquirer this summer](#) that continued increases in charter school payments could force the school district “to look to make sacrifices with our music, art, theater programs.”

Tracy said he was also concerned by an effort being pushed by Upper Darby Township that would eliminate the independence of Upper Darby Arts and Education Foundation’s board and weaken their philanthropic and fundraising efforts by enabling the school district and township to dictate the majority of board appointments. Under IRS regulations when an entity’s board is controlled by governmental appointments, donations and contributions to that organization are no longer eligible for certain tax deductions.

“The Foundation is happy to consider providing both the township and school district with representation on our board, but turning over control of the board to the government would make fundraising extremely difficult,” said Jennifer Schoener, Executive Director of the Foundation. “And since neither the school district nor the township are stepping forward with financial support, our ability to fundraise needs to be one of our primary considerations.”

“For the life of me, I don’t understand the political games that are being played or what they are hoping to accomplish,” said Schoener. “Neither the school district nor the township had the desire, expertise, or financial resources to continue Summer Stage as a joint program, which is when the Foundation stepped forward with the support needed to keep the program going. All we are asking for is the ability to continue to use the Upper Darby Performing Arts Center, the only home Summer Stage has ever known. And we want the opportunity to continue our successful fundraising efforts by maintaining the independence of the Foundation. It’s really not that complicated. We’re already off to an amazing start.”

Supporters can email [upperdarbyfoundation@gmail.com](mailto:upperdarbyfoundation@gmail.com) to learn more about how they can help.