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Tom Stack awarded Lafayette's 2023 Business Person of the Year

By Jennifer Wake



Tom Stack at the 2022 Art & Wine Festival Photo provided

When someone is awarded the distinction of Business Person of the Year, it's obvious they're successful in business. Tom Stack is no exception.

Starting by selling T-shirts out of a backpack in the parking lots of Grateful Dead concerts, Stack turned that endeavor into a thriving worldwide distribution operation and ended up working directly with the Grateful Dead as its VP of Licensing and Merchandising. Stack also worked across the table with Carlos Santana as his primary licensee and represented the estates of Jerry Garcia, Jimi Hendrix, Bob Marley and Janis Joplin. Stack then moved into the real estate game, becoming a top salesperson for Coldwell Banker Realty and as of this year, notching 17 years in the business. But it was Stack's involvement in Lafayette's Town Hall Theatre that set him apart from other nominees, since two of the main criteria for the BPOY award are that their work enhances the quality of life in Lafayette and brings the community together.

In 2009, then executive director of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, Jay Lifson, approached Stack and suggested he join Town Hall Theatre's board. THT was looking at closing for good, especially following a sprinkler mishap, known as the April Fool's flood, when fire sprinklers went off, dumping 800 gallons of water upstairs and flooding the entire downstairs. The theater had to be shut, de-molded and repaired. "I came on in the fall," Stack said. "They were in dire straits and needed revenue; I like to generate revenue."

Stack, who had watched Bill Graham in action at his concert events and had an obvious love of music (with his wife, Kiki, who is in two bands, also with music connections), decided that producing concerts at Town Hall between various theater productions could be a great way to generate income and introduce new patrons to THT. Stack began producing concerts in January, March, May, September, and November, about eight or nine shows a year, with all the proceeds going to THT.

"I fearlessly fundraise," Stack said. "That was really the goal - see if I could cross pollinate this thing. As emcee, from the stage, I would plug the productions and would ask for specific items for the house and the stage like lobby furniture, stage sound and lighting. Truthfully, it was about building community and generating revenue."

Much like when he walked the parking lots selling T-shirts, Stack hit the streets, concert tickets in hand, determined to fill the venue and raise the much-needed funds for the theater. "I just went to people I knew. It was a person-to-person thing," Stack said. Soon, the concerts generated their own buzz and sold out each time. Then Stack and his wife, Kiki, began producing the Lafayette Community Music Festival. "It was modeled after Neil Young's Bridge School with acoustic guitars, banjos, mandolins, and dobros," Stack explained. "Kiki would call all her musician friends and they would donate their time. That was her brainchild, her creation."

Unfortunately, when the pandemic hit, all in-person concerts stopped and Stack decided to leave the board in July of 2020. But the music has continued at outdoor venues, like those at the Lafayette Art & Wine Festival and the Rock the Plaza Summer Concert Series, where Stack serves as emcee.

Tom and Kiki will continue their backyard amphitheatre acoustic performances for 45-50 clients, friends and neighbors as they "sit outside to enjoy music in a glorious natural setting."

"I like to bring people together, build little communities in the moment," Stack said.

Stack will be honored on Friday, Feb. 3 during a special dinner at the Lafayette Park Hotel & Spa. To register, visit <https://lafayettechamber.org/bpoy>. The evening will include the State of the City Address by Mayor Carl Anduri and the introduction of the Lafayette Chamber's 2023 Board of Directors.

Reach the reporter at: jennifer@lamorindaweekly.com

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