

## Charitable Cheese making funds from fun

by Dan Viens

When the String Cheese Incident brings its fun, freewheeling show home for a sold out performance at the Boulder Theater Wednesday it will be for a much larger purpose than just having a good time.

Proceeds from Wednesday's show will be used to help special needs children, educate farm workers, house hurricane-displaced musicians in New Orleans and help fund a local literacy program. In addition, a toy drive put on by Boulder-based nonprofit Conscious Alliance will bring toys to the children of the Pine Ridge and Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservations in South Dakota and Montana.

The Dec. 21 concert is the Boulder-based band's semi-annual benefit concert. It is the latest in a long line of charitable benefits the band has hosted or been involved in.

The band has transitioned itself from a group of ski bums playing bars throughout Colorado's mountain towns to a world-wide touring machine and charitable force.

In three days following Hurricane Katrina, \$30,000 was raised on the bands website to help displaced victims. Along with an additional \$45,000 later raised, that money was used to provide food directly to hurricane evacuees.

"We've always wanted to make a difference socially and environmentally," SCI bassist Keith Moseley says of the band's efforts.

Several charities and organizations have been the beneficiaries of the band's past Boulder benefits, but changes in the bands lives and recent natural disasters have shaped this year's choices.

"The focus shifted as some of us started families," Moseley says.

The first of four organizations receiving money from the upcoming show is Kid Connects, a child development program, which is part of the Children and Family Services Team at the Mental Health Center Serving Boulder and Broomfield Counties.

The program provides services to children, families and staff at child care facilities in Boulder County. The goal of Kid Connects is to provide early intervention and prevention for young children through early identification of special needs children, consultative support for parents, child care staff training and referral to community resources.

The next group chosen by the band and its management company Madison House is Project Reach. The non-profit program is managed and funded by Boulder-based IZZE Beverage Company. Project Reach supports and creates education programs for farm workers and their families in the communities where IZZE buys its fruit.

A third locally based program will also benefit from the night

of music. Legacy of Learning is a non-profit educational organization with the primary goals of teaching reading, spelling and math to at-risk elementary and secondary students.

The final beneficiary of the evening is an organization based far from the Front Range, but close to many Americans and musicians hearts. Tipitina's Artist Relief Foundation focuses on preserving and rebuilding the New Orleans music community. The group helps in finding musicians housing and gigs.

Moseley says the band, based in Boulder, couldn't be happier about helping out local organizations. It also gives the band a chance for the band to play a hometown show.

"There's not a lot of gigs where we can play and sleep at home," the bassist says.

The band has graduated from playing ski town bars to playing gigs in front of audiences worldwide. As SCI's horizons have grown so has its fan base.

Moseley says the band's fan base is made up of like minded people who care about the environment and social events. He thinks the fans have a feeling of empowerment, knowing they can make a difference as a group.

No one knows that better than Justin Baker. A 2002 graduate of the University of Colorado - Boulder, Baker heads Conscious Alliance. The group organizes food drives nationally that benefit local food pantries and Indian Reservations across the western United States. The non-profit has grown along with String Cheese Incident and its fan base.

"String Cheese Incident continues to be the most giving people from the music industry that we work with," Bakers says.

However, he's quick to note it's not just the band; it's their fans and management. A food drive held at a concert of 10,000 brings in as much food as String Cheese Incident concert attended by 650, Baker says.

Following the Dec. 21 Boulder Theater concert, Baker will be high tailing it from Colorado to Indian reservations in South Dakota and Montana with a truckload of presents donated by concert goers.

Although Conscious Alliance asks for new toys with a value around \$20, String Cheese Incident fans have gone far beyond that in years past.

"We've had people ride up on brand new bikes," Baker says.

The most unique gift Baker can remember was a vintage set of 55 Star Wars action figures still in their boxes.

This tendency to go above and beyond seems to be the norm in the scene surrounding the String Cheese Incident. The band, its management, its fans and organizations associated with the group form a traveling community which helps out people no matter where they go.

On Wednesday, when the String Cheese circus sets up its big top tent in its hometown of Boulder all eyes will be on the band, but all hearts will be with the beneficiaries of the night.