

FRIENDS OF WOW HALL (FOWH) Questions & Answers

A disinformation campaign about Friends of WOW Hall is underway. The following Q&A addresses those false, misleading statements and rumors and explains our intentions. Please share.

- **WHO IS FRIENDS OF WOW HALL?**

Friends of W.O.W. Hall, (FOWH) is a group of Community Center for the Performing Arts (CCPA) members who care intensely about saving the landmark facility. Several have been members for decades. We advocate following the WOW Hall mission of “preserving and operating the historic Woodmen of the World (W.O.W.) Hall as a multipurpose community center, providing cultural arts and educational opportunities for all ages and income levels and maintaining a supportive environment for local artists and their new creative efforts.” We think the best way to carry out this mission is "give back" to the community. That means being more inclusive of children, youth, adults, elders by facilitating more culturally diverse programming. A vibrant gathering place for creative artists and organizations would be a WIN-WIN for all. As a member owned nonprofit, CCPA is dependent on its members for financial guidance. CCPA members elect a board and approve budgetary policies such as avoiding debt and depleting cash reserves. We strongly endorse and intend to carry out these policies to protect this treasured community resource.

- **WHAT ABOUT THE RUMOR THAT FOWH WANTS TO GET RID OF MUSIC SHOWS AT THE HALL?**

Quite the contrary. In keeping with the CCPA mission, FOWH would like to continue and diversify music offerings. We also advocate day time and evening programming to include more educational activities and increased community participation. The focus in recent years on commercial presentation of touring acts has not been financially sustainable incurring annual losses in the tens of thousands. Many current and former members say they no longer go to the W.O.W. Hall because little attracts them. A “W.O.W. Hall for all” can eventually bring the community back.

Of course, during the pandemic, we have to be creative finding new uses for the space with live stream concerts and COVID safe classes. COVID forced the W.O.W. Hall to close, furloughing all but three part-time staff. This hopefully temporary situation is an opportunity to evaluate programming, staffing, and spending priorities and adopt a sustainable budget with a smaller staff. This can be done with less financial risk and more opportunity for local event organizers.

- **WHY DOES FOWH SAY THE W.O.W. HALL NEEDS TO BE SAVED WHEN OTHERS SAY IT’S DOING FINE?**

FOWH began last December after members became aware of a 400% budget deviation. Insufficient board oversight of operations over two years resulted in the loss of cash reserves to make mostly payroll. \$70,000 in 2018 was spent down to a balance of \$1,600 by late 2019, before the pandemic when CCPA employed 14 part-time staff at a cost of about \$20,000 monthly. This large payroll without professional management resulted in repeated operational and budgetary deficits.

- **DOESN'T THE CURRENT STAFF KNOW MORE ABOUT RUNNING THE W.O.W. HALL THAN THE MEMBERS?**

Many FOWH and CCPA members have staff, board and volunteer experience and are very familiar with day to day operations. Some coordinate with staff and board in operational functions, restoration, fundraising and capital improvements. The pandemic forced the Hall to close and furlough staff except for a part-time bookkeeper, maintenance person, and membership manager. Although a great disappointment, this hopefully temporary situation is an opportunity to revive the W.O.W. spirit. The new board can evaluate programming, staffing and spending priorities with the help of members on advisory committees. A more attentive, competent board will adopt a more sustainable budget with a smaller staff including optimally a general manager to run the facility.

- **SINCE THE MISSION IS CLEARLY POSTED ON THE W.O.W. HALL WEBSITE, DOESN'T THAT MEAN BYLAWS AND MISSION ARE BEING FOLLOWED?**

In recent years the W.O.W. Board/staff has chosen to focus on show production rather than the founding mission of emphasizing local artists and educational services. This shift reduced membership participation. Also, CCPA often did not publicize membership meetings in local print media or radio resulting in smaller turnout at annual meetings. Friends of the status quo favorable to prioritizing commercial shows were elected usually dominating past boards. Now we need a board committed to representing all members and to open, transparent operations that follow the CCPA mission and bylaws.

- **WHY DID FOWH OPPOSE THE W.O.W. BOARD KEEPING A PAYROLL PROTECTION PLAN PPP LOAN THE HALL RECEIVED?**

The current board majority decided to apply without consulting with CCPA/W.O.W. Hall members. Starting in December 2019, 30 members attending board meetings advised against taking federal money as a PPP loan. Some offered the option of applying for an available outright federal grant instead of taking a potentially risky federal loan with strings attached. If CCPA/W.O.W. fails to meet the terms of forgiveness by the end of 2020, all of the PPP loan including what was spent may need to be repaid at a fixed rate of \$2,888 a month.

- **WHAT ABOUT FOWH THREATENING TO SUE CCPA/W.O.W. HALL?**

This never happened. Our attorney simply sent a letter to the CCPA/W.O.W. Hall Board reminding them that they needed to schedule the delayed Special Membership Meeting and Annual Membership Meeting as required by the bylaws. These meetings are crucial for the members to be able to exercise their democratic control of CCPA policy, budget and board elections. No threat to sue the CCPA/W.O.W. Hall was ever made by FOWH. At the Candidates' Forum, a board candidate opposing FOWH did threaten to sue CCPA if it went ahead with the planned online election.

- **DIDN'T FOWH ATTEMPT TO TAKE OVER THE ANNUAL MEETING CAUSING THE ELECTION DELAY?**

To the contrary. Absent board leadership, FOWH found a professional meeting facilitator and shared the expense with CCPA. FOWH also found EZVoteOnline, a reliable online election process to use at the Annual Membership Meeting attended by 150+ members on August 9th. Due to staff obstruction and deviation from the agreed upon process during that meeting, the election again had to be postponed until September 8th. Because FOWH has recently been shut out of recent preparations for that election, we have concerns about fairness and voter privacy with any type of roll call vote that may be proposed. To protect the democratic process, we urge members to insist on secure, confidential and independent online voting so ballot choices can be kept private and records can be verified.

- **BUT WHAT ABOUT A COUPLE FROM FOWH HAVING AN ALLEGED CONFLICT OF INTEREST IN SETTING UP THE ONLINE VOTING PROCESS?**

This couple generously stepped up as volunteers when it became clear nobody from CCPA was working to find an online election system. Steven Berkson from FOWH researched and found EZVoteOnline, an independent company unaffiliated with any of the concerned parties. Its online voting process with protections from manipulation is intended to provide confidence in voting tabulation. His partner Heather Kent was trained by EZVoteOnline on the technical aspects of using the software to conduct a fair election. Contrary to implementing it themselves, FOWH and W.O.W. representatives met with EZVoteOnline on Friday before the Sunday 8/9 meeting and successfully tested the system with sample email ballots. This entire event has become the source of numerous, documentable, false allegations against FOWH as part of a smear campaign. Steven has since removed himself as a board candidate to focus on being an election watchdog and to remove any basis for allegations of conflict of interest on the part of FOWH. Steven and Heather's full statement:

<https://friendsofwohall.org/response-to-the-board-statement-on-the-election>

- **WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD TO SAVE THE W.O.W. HALL?**

Crucial to saving the W.O.W. Hall is for the community to turn out to vote for a new WOW Board on Sunday, October 25th. We highly recommend FOWH's diverse slate of candidates with a background of working together effectively. Members will be better served by an accountable board with viable plans for protecting and administering the W.O.W. Hall during and after the pandemic. We encourage those with interest and expertise to consider joining us in assisting this new board in an advisory role to accomplish its goals. Over 20 members have agreed to help so far. (See our candidates' statements as well as COVID and post COVID budget plans at <https://friendsofwowhall.org>). To vote you must become a member of the WOW by giving at least \$15 at <http://www.wowhall.org/donate-or-become-member> before the 6:00 PM election on October 25th.