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Milbridge event elicits laughs, money

by Johanna S. Billings

In a funny way, Maine humorist Tim Sample helped Gateway Milbridge raise more than \$10,000 Friday night.

From the stage at the Milbridge Elementary School, Sample kept an audience of nearly 300 laughing for well over an hour as he told jokes and stories that resonate with Mainers. The only break in the laughter came in the middle of the show when Sample auctioned off a dozen hand painted mini paddles.

The paddles were handmade by Amish craftsmen, and painted by established Maine artists and celebrities from across the

Downeast area.

Bidding generally started out at \$50, except for one point when Carl Aseton of Milbridge offered \$5. Sample had to ask if he heard right as Aseton's wife, Ora, dissolved into laughter. Ray Goodwin of Rocky Mount, N.C., seated next to the Asetons, then jumped in to offer the anticipated \$50.

All of the paddles went for at least \$100 with several, by artists Ora Aseton, Joanne Halpin, Alora Felix and Ken Graslje, bringing bids of \$400 or more. A paddle decorated by artist Ray Carbone went for \$850.

The 12 paddles sold at the live auction had been picked by an independent jury. The remaining 33 paddles were sold at a silent auction along with a few paintings. Organizers also sold food, Milbridge Theatre T-shirts and recordings of Sample's shows.

Richard Bondurant of Gateway Milbridge said he was pleased with attendance, which he knew would be strong based on advance ticket sales. He was also pleased with the prices for which items sold.

"I think it's fair to say we were pleasantly surprised with money raised and the bidding on some

of the paddles was great and exceeded our expectations," he said Saturday.

As he and other Gateway Milbridge representatives sold T-shirts at the Milbridge Farmers' Market Saturday morning, John Bettis estimated the event raised between \$13,000 and \$15,000.

The money raised will help the nonprofit organization bring back the Milbridge Theatre. The popular venue closed in December 2014 following the death of owner Dave Parsons. Gateway Milbridge recently signed an agreement of sale to purchase the building, which has deteriorated beyond repair. The group plans to raze the existing structure and replace it with a new community theater. The entire project, including the expenditure already made to buy the building, is estimated at approximately \$450,000.

"The artists did an amazing job with the paddles — incredibly creative and unusual themes," said Bondurant. "We really do have some amazing talent in the region and could not have been happier with their support in painting and decorating and even carving the paddles as well as some of the donated paintings."



Ora Aseton of Milbridge, second from right, laughs as Tim Sample heckles her husband, Carl, far right, for bidding only \$5 on one of the pieces of artwork for sale at the Tim Sample Show and Art Auction Friday night. Sitting next to them enjoying the joke are Brenda and Ray Goodwin of Rocky Mount, N.C.



John Bettis of Milbridge raises his number to bid on one of the artist-decorated mini paddles at the Tim Sample Show and Art Auction in Milbridge Friday.



Several paintings by local artists were sold via silent auction at the Tim Sample Show and Show and Art Auction Aug. 12. The event benefits efforts to bring back the Milbridge Theatre.

Photos by Johanna S. Billings

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