

Taylor plans April 13 sparkling event

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CATHY WOGAN

ThisWeek Staff Writer

Retirement had not yet occurred when Debbie Taylor began making plans for the upcoming "SparklePaloosa" which will be held at the Makoy Center on April 13 from 2-5 p.m.

Taylor, who is more commonly known to the Hilliard community as "Mrs. Sparkles," retired from her position as a unified arts teacher who worked with music and movement on Feb. 29.

Even before her retirement became official, she and long-time friend Ellen Clark, who once taught with her in Hilliard before moving to the Upper Arlington City School District, discussed a charity event to benefit the Nationwide Children's Hospital Child Life Sibling Clubhouse.

The clubhouse is for preschool and school-age children to visit, play and learn while their siblings are hospitalized, according to Clark.

Taylor has invested more than three decades of working with kindergarten students and helping with fundraisers so the upcoming event was not a big leap. "SparklePaloosa" got its start in 2006, Clark said, when Taylor wanted to do something for the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

The year before she held a concert at Hilliard Davidson High School for the victims of the tsunami and it was such a success that she developed "Sparkle-Paloosa."

Taylor wanted to reach out and help others, so she picked up her trusty guitar and urged friends into helping her out.

On that first night, she said, it was cold and rainy and her expectations were not high, but she was both stunned and pleased when children filled the audience and she had the opportunity to work with three volunteer bands.

She said she discovered that she liked being on the stage, even more than she enjoyed her role as "Mrs. Sparkles" in the classroom.

"It is educating through entertaining," said Clark. "Debbie wanted to do something locally this time. She was aware Children's Hospital had a program."

During the "SparklePaloosa", Taylor reminds the children who are attending the event that they are helping other children.

"It is fun with a purpose," said Clark.

Taylor got her glittery name years ago when her nieces and nephews dubbed her "Aunt Sparkles" because of her glitzy wardrobe consisting of sequins, beads and bangles.

The name was altered a little for the classrooms in the Hilliard City School District.

Today, it is more of a shock to Taylor to be called by her real name.

"I haven't heard Mrs. Taylor for 15 years," she said, recently.

She even created her own "sparklific" language to entertain the children, as well as herself.

Activities during the "Sparkle-Paloosa" include a Bounce House and musical interludes by RMT Songs of America.

Clark said Taylor and the lead singer are friends.

"They are great," Clark said of RMT. "They are a contemporary rock band which is suitable for kids to dance to."

Musical storytelling will be provided by Barry Weaver.

"His work is very kid oriented," she said. "He encourages participation from the kids."

Balloon animals will be made by Luke the Juggler, who is well known in the Upper Arlington area.

Two sing-alongs will feature Taylor's alter ego performing with her guitar at 2 and 4 p.m.

The sticker-covered guitar, she said, leaves people with the impression that she is a left over hippie from the 1960s and 1970s era, but Taylor does not mind.

Fliers for "SparklePaloosa" will be distributed to the schools shortly before the event.

A family of five will pay \$10 at the door to enter.

For each person over the number of five it costs an additional \$2 for admittance.

During the event Taylor plans to pose with children for a photo with "SparklePaloosa" banners in the background, at a cost of \$10.

All types of tickets will be sold during the fundraising party extravaganza, according to Clark, with some of the prizes including a vacation at Delray Beach, Fla., a Jegs shirt, tickets to an Ohio State University game, a day at a spa. Jegs High Performance is sponsoring the event, while the owners of the Makoy Center are donating the space since their daughter had a child in Taylor's class.

A bake sale will also be held during the "SparklePaloosa."

Eventually Taylor hopes "Mrs. Sparkles" will make her television debut, where she can entertain more children that she was ever able to reach in the classroom, although she estimates that she has worked with 11,000 children during the last 35 years.

"Her new career," Clark said, "is continuing to provide educational entertainment for 3- to 6-year-olds."

Captain Kangaroo, Lucy's Toy Shop and Mr. Rogers are all gone and, Taylor said, it is time to replace them with someone who has the best interest of children at heart.