

Students fight human trafficking with music



The band Rocket to Anywhere is one of the acts that will perform at the 4th Annual Hope for Freedom Benefit Concert at South Fork High School April 30. The event, sponsored by the school's chapter of Artists for a Cause, raises money for Hope for Freedom, an organization that fights human trafficking in our area.

Photo courtesy of Eileen Walentin

Shelley Koppel
 STAFF WRITER
 skoppel@YourVoiceWeekly.com

MARTIN COUNTY — It is hard to believe that an area as beautiful as south Florida can be home to some of the worst human trafficking in the country. The evil is, quite literally, in our own back-

yard. Florida is home to many immigrants who are preyed upon by traffickers and to runaways from home or foster care who are also exploited by those who want to benefit from human misery and fear.

The students in South Fork High School's Artists for a Cause chapter will hold their 4th annual Hope for Freedom Benefit concert

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Kerstin Brown, Palm City

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at the high school April 30. The proceeds collected from the event benefit Hope for Freedom, an organization that battles trafficking in our area.

The event is the brainchild of Eileen Walentin, choral director at the high school. She and her son, Julian, who served as president of South Fork's Artists for a Cause before he graduated, heard about Hope for Freedom in church. Walentin had her students research human trafficking and they decided to make it their cause. Students liked the idea that the money benefitted victims in Florida.

While the subject matter is serious, the evening will feature an exciting mix of performers. Dance groups like the Preston Contemporary Dance Theatre and the Atlantic East Coast Dance Theatre will perform, as will south Florida-based bands Rocket to Anywhere and The Calm. The event will feature students from South Fork's Artists for a Cause, the South Fork High School Chamber Choir, and, this year, students from Martin County High School's chapter, as well. As always, it will end with a Grand Finale performance of Coldplay's "Fix You."

In addition to the concert, the

audience will have the opportunity to participate in a silent auction of artwork. All of the proceeds and donations go to Hope for Freedom. Walentin hopes to top last year's take of nearly \$1700. They would love to raise \$3000 this year.

Kerstin Brown of Palm City, a senior at South Fork, is president of the Artists for a Cause South Fork chapter. She said that this event has affected her life.

"I first saw the Hope for Freedom Benefit Concert my freshman year and it has honestly changed me as a person. I even wrote an extended essay for the International Baccalaureate program about human trafficking because of it. It's such an important cause and people don't realize how much of an issue it actually is. I hope that when people come to the concert, they not only have a great time, but they have a new understanding of human trafficking and that it can happen anywhere."

The 4th annual Hope for Freedom Benefit will take place in the South Fork High School auditorium, located at 10000 S.W. Bulldog Way, Stuart, April 30 at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for students and seniors, available at the door. Donations are welcome.

For more information, call (772) 219-1840, ext. 230.