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### A Son's Love of Music is Passed Along to Young Musicians Blues Angel Music Foundation Puts Instruments in Schools

Pensacola, FL: When Aaron Clark was in the third grade he started to take violin lessons, with his family's support. His mom, Carol Clark admits that she didn't think it would last, but then it did! She explains that he went through some rough times when he didn't want to practice, but by then she had seen his interest so she pushed a little and even got him private lessons. By the time he got to Pine Forest High School he was showing skill and he was a determined musician.

"He was a violinist, not a fiddle player, he would say," she explained. He joined the Pensacola Youth Orchestra and loved it. Then he found Jeff Glickman and the Panhandle All Stars and the Davenports, "and, he became a fiddle player, too."

"I could hear a difference in his playing. Music became a part of his heart, not just notes on a page," she said.

Aaron studied business in college and went to work for Navy Federal Credit Union for a "day job" while he continued to play in bands in his free-time. The bands were his chance to follow his dream. But his dream came to an abrupt end when he recently passed away unexpectedly. His family wasn't ready to let his love of music go, so his brother, Matthew, did some research and found the local Blues Angel Music Foundation.

"Matthew contacted me and told me about Aaron. He said he'd been doing research on local nonprofits and wanted more information about the Blues Angel Music Foundation. I explained our focus on music education and therapy, and that 100% of all money raised goes toward those programs," said Dan Fugate, Marketing Director, Blues Angel Music, Inc.

"By the end of our conversation he'd decided the family would ask for donations to the Foundation in lieu of flowers. Thanks to the generous outpouring from Aaron's friends and family, his love of music will go on and about two dozen students per year who might not have had an opportunity to pursue their love of music can."

Along with the donations made to BAM's Foundation came a request. The Clarks asked the people at Blues Angel to help them continue Aaron's love of orchestra music by helping to get violins and other stringed instruments into the hands of young musicians to give them an opportunity to find out if they are meant to be a violist, or a fiddle player, or a cellist or a bass player.

Mrs. Clark explained to a group of musicians at Bellview Middle School, "the money for these instruments didn't come from our family, it came from people who knew Aaron and cared about him. It has meant so much to us to hear their stories, and to be able to work with Blues Angel Music and the Escambia County School District to identify schools and students who will appreciate these beautiful instruments."

Bellview Middle School Principal Melia Adams greeted the Clarks, "Thank you for sharing Aaron's passion with us, this means a lot."

Carol Clark gave the members of Bellview's orchestra at a very mom-like pep talk. "When you have a time when you don't want to practice, know that Aaron had times like that, but I made him stick with it and he got through it, and, you will, too. Then some day you will be able to play with lots of local musicians."

The students gave her a giant thank you card and then an even better gift – their enthusiasm. Following a few group photos they immediately started chattering away deciding on names for each instrument. Voices overlapped as they decided one bass would be named Clark and the other would be Sara.

“Who is Sara?” they were asked and they all pointed to the second bass.

“No, WHO is Sara, where did that name come from,” they were asked.

“She just seems like a Sara,” a student answered.

The naming “ceremony” continued until each cello had a name, one would be Ruby, one would be Aaron and the third would be Matthew, after Aaron Clark’s brother. Mama Clark was thrilled. The instruments donated in Aaron’s name, were obviously in good hands.

The donation of the 2 basses and 3 cellos to Bellview Middle School was just one stop the Clarks and the DeStafney’s from Blues Angel Music made this week. They also donated 10 violins to the school district’s Fine Arts Specialist, Angela Barberi, who will work with district orchestra instructors to find students musicians to assign them to and 2 cellos were donated to Warrington Middle School and 1 bass and 2 cellos will be assigned to students at either Ferry Pass Middle or West Florida High School

The funds needed to support this effort to support Escambia County youth orchestra programs came from donations made in Aaron’s memory and funds raised during the Summer 2016 Blues on the Bay Concerts held at the Maritime Park.