

Pequannock Event Helps Local Soldiers

By Christopher Lotito

Locally based Family & Friends for Freedom Fund, a non-profit dedicated to fundraising for the medical expenses of injured soldiers, held a concert May 12th to benefit Derek McConnell and Adrian Simone, 2 [Afghan War](#) vets who are also double amputees.

The concert, located in [Pequannock Township](#) High School's auditorium, was organized by Kathy Sturla who founded the organization and consisted of a night of Vegas style entertainment. After a few moving words by Kathy Sturla, the evening kicked off with comedian Johnny Watson, whose pitch perfect comedy was a great comedic interlude in what might almost have been a somber event given the subject matter.



Well-wishers speak with the family of an injured soldier before Saturday's event.



Comedian Johnny Watson warms up the crowd.

Following a second comedian, Scott Sturla took the stage with his band playing a few songs, then finishing off with a piece titled "8 Days" dedicated to his brother, the wounded veteran for which Family & Friends for Freedom Fund was started.

Finishing up the night was the talented Gene Ferrari, a lounge singer and his jazz orchestra, performing a series of covers as well as a few original pieces.

The audience was also treated to a surprise visit from [Medal of Honor](#) recipient [Dakota Meyer](#). Corporal Meyer is only the third living recipient of the Medal of Honor since the [Vietnam War](#), a distinction earned by his massive assault upon [Taliban insurgents](#) over 3 successive strikes in a successful maneuver to rescue fellow soldiers who had become pinned down. Meyer's presence was an amazing validation of the great work done by the Family & Friends for Freedom Fund and indeed events paused briefly as many audience members moved to shake his hand.

The work performed by Family & Friends for Freedom Fund and organizations like it is absolutely essential, as the funds raised help to fill the gap in care expenses between what insurance and the government will cover for our wounded soldiers and the related expenses incurred in their every day lives. Nearly the entire Pequannock Rotary turned out to see the event as well as the Deputy Mayor of Pequannock and a wide collection of other local celebrities.

At \$18 a ticket, events such as this provide an easy answer to the age old question: What can I do to help?



Scott Sturla performs "8 Days"



Kathy Sturla, organization spokesperson.

Family & Friends for Freedom Fund is a non-profit charitable organization founded in 2005. The inspiration for the organization was Gy Sgt James Sturla who was severely wounded Sept. 22, 2004. 27 surgeries later and with a rebuilt elbow he is still in the Marines, deployed to Africa. They have assisted over 350 military families with funds that exceed \$650,000.

Family & Friends for Freedom Fund is planning a beefsteak event for the fall, more information and opportunities to assist or donate can be

found at: <http://injuredmarinesfund.org/>

Christopher Lotito is a member of the Pequannock [Historic District](#), Open Space, and Flood Control Advisory Commissions as well as the author of "[Torrent](#)," a book about flooding in the region. Lotito's personal mission is to reduce new taxes, drastically reduce flooding, and preserve more green spaces for our children. [Christopher Lotito Profile](#)