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Forever young: Benefit will support expanding vision of Young Audiences

By **Colin Dabkowski**

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Young Audiences of Western New York, the arts and educational organization-founded in 1962, is gearing up for a growth spurt.

The already wide-reaching outfit, which works with an estimated 60,000 young people every year, is leading a new effort called Arts Partners for Learning. That project, gigantic in scope and ambition, has as its goal integrating the arts into the lives of even more Western New York children; hopes are for programming to begin by the fall.

To help set the organization on its new course, Young Audiences is inviting Western New Yorkers to the Sportsmen's Tavern at 8:30 p.m. Saturday for "Beats & Brews," its second annual fundraiser.

The main event is a performance by Taylor Made Jazz, founded 25 years ago by Van Taylor and a favorite of Young Audiences' students. Around 10 p.m., after Taylor Made's performance and a series of fundraising raffles, the new funk-jazz collective FunkBelly takes the stage, featuring what News Pop Music Critic Jeff Miers called the "killer lineup" of Eric Crittenden, Zuri Appleby, Deshawn "D Ray" Jackson and Dale Toliver.

"It's been a privilege and a joy to promote the arts with Young Audiences through a thing called jazz," Taylor said in a release. "I love showing students how jazz started, why it started, and demonstrating our group's contributions to the art form."

"We like partnering with Sportsmen's Tavern because they have a long history of supporting local artists," said Cynn timer Gaasch, Young Audience's executive director. "They have a similar vision for their business."

For anyone on the fence about Saturday's festivities, Gaasch stressed the high danceability factor of both Taylor Made Jazz and FunkBelly, especially for those who came of age in the '70s and '80s. And with the Sportsmen's recent expansion, she said, she hopes to build on last year's healthy crowd of about 100.

Young Audiences, which will turn 50 this year, also is using the opportunity to spread the word about its new project. Starting April 1, it will put out a request for proposals from groups and artists who want to be involved. In the meantime, Gaasch directs anyone interested in the new Arts Partners project to the organization's website, www.yawny.org.

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