

# Mighty Manatees concert honors memory of Jeffrey Allan Jones of Phoenixville

By Dave Howell / Special to The Morning Call  
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Jeffrey Allan Jones was one of those people everyone liked. His older sister Deb Soufleris says, "He was an interesting character, a 6-foot-4-inch redhead, very gifted, smart and artistic. People were drawn to him."

Brian Miksis, his best friend at Phoenixville High School, says, "In high school there are boundaries of many cliques, but Jeffrey was not in any one crowd. He was attracted to all sorts of types." Childhood friend Dave Mandlowitz adds, "He was a big red ball of personality. He was such a great, open-minded person."

During his sophomore year at the University of Delaware, Jones was diagnosed with a brain tumor. He died 18 months later, in February 1989, at age 20. The following year, his friends started the Jeffrey Allan Jones Memorial Scholarship Fund at Phoenixville High with a fundraising memorial concert featuring regional band Mighty Manatees, singer songwriter Jim Femino and Grateful Dead tribute band Living Earth.

The sequel to that benefit concert will be held Tuesday Dec. 29 at Sellersville Theater.

The event will begin with a film by Miksis, "Life Is Fair." The film has music from the 1990 concert and features footage of Jeffrey and interviews with people who remember him. It also has interviews done by Jeffrey, who was a journalism major and wrote extensively for the Phoenixville Potpourri column of the Evening Phoenix newspaper.

The film will be followed by the concert by the Manatees. It will also be a "Mana-versary" celebration concert, commemorating the Manatees' 30th year. Along with guitar, bass, drums and keyboards will be the Rhino Horns of two trumpets and three saxes. Many former members will join in throughout the evening, so there will be musical chairs with many instruments. The group, which has put out a number of albums, has also been known as Los Manatees, the Manatees, and the Mighty Manatees Medicine Show.

"The Mighty Manatees are a musical collective more than a band," says guitarist Will Hodgson. "We range from an acoustic trio to eight pieces, depending on the gig." The group plays many different styles, including folk, rock, country, reggae, blues and jazz. "We always mix it up," Hodgson says, adding that the variety might have hurt the band, making it hard to classify. The unifying factor is, he says, "We are always a rhythmic dance band. We like to get people moving."

Hodgson says the band was also friends with the Jones family. "Michael [Jones Jr., Jeffrey's brother] was a musician and became a sound and video technician with the band. I also lost a brother to cancer, which formed a bond between us."

Miksis was inspired to do the film when he watched a box of VHS tapes of Jeffrey and the original fundraising concert. "I thought, maybe there is a story in this. I love telling stories. It made perfect sense that this would be the one I would tell."

He calls the hour-and-15 minute film, including about 15 minutes of music, a "glorified home movie." But that discounts Miksis' extensive Hollywood experience. He is a production sound engineer for television and film, currently working on the upcoming ABC political drama series "The Family," and his many credits include "Royal Pains," "Mad Men," "Homicide: Life on the Street," two "Law and Order" series, and a number of films.

"I did 10 new interviews last year, including two nurses and a doctor associated with Jeff's case. The segments with Jeffrey show him in remarkably good spirits. "I was surprised how much people remembered, much more than I expected," he says. One of the nurses even recalled the sign hanging on the wall in his hospital room saying, "Life is Fair," which provided the film's title.

The segments with Jeffrey show him in remarkably good spirits. "He would not let it get the best of him. He was a survivor," Miksis says.

The first fundraising concert, held at a pavilion in Mont Clare, Montgomery County, was called "Cancer in the Forest."

"It was 20-year-old kids who did this," says Jeffrey's sister, Soufleris, referring to Miksis, Michele Fisher and the late Matt Szabo. Fisher is doing publicity for the Dec. 29 show, and ran the scholarship fund for many years.

Grateful Dead cover band Living Earth headlined. "They were a big boost to the fundraiser," says Soufleris. "The Dead were very popular then. Some people came just to hear Living Earth." Miksis saw 40 Grateful Dead shows with Jeffrey.

The Jeffrey Allan Jones Memorial Scholarship is an annual \$1,000 award to a graduating senior from Phoenixville High to attend college or university to study English, journalism, or communications, Jeffrey's passion. Soufleris says it is for students who "want to make the world a better place, make it a little more awesome."

