

Harmonikids Hohner-sponsored Session #3:
Riverfront Blues Festival, Kay's Kamp, Children's Hospital of the
King's Daughters, SPAH Convention

In early August 2011, Harmonikids embarked on a Hohner-sponsored trip to the East Coast that was successful on several levels. The trip included harmonica workshops at the Riverfront Blues Festival, a session for "Kay's Kamp" for children battling cancer, room to room sessions with kids at the Children's Hospital in Virginia Beach, and a Harmonikids Seminar at the 48th annual SPAH convention.

The Riverfront Blues Festival in Wilmington Delaware has been a long-time supporter of Harmonikids. It is a first-rate nonprofit festival that every year features many of the most popular performers in the Blues. This year Hohner donated 300 harmonicas for my workshops that I conduct in between main stage sets. The classes were well attended by dozens of eager beginner harmonica enthusiasts from ages 5 to 65 who delighted in learning four Blues-oriented compositions and techniques and tips to keep them playing and improving. The Hohner and Harmonikids banners were proudly displayed at the workshop tent - an opportunity to publicly display the dedication each respectively brings to keeping the music alive. In each class, special mention was made regarding the partnership between Hohner and Harmonikids to provide humanitarian efforts worldwide. Throughout the weekend the joyful sound of my students happily practicing their newfound Blues harmonica talents could be heard all over the festival grounds.

While in Delaware, I was asked to provide a Harmonikids session to a very special venue for kids. **Kay's Kamp** is a summer camp for children battling cancer and those in remission. Its mission is to provide them the opportunity to participate in a unique camping experience promoting what the disease cruelly takes from their childhood – fun and normalcy. The camp is held on the pristine 2,200 acre campus of Saint Andrews boarding school in Middletown DE which offers a wide variety of indoor and outdoor activities. When I arrived the festive atmosphere the staff provides these kids facing remarkable challenges immediately impressed me.

The harmonica session was a unequivocal success, bringing sheer delight to the kids, as illustrated by this touching letter sent to me by the foundation president Laurie Warren:

Gary,

First I would like to thank you on the behalf of the entire staff for taking the time in your busy schedule to attend Kay's Kamp on August 10, 2011. It was the highlight of the evening and the kids, and staff, were memorized by the amazing things you were able to do with the harmonica!

Since all of our kampers are children affected by cancer and it's treatment, it is sometimes difficult for all of them to operate at the same skill level. So it was truly heartwarming to watch you teach **all** of them, from the youngest 5-year-old kamper to the oldest, how to play actual songs on the harmonica.

I know these children well and to see the sense of pride and accomplishment on their smiling faces for the next few days of Kamp, was amazing! One little boy said to me, "Mrs. Warren. . . I can do it! I can do it! – listen!" **His** rendition of Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star sounded perfect to me! And it was truly a milestone for him, you see, this little boy was recovering from brain cancer and had to relearn every skill we take for granted, like walking, talking, eating and everything else that a normal 7 year old does. Yes, it was truly a milestone.

From Wednesday night on they played and played giggling and trying to outdo each other, it was great! Although, I must say, I did hear a few of the counselors say, "Ok, ok, that sounded great – but put them away – it's time to sleep!!"

Gary, once again I can't thank you enough for sharing your wonderful talent with the kids at Kay's Kamp. Many of them did however, spent the week trying to figure out how in the world you played that harmonica with your ear! (I'll never tell.) Thank you also for giving a harmonica to one of our counselors. He is a cancer survivor who is now profoundly deaf. He is an inspiration to the children and a wonderful young man – I know he very much appreciated your kind gesture.

Thank you again for what you do to bring smiles to the faces of so many children. We are still rounding up all of the pictures from Kamp week, and I should have one to send you next week. We can't wait until next year!

Sincerely,

Laurie

Laurie J. Warren

President - Co-Founder

The Kaylyn Elaine Warren Foundation – KEWF

My next stop was the 48th annual **SPAH** (Society for the Preservation and Advancement of the Harmonica) convention in Virginia Beach, VA. Hohner generously invited me to this premier harmonica event, providing the opportunity to perform at their booth, and conduct a Harmonikids Seminar describing my work using the harmonica as a therapeutic tool. My first exposure to SPAH, I found it to be a most remarkable gathering of the harmonica community from around the globe, each displaying and sharing their undying love, enthusiasm and respect for the instrument. There was incredible diversity of genres, abilities, ages, genders, styles, and backgrounds. It was a wonderful experience. My seminar lasted beyond the 2 hour allotted time slot, with attendee's riveted to Harmonikids video footage, stories and insights. Many enthusiastically shared their own experiences in using harmonicas to help others.

Hohner's sponsoring of my SPAH convention appearance provided me the opportunity to visit a facility in the area called **The Children's Hospital of the Kings Daughters in Virginia Beach**. A wonderful children's hospital, it is the facility of choice for pediatric care in southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina.

When I arrived most of the kids I had been scheduled to reach were unavailable due to treatments or simply because they were too ill to attend. Of course in hospital environments this is sometimes the case, and though a challenge, it is not necessarily a deterrent to Harmonikids reaching them. After performing a fun session in the activity room with kids who were well enough to attend, I made the rounds, going directly to the children room to room. By coincidence, Child Life Assistant Jeremy Eppihimer was a Blues guitarist who had his acoustic guitar there, so his talent further enhanced the sessions. We visited 8 rooms, and each child was delighted to not only receive and play a harmonica, but to be serenaded by Jeremy and I. Some of the kids had family members there who joined in the fun. Giggles and smiles lit up their rooms. The cheerful sound resonated into the halls prompting the hospital Chaplain to stop by and express his enthusiasm for the Blues and the power of music for the soul. To our surprise, at one point a doctor (who'd been drawn to the sound) joined in and beautifully sang the Blues with us – prompting a jolly standing ovation from the staff nurses! Often Harmonikids sessions not only bring joy to children in facilities, but also can be a cheerful moral booster to the dedicated folks who provide them care.

Child Life Assistant (and guitarist) Jeremy Eppihimer said, *“It was truly a pleasure to have you today, the kids, as well as the staff, really enjoyed your visit. Your talent put smiles on quite a few faces. They were also very appreciative and pleased with the harmonicas that were passed out. As I walked through the units later in the afternoon I could still hear them playing. If you are ever in the area again we would be honored to have you for another visit. Thanks again.”* Child Life supervisor Debi Hardway added, *“I was thrilled with your visit. Your interactions with the kids were phenomenal. I hope you will come back in the future.”*

Harmonikids Hohner-sponsored August 2011 sessions were remarkably successful in many far reaching respects. From workshops at the Riverfront Blues Festival, to a summer camp session for children battling cancer, to room sessions with kids at the Children’s Hospital in Virginia Beach, and the SPAH convention seminar, the trip shared its goodwill and inspiration among a large and diverse population of those in need, those who provide, and enthusiasts of all levels.

Gary Allegretto
Founding Director, Harmonikids
www.harmonikids.org



QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

The Kay's Kamp child mentioned in Laurie Warren's letter

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Kay's Kamp Harmonikids

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A Blues harmonica workshop at the Riverfront Blues Festival