Folk singer brings his guitar to Tallahassee to raise funds for Alzheimer’s research

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When it came to choosing a headliner for the Alzheimer’s benefit concert he was producing, Sandy Halperin knew exactly who to call: Peter Yarrow of the famed folk group Peter, Paul and Mary.

“When my children were little, 3 and 4, I played Peter, Paul and Mary,” said Halperin.

Throughout his life Halperin, 64, had contact with Yarrow a number of times. As big fans of the folk trio, Halperin and his family attended four of their concerts and met him in person at several meet and greets. Halperin’s daughter, Karen, began corresponding with Yarrow, exchanging letters and poetry with him over the years.

“With Peter, I felt an emotional connection,” said Halperin. “I emailed him about the benefit concert and sent a photo of my family to him as well. And once he saw the photo, he remembered who we were, and called to talk to me about the concert.”

Yarrow has become as widely recognized for being an activist as for being an artist through his work with equal rights, peace, the environment, gender equality, homelessness, hospice care and education.

In a telephone interview with the Tallahassee Democrat’s Mark Hinson last week, Yarrow said, “When I’m called upon to help out with something like this, I do, because it is a privilege.”

Halperin worked at the Florida State Health Department until he was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer’s Disease in 2009. Since then, he’s been an active advocate in the Tallahassee community, striving to create a unified voice for the disease locally and nationally.

As part of this goal, Halperin created the Alexander “Sandy” Halperin, DDS, Alzheimer’s Research Fund and is working with the Alzheimer’s Project, Inc. to host a benefit concert at The Moon to help raise awareness in Tallahassee specifically.

“This is my time, I feel from my inner being, to help others,” said Halperin. “I’ve done it my entire life, but now in this chapter of my life, I’ve dedicated it — besides my family being first — wholly to what I can do next to help on the local and national level with Alzheimer’s.”

Halperin isn’t the only one who’s thrilled to have Yarrow on board for the concert. Jessica Duncan, the Alzheimer’s Project’s marketing director, said, “With Peter Yarrow coming here on this small, local level, I think that it’s going to give people here in Tallahassee the awareness they need.”
According to the national Alzheimer’s Association, more than 5 million Americans are living with the disease. It was recently identified by the *New England Journal of Medicine* as the costliest disease in the United States. Proceeds from the concert will go directly towards helping the local Alzheimer’s community.

Although having Yarrow in Tallahassee is something of a bucket list moment for Halperin, he points to the bigger picture.

“This isn’t Sandy saying ‘Help Sandy,’ this is Sandy saying and crying out to the people within the community, ‘Help these people with the disease that are suffering’,” said Halperin. “I’m just doing this as a face to represent the thousands and thousands of people who are being affected by this disease.”