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Wendel Has a 'Mema' Heart

By MAGGIE FRAM
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — Amy Wendel remembers when her dream to go to Africa began as a high school sophomore at Westfield High School in 1996.

"I watched *Out of Africa*, and I knew I had to go there someday. I know it sounds cheesy, but I saw all these pictures of Africa — the landscape and safaris — and I wanted to go there, particularly Tanzania," Ms. Wendel began.

Her dream came true in October 2009, when she volunteered with a U.S. volunteer organization (she prefers to keep it anonymous) and spent a month at Magereza Nursery School in Moshi, Tanzania.

The United Republic of Tanzania is located in Central East Africa and was formerly a German, then British, colony until declaring its independence in 1961. The new state combined the entities of Tanganyika and Zanzibar, hence the portmanteau of Tanzania.

Ms. Wendel spent the month working with the three nursery-school teachers and 80 children, ages 2 to 7. "All I had in mind were pictures and movies, and it blew my mind," Ms. Wendel explained about arriving her first day to the school. "They only have one outfit, so it helped me remember who they were each day," she continued.

"Children as young as 2 were walking themselves to school, some as far as 45 minutes away. Some kids walk miles and miles just to get to school," Ms. Wendel marveled.

The lack of sufficient provisions — from food to basic school supplies — is what particularly caught Ms. Wendel's attention during her stay in Moshi.

"There were not enough pencils. Kids were fighting over one pencil. They had no paper. They'd erase yesterday's math work for the current day's assignment. We fed them porridge every day made of flour, water and sugar. If we were lucky, there was milk," Ms. Wendel shared. It was for these simple tools for learning that Ms. Wendel decided she

"Kids were fighting over one pencil. They had no paper. They'd erase yesterday's math work for the current day's assignment...If we were lucky, there was milk."
— Amy Wendel, WHS Class of 1996

wanted to raise funds for the Magereza Nursery School.

When she returned to Boston, where she has lived since 1998, Ms. Wendel began her own non-profit, Project MEMA (Making Education in Moshi Accessible — "mema" also means "good" in Kiswahili).

"I came home and couldn't stop thinking about the kids. I have some downtime with my job, and my boss was very supportive of me developing this idea," said Ms. Wendel, who now works as a personal assistant for a financier.

Ms. Wendel incorporated Project MEMA in May of this year, and currently is filing the extensive paperwork to form a 501(c)(3). Her plan is to provide school supplies and books to the entire school.

Ms. Wendel just booked her ticket for September 25 to fly back and deliver the supplies herself during her two-and-a-half-week visit.

"A fund-raising anonymous 'angel' has donated airline miles to offset the cost of my airline ticket," Ms. Wendel continued. She also plans to buy as many school supplies in Tanzania to support the local economy as she can.

Her main goal is to help offset the cost of tuition, which is \$12 per child, or 12,000 Tanzanian shillings, at the Magereza Nursery School.

"So many kids were behind in paying when I was there last October. Parents would pay as they could, sometimes only 50 cents at a time.

With an annual income of \$200 to \$300, most Tanzanians cannot afford the school fees up front for their children," she remembered. The fees for secondary school are exponentially higher, at the rate of \$250 to \$300 per child for day school.

Eventually, Ms. Wendel wants to expand her fundraising efforts to help secondary students with individual sponsorships, since only "20 percent of secondary students can afford to attend school and graduate," she informed *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times*.

"I'd love to see it grow to help more kids. One of the biggest things I want to do with Project MEMA as it grows is to keep administrative costs at zero or the smallest percentage possible," Ms. Wendel concluded during the phone interview.

To learn more about Project MEMA, visit projectmema.org or check out her page on Facebook.

Arts & Entertainment

Schaeffer's WWII-Era Book Full Of Moral and Ethical Quandaries

By MARYLOU MORANO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — Nazi Germany during World War II is the backdrop for "Hummel's Cross," a book written by Westfield resident Brad Schaeffer. The book's storyline revolves around Erich Hummel, a youthful Luftwaffe fighter pilot decorated with the Iron Cross by Hitler himself, who comes to fight the war on his own terms.

Mr. Schaeffer has given readers a complex character in Hummel.

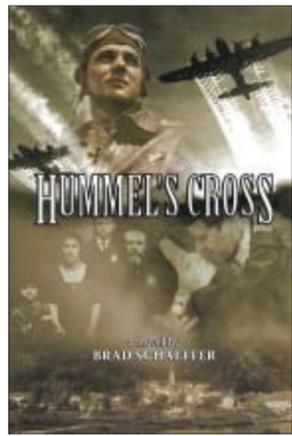
While shooting down Allied planes invading the German skies, he covertly helps his fiancée, Marina, hide his Jewish piano teacher and his family in her attic.

Then, after witnessing firsthand the cruel plight of the Jews at the hands of the regime for which he has been fighting, and then seeing his brother's plane shot down by roving Allied fighters, Hummel deserts the Luftwaffe and turns traitor.

It does not give away the ending of the story when pointing out that Hummel and Marina survive the war. We learn in the first paragraph of the first chapter that it is Hummel, now a retired musician living in London, who is relating the story.

As he tells his tale from first page to last, Mr. Schaeffer involves his readers in a rollercoaster of emotions that range

from heartbreak, to horror, to the righteous feeling that in the end, good does prevail over evil.



This is Mr. Schaeffer's first novel, and it is a fine one.

The story is compelling; the protagonist, Erich Hummel, is memorable, and Mr. Schaeffer's message is timeless.

"Never be afraid to stand up for what you believe in," he said. "...Sometimes, you have to pick [a] side of the

moral divide, make your stand, and then accept the risks."

In a literary genre that can at times seem replete with cruelty and the automaton-like following of the senseless and fanatic, Mr. Schaeffer bursts on the scene with a refreshing take of historical events.

Erich Hummel is the type of fictitious Nazi character about whom one does not see much written.

In Hummel, Mr. Schaeffer gives voice to those who, like the character, fell into what the author calls "that vast gray area of those who may have been uncomfortable with certain aspects of the regime, but then again quite happy with the tangible results like good roads [and] full employment.

"To understand Hitler's rise," he continued, "we must understand the terrible conditions of Weimar Germany that preceded him. It is a chilling lesson in the willingness of an otherwise-sophisticated and astute populace to follow a magnetic politician when mixed with economic despair and social upheaval."

At first, Hummel can't make up his mind about which side to support.

It is his indecision that lends itself to the complexity of the character, a complexity that Mr. Schaeffer points out is not unlike the complexity of pre-war Germany itself.

Ultimately, Hummel makes the right decision, and as the story progresses, the reader is privy to his psychological transformation; from oblivious to what is going on around him, to support of Hitler, to full-fledged treason, the reader is witness to it all.

Minor characters in the form of family, fellow fliers and SS officers keep Hummel's transformation active and the reader's pages turning.

Mr. Schaeffer admits that he likes the older, wiser Hummel better than the younger character.

"The history of warfare is filled with decent people who may have, for one of many reasons — be it circumstance, geography, the times and places in which they lived — find themselves fighting on the morally inferior side of the fight," he explained. "The uniform one wears does not always tell who they are."

The author researched the time period and events by perusing memoirs and viewing hours of interviews with Luftwaffe personnel, American fliers and ordinary German citizens who lived during the times.

Hopefully, Mr. Schaeffer, who also is a political and social commentator, will continue writing novels. This reviewer is one reader who is eager to see what he publishes next.

"Hummel's Cross" is available at amazon.com in both paperback and Kindle format. It also is available at select area bookstores.

Paid Book Review
E-mail ae@goleader.com

Juxtapose to Present Due Sorelle Trunk Show

WESTFIELD — It's fall again and time to spruce up the fall wardrobe with some of Due Sorelle's one-of-a-kind handmade jewelry.

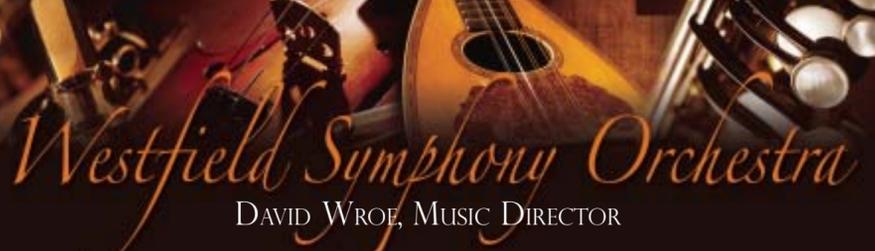
Their trunk show will take place at Westfield's Juxtapose Gallery on Saturday, October 2, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Designer Gena Spil will be there with her brand new fall collection.

The color gray is a big trend for this fall's fashion, along with an assortment of bold, bright jewel tones, including fuchsia, teal and cobalt blue.

There will be plenty of designs that will coordinate with this season's palette. This collection ranges from sophisticated pearl looks to funky bohemian chic made of suede and leather mixed with pearls and stones.

Another great look is lots of icy clear crystals to offset the warmth of fall's hues. Please join us for a fun day, and let us assist you in making the perfect fall purchase.

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DAVID WROE, MUSIC DIRECTOR

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www.westfieldsymphony.org





LEAVING LAS VEGAS...Dave Williams of Williams Nursery, right, just returned from a Garden Centers of America meeting in Las Vegas. Although no showgirls were willing to pose for a picture, P. Allen Smith, the keynote at the session, posed with *The Westfield Leader*. Mr. Smith is an American television-show host and gardening expert. His television show, "P. Allen Smith's Garden Home," is shown on PBS member stations and in syndication on other networks.

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Wed, Sept 29: Leave Your Passport at Home & Celebrate OKTOBERFEST, Beer Flights; German Fare; Lederhosen & More.

Mon, Sept 27 & Oct 4: LIVE MUSIC — The Booglerizers: Rich DiPaolo & friends Live Pickn' 7:30 pm

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