

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Fans prepare to thank the Grateful Dead through “great big cosmic hug”

June 17, 2015 –Thousands of Deadheads from all over the world will soon converge on Santa Clara, Calif., and Chicago, Ill., for the Fare Thee Well tour, the last five shows the surviving original members of the Grateful Dead will ever play together. Nearly 1,000 of them are organizing the largest “thank you” – for the past 50 years of music and family – that the band has ever received.

“You don’t show up to a 50th anniversary party without presents,” said Rob Neff of Baltimore, Md., who founded the group’s Web site (www.nfadead50.net) and Facebook group (www.facebook.com/groups/nfadead50). “The pandemonium surrounding these shows is evidence of just how deeply the Grateful Dead has touched people’s lives. The band has said more than once that these shows were meant as an expression of gratitude for their fans. That is one heck of a grand gesture. They deserve a grand gesture of our love and gratitude in return.”

The group, which came into the public spotlight in April, is organizing three massive displays of gratitude for their favorite band – a moment of song and celebration during the shows; a fundraiser for the Rex Foundation, founded by members of the Dead in 1983; and a collection of videos thanking the band directly, shared through their YouTube channel. Their organization efforts are truly grassroots, operating on a budget of \$0. Some members have generously donated artwork and time, and everyone is encouraged to download flyers to print and distribute anywhere Deadheads might be found – especially the Fare Thee Well shows. So far, roughly three dozen fans have signed up to spread the word at the shows, with more expected as word of this movement spreads.

“We are calling on everyone to sing ‘Not Fade Away’ to the band at the *start* of the second set all five nights of the Fare Thee Well tour,” said Neff. Normally, if the band plays the song “Not Fade Away,” it happens at the *end* of the second set: The audience chants the words “know our love will not fade away” as the song closes, and continues chanting until the start of the first encore. At the Fare the Well shows, starting it earlier will indicate to the band that the fans organized the chant on their own. Details on coordinating the exact time to start the chant are available on (<http://www.nfadead50.net>).

In addition, the group is raising what it hopes will be the “largest collective donation to the Rex Foundation ever.” Established as a nonprofit charitable organization by members of the Grateful Dead and friends in the fall of ’83, the Rex Foundation aims to help secure a healthy environment, promote individuality in the arts, provide support to critical and necessary social services, assist the less fortunate, protect the rights of indigenous people and ensure their cultural survival, build a stronger community and educate children and adults everywhere. The group has raised \$2,000 for the foundation to date, which is a start. They hope to tack some zeros on to the end of that number now that the shows are at hand.

Fans can always donate to the Rex Foundation independently, but if donors go through the Not Fade Away site (<http://www.nfadead50.net>), they can earmark their donations as being part of

the fan-based movement. The Rex Foundation is keeping track of how much is raised through this effort, an explicit “thank you” to the Grateful Dead from the fans.

For Deadheads, it’s not just about the music – it’s about a kinder way of life that embraces and celebrates our differences at the same time as it unifies people in profound and often surprising ways. Cameron Sears, executive director of the Rex Foundation, says this group of fans epitomizes this fundamental spirit of the band. “The NFA effort embodies two core concepts that are integral to the Grateful Dead, community and giving back,” Sears explained. “The band and the fans made the Rex Foundation what is, and it is wonderful occurrence when fans under their own initiative decide to demonstrate their love for the band and dedication to community in such a heartfelt way. We are thrilled to have been chosen to be the custodians of the fans good will, and we intend to continue in that capacity for many years to come.”

Sears’ roots with the Dead go back decades. He has served as the president of Grateful Dead Productions and as personal managers for both Bob Weir and Mickey Hart. He was also co-producer of the Further Festival from 1995 to 1998. Sears took over as executive director of the Rex Foundation in 2013.

Recently, the group began collecting thank-you videos directed toward the band and sharing those videos through their YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCmAPEpUkpBuOPGVHghjY7Q>). This effort is still in its early stages, with about a half-dozen videos collected so far.

“If we can get a couple of dozen videos by the time the first show starts, we can use our ground game to turn that into hundreds,” said Neff. “The vision for this is that it’s kind of like the video messages to the couple that get collected at weddings. We know we can get the link into the hands of the band. And we’re pretty sure, knowing how much they love their fans, that they’ll find the time to sit down and watch these videos.”

Directions for getting a video included on the YouTube channel are available on the group’s Web site. It’s as easy as uploading a video to one’s own YouTube account and e-mailing the link to video@nfadead50.net.

“This is something people can do in the lot, before, after or during the shows,” said Neff. “In fact, it can be done anywhere. Many of us have smartphones. It’s super-fun and easy to take a short video of your friends and get it uploaded. With the number of volunteers we expect to have in the lots, particularly at Chicago, we hope to reach thousands of new people during the shows. If just a small fraction of those people uploads a video, we can give the band a great big cosmic hug and give them a view of their own shows they simply can’t get from the stage.”

The group’s Facebook group, titled #NFA, has more than 800 members, all of whom joined for different reasons, united by their love of the Dead.

For Alexandra Lincoln, the desire to be part of this massive effort comes from an important sense of self that she achieved through the music. “I have never felt a deeper connection to my ‘self’ than when listening to the Dead. And I have never had a more profound experience of

communion with others, then when at a Dead show. To put it really, really simply, this is my church. As real and sacred, I think, as any other. From the depths of my soul, thank you,” Her message to the band: “You have been with me on my greatest adventures, there for me in my darkest hours, and everything in between. Thank you. I love you more than words can tell.”

“I was a lost child,” admitted Sky Lyons, an active member of the group. “My uncle took me to Houston in 1988 to my first Grateful Dead show. What I didn't know was that he was giving me a family, a history, a safe place to grow. I must thank the Grateful Dead's fans for that love. Moving forward 27 years, I am a faithful Deadhead. I love each of the band members for one reason or another. The music, words and tour has gotten me through the best and worst of times. I'm so grateful for the chance for one more Saturday night.” Her personal message to the band? “Give 'em hell, boys, and thank you!”

As James Buzzel, another member of the group, explained, it is quite fitting that the Chicago shows are centered on July Fourth: The Grateful Dead are deeply embedded in the American experience. “When I went to my first show I was hooked ... not just by the music, but the culture and the philosophy of the music, pushing further and always trying to see around the next corner ... the Grateful Dead are the one band that will endure for me, it's the first band my daughter heard when she was born and the first music she sang along to. They are an American standard.”

Dozens of members have signed up to volunteer in the parking lot, which will be transformed by the Deadheads into a medium-sized city, surrounding and supporting those attending the shows. The Web site has recorded more than 3,000 hits since its founding in late March. The group's impact to date has been enabled by technology that simply didn't exist the last time the band played together at Soldier Field, the Chicago venue that will host the band's final show together.

“Social media has been really important for us,” Neff explained. “The press also has been very helpful. But the key to making this really huge will be reaching people on the ground, at the shows. Between now and the shows, we will continue to spread the word, because that will make our efforts in the lot that much easier. We will continue recruiting new volunteers before and during these epic shows.”

Those interested in joining the organizing effort are encouraged to visit the Web site and join the Facebook group for more information.

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Contact info for #NFA members in quoted in this release available upon request.

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