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The UNITED Announces "Nashville North" Initiative to Forge a Musical Pipeline Between Nashville and Westerly

Westerly, RI – March 5, 2025 – The United is launching a new entertainment, education and economic development initiative that will create a dynamic and expanding pipeline between Nashville, America’s “Music City,” and Westerly.

“This program will connect the energy, culture, and vibrancy of Nashville with the rich musical history of Westerly, offering unique experiences for our audiences, students, and the broader community while strengthening the shared musical heritage between these two storied locations,” said Carly Callahan, Executive Director of the United, a non-profit cultural complex in downtown Westerly.

The United’s Nashville North initiative will include programming collaborations with Nashville’s iconic Bluebird Cafe and the nonprofit Country Music Hall of Fame® and Museum, which is home to the Taylor Swift Education Center.

The Bluebird Cafe has gained worldwide recognition for launching the careers of artists like Taylor Swift, Garth Brooks and Faith Hill. Known for its intimate “In The Round” performances — where songwriters share the stories behind their songs — the Bluebird has extended its reach beyond Nashville, hosting performances in select locations such as Santa Fe, NM, Sundance, UT, and London, UK.

“The original vision for bringing programming from the venerable Bluebird Cafe to Westerly and connecting the United with the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum’s educational

programs belongs to Scott Swift, financial advisor and entrepreneur, whose deep connection to both communities inspired this collaboration,” said Callahan. “We are incredibly grateful to him for recognizing the potential of uniting Nashville’s extraordinary songwriting tradition with the musical heritage of Westerly and for setting in motion what will be an unforgettable and ongoing exchange of artistry and storytelling.”

Beginning this fall, the Bluebird will present singer-songwriters from Nashville who will perform at the United in the same intimate and immersive format delivering not only country music, but also the art of songwriting to Rhode Island.

“We are thrilled to bring this experience to New England, beginning this fall and continuing quarterly providing our region with an exclusive opportunity to experience the Bluebird Cafe’s signature songwriter-driven performances. This series will connect audiences to the stories behind the music, offering a rare and authentic glimpse into the creative process of some of the industry’s most respected songwriters,” said Tony Nunes, Artistic Director of the United. “As part of this Nashville North initiative we are also excited to present more Nashville musicians and country music artists on both the United stage as well as at our sister venue The Knick.”

The United Music School will participate in the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum’s Words & Music® program. During a one-day teacher training at the Museum, UMS educators were taught how to integrate the Words & Music curriculum into UMS’ After School Arts program, a free arts education program for Westerly Middle School students.

Student participants will craft original song lyrics, developing key language arts skills, artistic expression and confidence. Through the Museum’s virtual offerings, the group will then be paired with a Nashville-based songwriter who will transform student lyrics into finished songs during an interactive workshop. “We were so inspired by our visit to Nashville and to see firsthand the impact that the Museum’s Words & Music program had on students. The basics of imagery and rhyme — not to mention the social emotional learning — all enhance the school’s mission of enriching students’ lives through personalized professional instruction and exposure to world class educators and musicians,” said Tom Foley, UMS Director.

Fueling the connection between Nashville and Westerly is Southwest Airlines’ new route between Nashville and Providence, R.I., which begins on Tuesday, April 8. Southwest is a longtime partner of the Bluebird Cafe and has served Nashville for 39 years and Providence for 29 years. To celebrate the launch of the new nonstop flight, the United will host a special pop-up performance at T.F. Green Airport.

ABOUT THE UNITED

The non-profit United features a 700-capacity flexible-use black box auditorium that is used for live music, theater, opera, dance, and presentations; three film venues including a 76-seat main cinema, a 24-seat micro-cinema, and a 100-seat balcony cinema; a multi-purpose event and gallery space; and a state-of-the-art music school. The United is located at 5 Canal St. in downtown Westerville.

ABOUT THE UNITED MUSIC SCHOOL

The United Music School offers a range of music education programs and performance opportunities to people of all ages, incomes and ability levels. More than 400 students are instructed by a faculty of 27.

ABOUT THE KNICKERBOCKER MUSIC CENTER

The Knickerbocker, established in 1933, became a legendary venue for blues and roots music, hosting icons such as Big Joe Turner, Albert Collins, Leon Russell, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Buddy Guy, Delbert McClinton and Jean Batiste. It was also home to the influential band Roomful of Blues, which helped define the swinging, horn-driven blues sound that still resonates today. The non-profit Knick is a sister facility of the United and the United Music School.

ABOUT THE BLUEBIRD CAFE, NASHVILLE TENNESSEE

Nashville's Bluebird Cafe is a small but mighty venue where up-and-coming songwriters and artists build their careers and rise to fame. Over the past 42 years, the tiny room has evolved into one of the most significant music venues in the world where all songwriters are welcomed and supported, from novice to established hit-makers. Artists such as Kathy Mattea, Garth Brooks, Faith Hill and Taylor Swift have had career moments along with countless hit songwriters whose music is represented on a wide range of charts.

A typical show at The Bluebird features 3 or 4 songwriters performing "in the round," a format made famous at the club where the performers take turns playing their original music, sharing the stories behind their songs, accompanying each other instrumentally, and vocally. The venue's "SHHHH" policy establishes it as a listening room where audience members are encouraged to pay attention to the song itself – and since it accommodates only 86 people per show, the demand is high, and tickets sell out in minutes.

Over 80,000 people visit the venue annually; many of them as a result of seeing the Bluebird on television, in news pieces, The Foo Fighters' documentary, *Sonic Highways*, the feature film, *The Thing Called Love*, or on the ABC hit drama, *Nashville*. The Bluebird Cafe has been featured in publications such as Southwest Spirit, National Geographic Traveler, The New York Times and Rolling Stone magazine where the club was voted one of the Top 10 Best Clubs in America. The venue's history was featured in the 2019 documentary, *BLUEBIRD*, available on streaming channels including iTunes and Amazon. For more information bluebirdcafe.com.