
How Does a Small Town Get a Big Time Comedian?

How on earth does Bob Nelson-a big-time comedian who has appeared on the "Tonight Show," starred in his own HBO special, and performed for President Ronald Reagan-end up coming to Little River to do a show on Aprils Fools Day?

One thing is for certain. Nelson's appearance is no joke, but the result of one person's dream and the wisdom of an entire community.

"Back in September of 2004, my wife and I went to a day-long conference in Wichita called, 'Come Thirsty,' hosted by well-known Christian author Max Lucado and Grammy winning recording artist Michael W. Smith," recalls Pastor Ted Weis of the Congregational Church.

"When lunch was over, everyone was expecting to see Max and Michael. But instead, out comes this goofy guy-Bob Nelson. He told the funniest jokes and made the whole auditorium roar in laughter," said Pastor Weis. "Afterwards I thought, 'Wow, wouldn't it be great if we could bring that guy to Little River?'"

The idea fermented for a year and then the Congregational Church submitted a grant proposal to the Little River Community Fund. Because one of the goals of the Community Fund is to support and enhance Little River's quality of life, they provided a generous grant to get the event off the ground. With additional support from the town's three churches-Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Little River United Methodist Church, and the Little River Congregational Church-the comedy show is a reality.

The support from the Community Fund was key. When Mutual Telephone sold its interest in Kansas Cellular to Alltel several years ago, most Little River citizens got a large windfall share of the profits. But instead of putting all the money in its pocket, the people agreed to establish a foundation to benefit the community.

"If it wasn't for the over-the-horizon thinking by the people of Little River," says Pastor Weis, "we wouldn't have a Community Fund. And then, we wouldn't have a Habitat for Humanity House in our town, we wouldn't have repaired headstones in our cemetery, and we wouldn't have additional support for our schools. And last, we wouldn't have a big time comedy show in Little River on April Fools Day!"