

## HELPING HANDS

# Rector native's ties to stars pay off for town

*Proceeds from guitar, other items to help needy*

BY KENNETH HEARD

ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

A Rector native's connections with music stars Keith Richards, Keith Urban and Trace Adkins are delivering clothing, medical treatments and college scholarships to children in the small Clay County town.

Donations from the artists are helping fund the Rector High School Helping Hands Foundation, a nonprofit organization developed by former Rolling Stones attorney William Carter that provides money and other care for needy children.

It's a way for Carter to repay the kindness Rector showed him when he was a child.

Carter grew up poor among the cotton fields around Rector. His father was a laborer, and his mother cleaned houses.

As a young adult, he left town in the 1950s and created a life dramatically different from his

His relationship with Rolling Stones guitarist Richards eventually led to the donation of a Zemaitis Pearl Front guitar. The guitar, which Carter believes could bring in more than \$50,000, will soon be auctioned on eBay.

Carter has yet to set a date for the Internet auction, choosing to search first for collectors to make private bids, he said.

"We're trying to help kids out," Carter said. "It started in Rector, but because of who we've got involved, it's become well-known all over."

Richards, 65, donated the signed electric guitar after he spoke with Carter in Nashville last summer



car, and Richards was cited for reckless driving and possessing a hunting knife.

"I was with him in those turbulent years, keeping him out of jail," Carter said. "He flew to Nashville with his biographer to ask me about his arrest in Arkansas. There are periods of time he just doesn't remember."

In 2006, then-Gov. Mike Huckabee issued a pardon for Richards' reckless-driving conviction.

Carter was apprehensive about asking Richards for a guitar for the foundation when they met. Instead, he pondered it awhile and then asked Richards' personal manager a few days later.

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**"The community helped us when we were kids. Now we want to help every kid back." — William Carter**

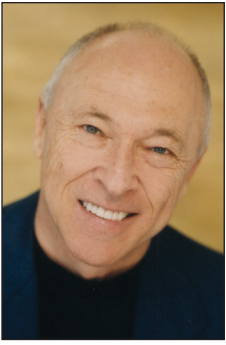
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upbringing. He joined the U.S. Secret Service and later became an attorney for The Rolling Stones.

Carter, 72, was also an attorney for the Gaither Vocal Band before retiring recently in Nashville, Tenn.

about Richards' July 5, 1975, arrest for reckless driving in Fordyce.

Police detained Richards and band member Ronnie Wood in the Dallas County town on that 1975 day. Authorities said they found cocaine in the singers'



William Carter

"I was expecting a cheap guitar," Carter said. "I didn't expect what he gave us."

Richards' instrument is not the only collectible

the Rector High School Helping Hands Foundation has obtained.

Along with a hat from deepvoiced country and western singer Adkins and an autographed poster of Urban, the nonprofit organization has a guitar played at the Grand Ole Opry by Carrie Underwood. It has also auctioned a guitar signed by members of the group Brooks and Dunn.

The foundation was developed in 2006 by Carter and his former classmate, George Barker, a retired U.S. Army general living in New York.

Carter said he returned to Rector that year while making a trip from Nashville to Mountain Home when he was moved by the sight of a small girl in tattered clothing walking along Main Street.

"She looked like a little Raggedy Ann doll," he said. "She was poor. I thought, when I was her age living in Rector, what was I thinking? Was the little girl thinking the same? Was there any hope for her future?"

"I couldn't get that out of my mind," he said.

He called Barker when he returned to Nashville, and the two developed the nonprofit organization.

"We wanted to give back what we got from Rector," he said.

"We all grew up together," he

said. "The town was one big family. We were all poor."

Carter said his memories of Rector have always stayed with him.

"The community helped us when we were kids," he said. "Now we want to help every kid back."

Rector, in northeastern Arkansas, is surrounded by cotton and soybean fields. According to City-data, a Web site that provides demographic information for towns, Rector's median household income in 2007 was \$26,397. The state's median household income for that year was \$38,134.

"This is a poor area," Rector Mayor Ron Kemp said. "It's gratifying to see people who grew up in Rector come back and help others."

"Obviously, the key to this is Carter," Kemp said. "His involvement is critical."

Kemp said Carter has inspired others to give as well. The city is collecting donations to build a downtown Vietnam War memorial. It's not associated with the Rector High School Helping Hands Foundation, but people who serve on the foundation's board are involved with the memorial, Kemp said.

"This has added a new dimension to Rector's giving," he said of the foundation.

The Rector High School Helping Hands Foundation's tax form listed \$62,298 in assets and cash in 2007, the last year for which figures are available.

The group auctioned a painting last year commissioned by Paul Frets, a Virginia artist who, like Carter, calls Rector his home.

Frets painted a portrait of Moses Knight, who would visit

Rector on Saturdays in the 1940s and play his banjo for children. A Tulsa couple bought the painting for \$10,500.

In the summer, an anonymous donor promised Carter that he would provide a student with a year's tuition at Williams Baptist College in Walnut Ridge annually in honor of Knight.

"He wanted the scholarship to be named for [Knight]," Carter said. "We continued that legacy. Sixty years later, Knight is sending a kid to college."

Daniel Hester, an Arkansas State University freshman, received \$2,500 from the foundation last year to help defray living expenses and the cost of books.

"It has helped him tremendously," said his mother, Sherry Hester, a teacher's aide. "We're a pretty poor community. There's no industry here. Helping Hands does things that parents can't do."

"If you came here, you'd be surprised to see how organized this is in such a small town," Hester said. "This organization is better in helping than ones in big cities."

Since its inception, the foundation has helped 300 children with dental work, shoes, scholarships, clothing costs and other expenses.

"It's the most rewarding thing I've ever done," Carter said. "There are medical needs that go unattended. We're trying to stop that."

"There's a community spirit in Rector that we've shared with each other for all our lives," he said. "We want to help every child we can." ■