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Concert Funds Campaign for Replacement of School Below Coal Sludge Dam, Promotes Clean Energy

PITTSBORO, NC – Spending a summer weekend listening to music will help to ensure a safe school for hundreds of children? How? The **Mountain Aid** concert **June 19-20, 2009** at **Shakori Hills Farm in Chatham County, North Carolina**, will benefit Pennies of Promise, a grassroots campaign to construct a new building for Marsh Fork Elementary School in West Virginia.

Marsh Fork Elementary sits in the shadow of a mountaintop removal coal mine, just 225 feet from a towering coal silo and 400 yards downstream from a leaking dam holding back nearly three billion gallons of toxic coal sludge. Independent tests show coal dust contaminates Marsh Fork Elementary, a direct threat to the children's respiratory health.

Ed Wiley, grandfather of one such child, began Pennies of Promise after his granddaughter became sick and West Virginia leaders told him the state could not afford a new school in a safer location. The goal? To raise eight million dollars and create a healthy future for the children of Appalachia. That's where Mountain Aid comes in.

Grammy-winning singer and songwriter and West Virginia native Kathy Mattea will emcee and headline Mountain Aid. "Hosting Mountain Aid is the best way I can think of to spend my 50th birthday. I love these mountains, and to celebrate them and unite with others who love them, through music, is a great opportunity," Mattea says.

Other performers include Ben Sollee, named one of National Public Radio's "Top Ten Unknown Artists" of the year for 2007; American music icon Donna the Buffalo; and roots rockers the Sim Redmond Band.

The Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (OVEC), based in Huntington, West Virginia, and Coal River Mountain Watch (CRMW) of Whitesville, West Virginia, are sponsoring Mountain Aid and will also receive funding from the concert's proceeds. Both groups will send volunteers and staff members to the concert to interact with anyone who has questions about the dangers children face at Marsh Fork Elementary, about mountaintop removal coal mining or about the organizations' efforts to promote renewable energy in West Virginia.

Maria Gunnoe, a community organizer for OVEC who won the 2009 Goldman Environmental Prize – the internationally-recognized “Green Nobel” – for her work to end mountaintop removal will attend the concert.

“Mountaintop removal is a force that is destroying Appalachia,” Gunnoe said. “But music is a force that can bring about healing. This is a great way to raise both the funds and awareness we need to build a better future for our kids.”

Judy Bonds, co-director of CRMW, will join Gunnoe at the concert.

“Mountain Aid is *the* event of the year, with amazing talented musicians and rowdy activists gathered together in harmony to save the land and the people,” says Bonds, who won the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2003 for her work to end mountaintop removal. “We often hear, ‘Save the Baby Whales!’ It is time to ‘Save the Baby Human!’ Mountaintop removal is a human rights issue and a crime against our children.”

Advance tickets for Mountain Aid are on sale now for \$22.50 (\$30 at the gate). On-site camping, food and craft vendors will be available. To purchase tickets and for more details, visit www.mtnaid.com.

One of the concert’s organizers, Michael O’Connell, says North Carolina is a good spot to hold the concert.

“According to Duke Energy, North Carolina is the number two consumer of mountaintop-removal mined coal in the country,” O’Connell says. “And, North Carolina lawmakers are considering a bill that would ban the use of mountaintop-removal-mined coal here. As we raise funds for the Pennies of Promise campaign, OVEC and Coal River Mountain Watch, we will also create awareness and support for clean energy.”

O’Connell hasn’t limited his awareness-raising efforts to Mountain Aid. He directed *Mountain Top Removal*, a documentary which focuses on mountaintop removal mining’s harm to the communities around Marsh Fork Elementary. *Mountain Top Removal* has played film festivals domestically and internationally and won the Reel Current award selected and presented by Vice President Al Gore at the 2008 Nashville Film Festival. In conjunction with Mountain Aid, the film will screen on June 19 at 7:30 p.m. at the Carolina Theatre in Durham, North Carolina.

Gunnoe and Bonds both appear in *Mountain Top Removal*, and Gunnoe is the focus of another documentary, *Burning the Future: Coal in America*. Directed by David Novack, this film has aired on the Sundance Channel and won the International Documentary Association (IDA) DocuFest’s Pare Lorentz Award Winner, Best Social Documentary of 2008.

Mattea is one of the protagonists of another upcoming film on the subject of mountaintop removal, *Coal Country*, produced by Mari-Lyn Evans and Phylis Geller, which will premier July 11 at the LaBelle Theatre in South Charleston, West Virginia.

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