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Friday, March 10, 2006

## Concert to rock for foster kids

By Kevin Keenan TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

**SHREWSBURY**— The Hoagland-Pincus Conference Center will become a rock venue for one night tomorrow, as a local couple's fundraiser for foster kids morphs from a private concert to a full-blown event.

Jamie and Steve Levine of Shrewsbury are rock fans who frequently land backstage passes to major concerts, thanks to some excellent connections. They are also foster parents and have cared for 20 children during the last year. Passion for music and kids inspired them to do something unusual — book a nationally-recognized musician for a performance at their home and ask friends to contribute to a foster child cause.

The couple booked Maia Sharp for a concert after they saw her open for Bonnie Raitt at a performance at the Orpheum in Boston. They liked her, and put their names on an e-mail list updating fans on Ms. Sharp's schedule. An e-mail went out recently saying she would play private concerts in the area, if any fans were interested.

"My wife said 'book her!' So we did, and left the details for later," Mr. Levine said.

What happened, however, was that the idea kept growing and more people were invited, Mr. Levine said. They moved the performance to the Hoagland-Pincus Conference Center at 222 Maple Ave., turned it into a benefit and sold out all 200 tickets. As foster parents for the state Department of Social Services, the couple wanted to donate money to help foster children. So they chose Camp to Belong, an organization that brings displaced foster siblings together at summer camps and other activities. According to the organization, 75 percent of foster siblings are separated.

"The summer camp allows them to reconnect," Mr. Levine said. "They run programs throughout the year; they try and rebuild these bonds between siblings."

Mrs. Levine is a pediatric nurse. The couple takes foster children into their home at a moment's notice. There are about 10,000 Massachusetts foster children, either in a foster home or waiting to be adopted, according to the DSS. The agency has a serious shortage of foster parents, Mr. Levine said. He hopes to raise awareness about these issues to people through this concert.



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“My wife said ‘book her!’ So we did, and left the details for later.”

Steve Levin, ON THE DECISION TO HAVE MAIA SHARP, AT LEFT, PERFORM AT A CONCERT

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"There are more foster kids in Massachusetts than there are kids in Northboro, Westboro and Shrewsbury combined," Mr. Levine said. "That's amazing to me."

A typical foster arrangement involves a child or children being removed from a home, and then placed with a foster family, if one is available. The Levines have cared for children of all ages, including newborns. The children will stay as short as one day, or as long as two weeks, before alternative placements are arranged, he said.

Other performers tomorrow include folk/pop singer Kate Klim and the John Cate Band.

Anyone looking for more information should check [www.shrewsbury.net](http://www.shrewsbury.net) or contact Mr. Levine at [steve@stevelevine.com](mailto:steve@stevelevine.com).

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