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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **Fox Communities Credit Union Named Presenting Sponsor of Mile of Music Festival**

APPLETON, WIS. (April 12, 2019) – Willems Marketing & Events, Inc., producer for the annual Mile of Music festival, and Fox Communities Credit Union, one of the event’s original community collaborators when it launched in 2013, have reached agreement for the longtime Valley credit union to become Mile of Music’s new presenting sponsor.

Mile of Music, which will announce details of the Festival next week at OuterEdge Stage as part of its annual Countdown to Mile Week/First Fifty lineup reveal and noontime concert event, is in the middle of finalizing sponsors and artists for the four-day celebration of original music this summer. It will be the seventh festival – dubbed Mile 7 – and is set for Aug. 1 – 4 throughout Downtown Appleton.

Dave Willems, president of Willems Marketing & Events and executive producer of Mile of Music, said the agreement with Fox Communities Credit Union not only helps secure the free festival’s future but also helps boost The Mile’s continuing efforts to build Downtown Appleton’s reputation as a leading destination for live original music. He said the decision by Fox Communities to greatly expand its commitment and move into the Presenting Sponsor role is significant for a community-modeled, grass roots festival that continues to defy the odds by offering free access to eager attendees since it started in 2013.

“This is an important step in continuing the vision of having a remarkable music and community event that is truly accessible to the entire community,” said Willems. “Fox Communities Credit Union’s willingness to step up and dramatically increase its financial support by stepping into the lead sponsorship position – along with their overall organizational commitment for this community festival – goes a long way toward securing The Mile’s purpose as a free celebration of original music that is like no other, that brings a unique vibe to our downtown community, and that plays a big part in making life more interesting for all of us who live and work here.”

The overall commitment from Fox includes the opportunity to continue its lead sponsorship role for subsequent festivals, Willems noted, but is also significant in that it puts a big, bright bow on what's already been a strong collaboration. He said Fox Communities was the first company to lend its support in the Spring of 2013 when he approached them to help establish a dedicated civic checking account for Mile of Music through Willems Marketing. "The support shown by Fox Communities from top to bottom since that time has always been special," Willems said. "With that very first meeting with Greg Hilbert (Fox CEO), when no one had any reason to believe we could make this anything special, Fox has been alongside with its support through encouragement, guidance and funding. That makes it even more special for The Mile Team to see this agreement become a reality. It feels very right for the event and for the community."

Another big piece of the collaboration to date has been Fox's launch of the Bike to the Beat event back in 2016, which has become wildly popular. Offering live music as a backdrop to the community bike ride, Track 4 of Bike to the Beat will be held on Saturday, Aug. 3 and is expected to again host 3,500-plus bike riders of all ages, adding to the overall vibe of Mile Weekend. Cathy Harvath, vice president of marketing for Fox Communities Credit Union, said the opportunity to further Fox's connection to such a difference-making event for the Appleton community was one the organization couldn't pass up. "Mile of Music continues to be a shining example of how our communities within the Greater Appleton and Fox Cities community work so productively together," she said. "We're excited to expand our commitment to such a magical, organic blending of the artist and business communities along with the non-profit and municipal sectors, all of whom knock it out of the park each August to make something very special happen." Willems said the Fox Communities commitment becomes an important piece of the puzzle for the future. "The Festival continues to evolve in different ways each year, whether it's the challenge of not having Jones Park for a couple of years or working around weather issues, but the goal has always been to work collaboratively with sponsors and downtown advocates to keep focusing on delivering a better experience to the artists and the music fans," he said. "Fox gets this, and that's what makes them such a great partner as we move forward."

Perhaps the biggest secret to Mile of Music's popularity and success, according to Willems, has been the rare and enthusiastic collaboration between the public, private, community and non-profit sectors within the Downtown Business District, the Appleton community, and the Greater Fox Cities community. The event has evolved into a national draw only because of the 50-plus sponsors who help to underwrite the costs and provide the seed money, the 60-plus downtown small business host venues, the hundreds of individual Music-Makers who serve as sponsors, the 400-plus volunteers and helpers each year, the dozens of community organizations and municipal departments who lend their support and expertise, and the thousands of local, state and national musicians who have delivered their talents.

The Festival was launched as a community model through Willems Marketing in 2013 with a focus on pooling resources from community advocates to create a special vibe that helps to ensure a strong downtown business and entertainment district into the future. That community model, Willems said, now needs to evolve into a stronger business model to ensure the long-term viability. Part of Fox's overall commitment to Mile of Music includes business advisory consultation from its executive team plus an evolving connection to its non-profit arm, the Fox Cares Foundation, which focuses on the arts, hunger and homelessness. A complementary piece to the community-business model is the recent establishment of a non-profit organization – Appleton Community Music, Inc. – which was initiated last year and will start working this year to boost the original music movement through both big and small events and by developing an artist support fund. In addition, the Festival continues to work closely with Appleton Downtown, Inc. and its Creative Downtown, Inc. fund.

Willems lauded the Festival's previous presenting partner, Tundraland Home Improvements, for its impact on The Mile since Mile 3, while noting that Tundraland will continue as one of the Festival's significant sponsors. "There wouldn't be a Mile 7 – at least not as we know it – if it wasn't for Brian Gottlieb and his team at Tundraland," Willems said. "Their critical lead sponsorship support these last four years has been pivotal to our ability to continue this very unique community model each of the last four years while truly setting the tone for the future."

*Fox Communities Credit Union is 81 years strong and today serves over 103,000 members with 22 branches. As a member-owned financial institution, Fox prioritizes people over profits. Fox has made a commitment to remain vital in the communities we serve, through our support and involvement. Fox has over 400 dedicated employees and more than \$1.6 billion in assets. In 2017, Fox was awarded the best performing Credit Union by S&P Global.*