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Project iAm

Nicole Khoury leads effort to raise funds for autism with Sept. 21 concert featuring Rusted Root.

Stories by Brigitta Burks and Vicki L. Kroll, Page A6

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FUNDRAISER

Project iAm founder balances work, music, philanthropy

By Brigitta Burks

TOLEDO FREE PRESS NEWS EDITOR
tburks@toledofreepress.com

Nicole Khoury's look reflects her multiple roles in the Toledo community. She is wearing a classic suit — but her hair is streaked with blue.

Khoury has her own law practice and also works part time for the public defender's offices in Sylvania and Maumee. And when she isn't working, Khoury is rocking out with her cover band, Arctic Clam. Plus, she runs her own nonprofit, Project iAm, a charity that provides funds to Toledo-area children with autism for various needs.

"I love what I'm doing right now. This is a great time in my life. I can't imagine changing anything, except maybe I'd like to sleep a little more than I do," Khoury said with a laugh.

Khoury, a University of Toledo law school grad, grew up in Toledo's South End with her three younger sisters. From the beginning, music has been a big part of her life.

"My dad's whole side of the family is vocally very talented. My dad was in a band his whole life. He's an amazing guitar player, a great harmonica player. My mother's side of the family sang and played the piano and choirs and everything like that. So from being born, I always say I knew about Jimi Hendrix before I knew about math," she said.

The singer/guitarist began playing acoustics with Mick Mason since 2006, before getting more band members and officially becoming Arctic Clam in 2011. Music serves as Khoury's respite from her busy work schedule.

"The law is so hard on the heart, and it's so hard on your soul and the mind," she said. "So you throw in



TOLEDO FREE PRESS PHOTO AND COVER PHOTO BY BRIGITTA BURKS

■ ATTORNEY NICOLE KHOURY RUNS PROJECT iAm AND PLAYS WITH ARCTIC CLAM.

something like music, that really balances it out and lets me go up and have a great time and lose a lot of energy and that stress."

Still, Khoury emphasized how much she values her day job.

"If I didn't love what I did though, I wouldn't do it. I'm very lucky to love my job," she said.

Part of what made Khoury stick around Toledo is its criminal defense community, she said.

"It is amazing. You walk into another courtroom somewhere else and ... it's not the feeling you have here. Everyone really works together here," she said.

Toledo in general has allowed Khoury to flourish. "It would take a lot to pull me away because I'm not going to be able to move to a big city and make the money that I make in the time that I make it and be able to be a rock star and have a charity," she said.

Khoury has big hopes for her

city's Downtown. "I want to see more people living down here and once we get all this going, then the stores will start coming and we'll start to have our own little mini-Chicago," she said, adding that she believes that is the direction the city is headed.

"I would love to see Downtown what it is on a Friday or Saturday night or what it is after a Mud Hens game all the time," she said.

Khoury is bringing Pittsburgh band Rusted Root to the Shops at Fallen Timbers for a Sept. 21 benefit concert. Advance tickets are \$11 (\$15 at the door) and are available at <http://aboutprojectiam.com/>. Khoury started Project iAm after talking with her best friend, whose child has autism, about the struggles families can face when it comes to finances.

"I don't ever want a family not to get their kid tested or not seek a treatment," she said. ★

Rusted Root to play Acoustics for Autism show in Maumee

To make "The Movement," Rusted Root got creative — more creative than usual. "[The forthcoming disc] was pretty much fan-funded. We had a campaign called Fortunate Freaks Unite, and we have a bunch of different packages from the website, and you can actually still donate at rustedroot.com," said bass player Patrick Norman.

"And with the donations, you get various things, like you get your name on the credits of the album thank-yous. The packages range from that to we'll come and play a show for you at your house if you want."

Norman said it was nice to not rely on a record company and added, "We feel it's a good way to reconnect with the fans, to help the fans feel more involved with the band."

The Pittsburgh group has a reputation for fusing all kinds of music.

"We all are pretty much audiophiles. I've listened to music my whole life, and there's no particular style of music that I'm into," Norman said during a call from the Steel City. "It's natural to take what you hear and what you are inspired by through life and listening to music and incorporate them in songs. A lot of times, it happens subconsciously."

Rusted Root is best known for the song "Send Me on My Way" from 1995.

"It's a really innocent song with a very positive message. And the fact that it was used in a couple of famous movies didn't hurt, being on the soundtrack for 'Matilda' and 'Ice Age' was a really big thing because it keeps young fans coming," Norman said.

"They'll grow up and share it with their brothers and sisters, and they grow up and share it with their children or brothers' and sisters' kids; we've been very blessed to be part of some great art."

The band — Norman, singer and guitarist Michael Glabicki, percussionists Liz Berlin and Preach Freedom, and guitarists Colter Harper and Dirk Miller — is on its way to Maumee, where it'll play an Acoustics for Autism...Plugged In! show at the Shops at Fallen Timbers on Sept. 21. Doors open at 5 p.m. Special guests will be Arctic Clam, Dave Carpenter and Kyle White. Tickets are \$10 in advance at the Village Idiot, Doc Watson's and Ye Olde Cock n' Bull Tavern and \$15 at the door. All proceeds will benefit Project iAm, a nonprofit organization that raises funds for local families with autistic children.

"Michael had done some solo shows with [Project iAm], and he introduced [the band] to the cause, and we jumped right on board," Norman said. "It helps families with children with autism; it helps get them some money that they might need because there's special needs for autistic children and some things that most people wouldn't even think about. And this way, somebody's going to get a little bit of help directly." ★

— Vicki L. Krull



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