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New foundation honors Sullivan

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When the late Paul Sullivan was on the air, holding down the weeknight 8 to midnight shift on **Radio Tracks** WBZ-AM (1030), his listeners were well aware of his humor. The Lowell native, who died of cancer at 50 this past September, didn't suffer fools gladly, and listeners who tuned into "The Paul Sullivan Show" enjoyed his common-sense-driven jibes at bad drivers and selfish politicians.

But when it came to giving, Sully, as he was called, was a little quieter, and fans of the show, which first went on air in January 2005, might not have been as aware of his sense of community. That will change next week, at Wednesday's kickoff party for the new Paul Sullivan Foundation, to be held at the Lowell Memorial Auditorium.

"Since Paul has died, everybody has learned a little bit about him that we didn't know," says Peter Casey, WBZ's news and program director and one of the event organizers. At the talk host's memorial service, for example, Casey learned that "every Christmas, [Sullivan] would pick a family that needed something — presents, tickets to a circus, whatever — and he would go help that family. It was his quiet thing."

"His favorite thing to do was promote different causes," recalls Sullivan's widow, Mary-Jo Griffin. "He'd either get people financially or physically involved."

This spirit, says Griffin, is what guides the foundation, organized by Griffin, Casey, University of Massachusetts at Lowell president Marty Meehan, Howell Communications president Ray Howell, attorney Steve O'Neill,



DINA RUDICK/GLOBE STAFF/FILE 2007

The late Paul Sullivan shared his final WBZ broadcast with his wife, Mary-Jo Griffin, on June 28, 2007.

and Kendall Wallace, chairman of the Lowell Sun. Griffin says the fledgling foundation already has two projects. The first is the Paul H. Sullivan suite at Saints Medical Center, where Sullivan was born and where he spent his last days.

"They were wonderful to us," says Griffin. "But it was still a sterile environment." Her husband, she says, wanted families to be more comfortable at such stressful times and planned for the two-room suite, which will have a pull-out bed, a kitchenette, and a shower. "It was all about comfort for Paul."

The second project, following up Sullivan's commitment to community involvement, is funding the Paul H. Sullivan Leadership Institute at Middlesex Community College.

"He thought, 'How are we going to get young people involved?'" Griffin recalls. The institute is already helping groom 12 Middlesex students for the business world — and for roles in the community at large. "We

bought them their first business suits," says Griffin, "and we're taking them out to events like this."

True to Sullivan's memory, the launch event will combine humor and good works. The fund-raiser, which will be hosted by WBZ's Jordan Rich, will open with comedy by Jimmy Tingle and a cocktail hour featuring "Sully's dream cuisine," which Griffin describes as macaroni and cheese and pigs in a blanket ("with an elegant touch"). A formal dinner will follow, and then a multimedia event with a range of speakers from the worlds of media and politics. A range of tickets are available, from corporate sponsorships to \$125 for the dinner and show and \$20 for the show only. The event, says Griffin, is one her husband would have loved: "As Paul would say, 'We laughed, we cried, we had a good time.'"

To which Casey adds, "It's a nice way to keep Paul's name out there, but also to keep Paul's good work out there."

More information is at paulsullivanfoundation.org.