

# MILL VALLEY LIVING

MARCH 2021



THE B-SIDE—BEYOND THE STAGE

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MEET  
THE  
HAGARS

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*Photo by Leah Steiger*

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## FOR each petal on the SHAMROCK, THIS BRINGS A WISH YOUR WAY: GOOD HEALTH, GOOD LUCK, AND HAPPINESS FOR today and every day.



Tami Larson, Publisher

It's March 2021 my fellow Mill Valley residents. As you are reading this, it was approximately one year ago that we were entering a lockdown. Spring remained busy outside, awakening the earth, as apple and cherry trees blossomed while inside, a different awakening was taking place as we started growing closer to what's important, our families. More of us started reading, playing games, learning languages, playing instruments and even howling to each other outside every night as the coyotes howled with us in harmony.

This Spring and March edition of *Mill Valley Living* pays tribute to this new awakening we are all feeling. As we slowly begin to venture outside our homes this year, spring will not be just another month that passes us by, but treasured.

Our feature resident this month is **Sammy Hagar**, his family and what he's done "Beyond The Stage" The Hagar family's generosity and love exemplify all that's required in awakening our spirits, healing our souls and uniting our community. If you think you knew everything about Sammy Hagar, think again. We also give you a reason to get outside even if to just walk through one of the many groves nestled in our Redwood forest, because you might just get lucky like we did one afternoon and find **Jamie Clark** and his band nestled between the trees, belting out original tunes to live-music-craving residents. If you follow the spring scents even further, you might find one of **Tim Ryan's** beautiful handmade metal hearts he created from bending large metal rings. There's a sign attached to every one of them. "Share a heart. Please take one but only if you will give it away." Oh yes, spring is in the air and we can't thank all of you enough for sharing your stories with us so we can continue to use this platform to share them with everyone else in our community.

*Tami*

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The impact of rock and roll is far-reaching, and often instrumental in raising social consciousness and awareness. It also acts as a rallying cry to bring people together for a cause, evoking powerful feelings and emotions. Accordingly, some rock musicians do so much more than just entertain. On that note, it is our distinct pleasure to honor Mill Valley's longtime resident, **Sammy Hagar**, an international rock star with a very big heart.

Philanthropy is derived from the words "philos", meaning loving, and "anthropus", meaning humankind. Love for humankind—Beyond his legendary status as a rock and roll icon, Grammy award winning Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee, entrepreneur of restaurants, bars and spirits, star of his own television show, *Rock and Roll Roadshow With Sammy Hagar*, and two time New York Times best-selling author, Mill Valley's Sammy Hagar is a true lover of humanity. He is an authentic philanthropist who has heeded the call time and time again to activate his inherent humanitarianism at every opportunity. 25 Platinum albums later, ranging from his original band, **Montrose**, to his solo career, to becoming the front man of **Van Halen**, to **Chickenfoot**, and his latest supergroup, **The Circle**, Sammy continues to amplify his message to help raise funds for causes close to his heart.

Sammy was born in Salinas, and raised with very humble beginnings in Fontana, a small steel mill town in Southern California. Growing up without much inspired his grit, determination and relentless work ethic. "Being a poor kid is a little humiliating," he revealed.



Samantha Hagar, Sammy Hagar, Andrew Hagar, Kama Hagar, Aaron Hagar

"It instilled in me a desire to be somebody. It's where all my drive comes from. I was willing to work hard to ensure I was never poor again." "Even now," he added, "I can still go to that place and remember that feeling, but now it drives me to want to give back and show kids that if you work hard, there's going to be an open door out." As part of Fontana's 100th Anniversary celebration in 2013, Sammy was thrilled to be named Honorary Grand Marshal of the Fontana Days parade. He was presented with a key to the city and a street was named after him - **Hagar Way** - a distinctive honor he cherishes as much as his many music accolades.

Sammy is a proud resident of Mill Valley, where he has called home for nearly 50 years. His admiration for the town began after his first son, Aaron was born. He was living in San Francisco at the time with his first wife, Betsy and mother of his two sons, Aaron and Andrew. To escape the city, Sammy often ventured to **Old Mill Park** on Sundays so Aaron could swing and play under the majestic redwoods. As they walked around the square, Sammy marveled at the fact **Jerry Garcia** and **Carlos Santana** were often hanging out downtown. He remembered thinking, “Hey, when I make it, I’m going to move to Mill Valley.” It became his go-to place and like so many others who “discovered” the area, he also fell in love with Mt. Tam. Right after signing his first record deal with his San Francisco based band, **Montrose**, he picked up and moved to Mill Valley in 1972. He’s been here ever since. With a sense of nostalgia, he recalled there were no stop signs or signals from his original house on Montford Street all the way to the freeway! And with an equal sense of pride, Sammy shared that he and his wife, **Kari Hagar**, live in the same Mill Valley home he purchased in 1976.



Sammy and Kari were married in 1995 at the Amphitheatre on Mt. Tam in an intimate ceremony in front of his family, dearest friends and his Van Halen band mates. The wedding was followed by a reception at the **Marin Outdoor Garden Club** catered by his friend, **Emeril Lagasse**, at a time of pre- Lagasse fame! His guests stayed at the **Mill**

**Valley Inn**. Sammy later partnered in helping build the **Aqua Hotel** to accommodate the overflow of his out-of-town guests visiting Mill Valley over the years. Soon after, the Hagars became fixtures in the community they now love. Their children were educated in the Mill Valley School District, and over the years Kari and Sammy were among the proud parents attending Back-to-School Nights, Drama and Music performances at **Old Mill School**, **Mill Valley Middle School** and **Tam High**, all the while generously supporting our school’s charitable organizations including **KIDDO!** and the **Tam High Foundation**. Participating in events supporting these programs was also fun for Sammy. One of his favorites was a KIDDO! fundraiser at **Sweetwater Music Hall** to raise funds for art and music education in our public schools. Sammy performed and was joined on stage by Grateful Dead legend, **Bob Weir**, guitar masters **Vic Johnson** and **Joe Satriani**, and Sammy’s own sons, Aaron and Andrew. His enjoyment and generosity continued last year when he was asked to create a cameo clip for the Tam High Class of 2020 graduation. Without hesitation, Sammy produced an endearing and optimistic video to close the virtual ceremony honoring the graduating seniors. Through all these experiences, Sammy and Kari have felt blessed having the ability to contribute to their community, and to the broad arts and education programs, helping to ensure all Mill Valley children will have the same benefits for years to come.

Doing all this without fanfare and family disruption requires the right blend of community involvement while maintaining a low profile. These challenges are not to be underestimated by the rest of

us in the community who are not in the spotlight. But not only did the Hagars pull this off with grace, they continue to engage in generous endeavors to this day.

In 2008, Sammy and Kari created **The Hagar Family Foundation** primarily focused on supporting established food relief and children’s causes. This Foundation has accounted for over \$4 million in donations to date, supporting organizations including **Ambassadors of Hope and Opportunity (AHO)**, **Mill Valley Library Foundation**, **Mill Valley Philharmonic**, **Throckmorton Theatre**, **Mill Valley Association of Volunteer Firefighters**, **Ritter Center** and **Rotary Club of Mill Valley** to name just a few! The Hagar’s two boys and their daughters **Kama** and **Samantha** play an active role in their foundation work. Sammy humbly maintains a philanthropic philosophy based on keeping somewhat inconspicuous.

“You do it for the right reasons, not for your own ego.” His philanthropy is personal for him and not always loudly broadcast. Furthermore, it is of the utmost importance that every penny donated goes directly to the cause. He refuses to hire people to direct the money and takes this personally. Thankfully, Kari, their children, and his trusted advisors help him weed through the many requests that come his way.

If there is an example clearly reflecting how genuinely passionate and caring Sammy is, it is the story leading to the creation of his annual fundraiser, **Acoustic-4-A-Cure**, first launched in 2014. Around that time, **UCSF** was in need of focused funding to support research to find a cure for children born with brain tumors, who required radiation immediately upon birth. While UCSF has no shortage of significant donors, a friend of Sammy’s, the head of oncology at UCSF, suggested that Sammy consider giving to UCSF. After meeting a group of doctors, it was **Dr. Jean Nakamura** who got to him. Dr. Nakamura was educating Sammy about the critical need to focus on building these infants’ immune systems to fight off the tumors and it instantly grabbed Sammy’s attention. Without hesitation, he decided

# THE B-SIDE—BEYOND THE STAGE

## MEET THE HAGARS

by Alexandra Fee

## RESIDENT FEATURE

to fund Dr. Nakamura's research by paying her assistants' salaries so she could solely focus on her lab research. As Sammy recounted the genesis of *Acoustic-4-A-Cure*, he admitted experiencing goosebumps remembering how much this one doctor's appeal affected him. True to form, his money would go directly to the doctor's efforts in fighting this devastating childhood cancer. *Acoustic-4-A-Cure* became one of his signature causes. Sammy explained, "When you bite off philanthropy, you don't just do it once." So began his annual *Acoustic-4-A-Cure* benefit concert, held every year at San Francisco music venues including the historic

Fillmore. All proceeds are donated to UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital for pediatric cancer research. Legendary artists donate their time by performing acoustic sets along with epic collaborations and impromptu jams. Sammy's commitment to helping Dr. Nakamura's research speaks to his mantra of taking the long view when committing to a specific cause—that is, to look at philanthropy in 10-year chunks, then

reevaluate. Sammy urges anyone who is able and decides to give, to be consistent and give every year. Don't just give once. For most causes, commitment is everything to assure you are having the proper impact, and nothing is more rewarding than making a difference.

While projects such as pediatric cancer research have grabbed Sammy's attention and pulled at his heartstrings, it's probably fair to say Sammy's passion to give has roots dating back to his hard times growing up in Fontana. He is therefore well-aware hunger exists in essentially every single community in the United States. This has spurred a passionate devotion to giving to food banks, which began in earnest when exploring the work of the **San Francisco-Marin Food Bank**. While learning how the organization works by personal visits, he saw that many families waiting in line to be fed were not all homeless, but rather appeared to be normal looking people he might encounter in any community. After talking to some of them, he discovered many of them had jobs and were supporting a family. He recalled meeting a gardener whose lawn mower had broken. While struggling to make ends meet and needing money to fix his equipment, he had turned to the food bank for a meal every so often to help his family stay on their feet. At that moment, Sammy was stricken by the message he continues to relay — that food banks are critical in every community as they support so many in need. Knowing people can eat at food banks in a dignified manner, thereby saving some money to help pay bills and keep their families intact has inspired his undying support of these vital organizations. Many of us give to food banks over the holidays, but Sammy took a moment to encourage all of us who can, to give to them all year long. "Food Banks in your local community are the biggest bang for your

buck in my search for the simplest and most reliable way to help others", he explained. "\$10 can lead to 10 meals...a great bang for the buck." Sammy's mission to spread the word on the critical role food banks play in every community doesn't stop in San Francisco and Marin. He has brought awareness to food banks in every city he visits including featuring information about them on video screens during live performances.

For his part, last year during the ongoing pandemic and with food banks across the country in mind, Sammy recorded *Lockdown 2020* with his band, **The Circle**. The entire album was recorded remotely in their *Lockdown Sessions* on iPhones, producing a unique sound composed of sensational covers. Included are songs by **AC/DC**, **The Who**, **Bob Marley** and of course, **Van Halen**. Their cover of **David Bowie's Heroes** highlighted their goodwill efforts as an ode to our frontline workers, capped off with announcing that all proceeds from the record will be donated to food banks nationwide.

Reflecting on the joy he experiences when engaging in benevolent efforts, Sammy told us one of the greatest things about being an artist is that "I can do what I love to do and raise some money to help someone out." Therefore, picking up his guitar to play at a benefit with his loyal fans – a.k.a. **Redheads** - always in the audience supporting causes, well let's just say nothing gives him greater pleasure. Ultimately, his fans are the ones really doing the charity work, he explained, adding "I think it's the most beautiful relationship on the planet!" In part, that is because Redheads never fail to show up in full support of his philanthropic shows. In Sammy's words, "I play for free for them, and ask a few of my fellow musician friends to join me. All I ask is that they buy the tickets. I never ask them to donate anything...just to bring their friends and have a good time, pay full price and take pride in the fact that every penny is going directly to the cause...a win-win for all. It's really about the fans engaging and knowing you are giving the money away—not putting it in your pocket—that makes your fans happy." This is exactly why Sammy's fans, his devoted Redheads, love him so much.

With traditional benefit concerts, and live music in general on hold during the pandemic, Sammy has focused on spending time with his family and writing music. When asked what advice he could offer to aspiring musicians during these tough times and beyond, he emphasized the importance of just getting out there to play as much as you can, in front of people to anybody and everybody that will listen---but to first hone your craft by deciding who you are before introducing your music to the public. Obviously, with the internet and its many platforms, it's somewhat easier these days to get exposure; but as Sammy avowed, there's nothing like live music. "Don't get hung up trying to be someone else, that's just how you learn," he espoused. As an example, he recounted the time when he first started in music and loved the **Rolling Stones**. At first, he



Kama Hagar (left) and Samantha Hagar (right) with Sammy at home in Mill Valley



On stage at the Wiltern Theatre at Acoustic-4-A-Cure Photo by Jon R. Luni



Sammy with his son, Andrew

## RESIDENT FEATURE ■

Having focused our interview on the many aspects of Sammy's generosity and giving to others, we asked if he might indulge us by sharing a quip or two about his own, well-deserved pleasures. On the spot, he passionately recalled the utter excitement of owning his first car—a '49 Chevy. His mom paid \$35 for it and it changed his life, fueling a love affair for cars. He confessed to dreaming about one day owning all his favorites, both classic and new. So, after learning more about "the B-side" of Sammy's life beyond the stage, the next time you see him driving around Mill Valley in one of his fancy new cars, or his 1972 Daytona Ferrari, or his '75 Jaguar XKE, all we can say is: "Don't judge!"

covered many of their biggest hits, but has figured out the sound he really liked, which he described as "what you hear in your head", he learned how to express that in his music. "You cannot be too original. Break all the rules if you need to!" Then, when you change and mature, your expression of yourself also changes—a natural progression. "It's all about longevity, says Sammy, "that's how you stay in the music business—by continuing to express yourself. When you're truly expressing yourself, your music changes with you." As recounted by our music column contributor, **Dennis Strazulo**, we found our Music Spotlight artist of the month, **Jamie Clark** "carrying out Sammy's advice playing original songs in Miller Grove".

Yes, he is an admitted car fanatic but please don't forget—he is a rock star with an exceptionally high humanitarian pulse. Having offered this admonition, if there is one thing we learned in getting to know Sammy, it's that he and his family have exceptionally big hearts—The Hagar way... big hearts! And the Mill Valley community has long been an object of their affection. They love the **Mill Valley Market**, all the Mill Valley restaurants, **Sweetwater Music Hall**, and **Throckmorton Theatre**. As with all of us, Sammy and his family are hopeful our storied venues and amazing restaurants will soon thrive again—and you can be sure the Hagars will do all they can to support the revival. ■

*September Days*  
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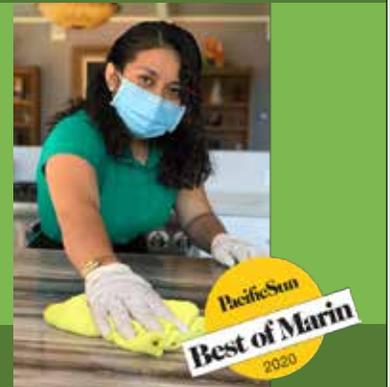


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