

## Barone's Tuscan Grill holds concert to benefit The Little Rock Foundation

By Hayden Mitman

### *The Trend*

Rocco Fiorentino, of Voorhees, is a talented child. He has the gift of a melodic singing voice, and he is an accomplished pianist. He is also a composer and at the age of only 10, he has his own CD and a song, entitled "Through My Eyes," which was written especially for him. Rocco has also been blind since birth, and that makes his abilities all the more amazing.

"Singing makes me feel good," he said. "I have the passion for it. I really like singing and performing, I like all of it."

Rocco was born four months premature, and he had a lot to overcome at birth. But, according to his mother, Tina Fiorentino, Rocco, from a very young age, has naturally been musically talented.

"He started learning to play piano with me because I used to play piano," she said. "So, that's how he started, but by the age of 4 he could hear a song on the radio, he just had this perfect pitch, and he could instantly pick it up and play it on the piano."

But, along with blindness, at his young age, Rocco has already overcome many obstacles, and to help other children like Rocco, his mother started The Little Rock Foundation.

"When Rocco was born, I found that information [on children like Rocco] was hard to find. So, I wanted to start an organization that could help parents who have children who are blind or visually impaired," said Fiorentino.

On the Web site for The Little Rock Foundation, [www.TLRF.org](http://www.TLRF.org), she wrote a synopsis of the trials that Rocco has overcome to be the talented young man that he is today.

"Try to imagine a child the size of a ruler, with a head smaller than a baseball. Rocco's skin was so transparent that touching it could actually remove it. His body had to be covered with saran wrap to help maintain his body temperature," she wrote on the site. "His chance of survival was less than five percent. He was so close to death that his parents took it minute by minute, hour by hour, not day by day. Our painful ordeal continued for four months at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. Rocco has endured 12 major surgeries, and has beaten the odds against him. 'A miracle child,' is how the hospital staff refers to him now. Remarkably, his only lasting challenge is blindness caused by Retinopathy of Prematurity."

But, after all that, Rocco is now a spokesperson for The Little Rock Foundation and he helps to educate his audiences about blindness. He brings a message of hope everywhere he performs.

On Thursday, March 1, Rocco performed at a fund-raiser for The Little Rock Foundation, held at Barone's Bar and Grill in Cherry Hill along with the Peter Cole Trio. Also that night, Peter Cole did a dead-on impersonation of Tony Bennett.

According to his mother, Rocco's performance brought in a large crowd and raised over \$3,400 for the non-profit organization.

Fiorentino started The Little Rock Foundation ten years ago and now the organization has a wealth of opportunities and activities to offer visually impaired children, and their parents. Every year the organization hosts a summer camp that allows blind and visually impaired children to ride horses, go hiking, boating, swimming, do crafts and more. The Little Rock Foundation also offers a scholarship program and it hosts a yearly holiday gathering for the families involved with the organization. Also, on a daily basis, The Little Rock Foundation runs two resource centers, one of which is located within Wills Eye Hospital in Philadelphia and the other at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

These centers enable parents to learn about the latest computer technologies, periodicals, medical advancements and support services for their children.

But all of these things that the Little Rock Foundations does, Rocco says that he has the most fun when he is performing or listening to music.

"I love Frank Sinatra," he said. "And, I like jazz music."

The next event that The Little Rock Foundation will host will be the 13th annual Remington and Vernick Charity Bowling Tournament, to be held March 31, at the Baker Lanes on Cuthbert Road, in Cherry Hill. That day there will be four sessions of bowling, from 9:30 a.m. to noon; 1 to 3:30 p.m.; 4:30 to 7 p.m. and 8 to 10:30 p.m. The event will feature live entertainment, prizes and fun for all. The cost will be \$10 per bowler (includes shoes) with four to six people per team.

To request an invitation to the event or if you are interested in volunteering for the event, please contact Debbie Nichols 215-825-9081 or 856-740-3731 e-mail at [DNichols@willseye.org](mailto:DNichols@willseye.org).

"It's nice to help people like me, people of my kind," said Rocco.

For more information on The Little Rock Foundation, visit the Web site at [www.TLRF.org](http://www.TLRF.org), or the newer site at [www.littlerockfoundation.org](http://www.littlerockfoundation.org). For more information on Rocco and to order a CD including his song "Through My Eyes," visit the Web site at [www.musicbyrocco.com](http://www.musicbyrocco.com).



Photos courtesy of P. Michael Moffa

Above, Rocco Fiorentino, a 10-year-old singer, composer and accomplished pianist, performs during a recent fund-raiser for The Little Rock Foundation, on March 1 at Barone's Tuscan Grill in Cherry Hill. Below Rocco poses with the Peter Cole Trio, with whom he performed with during the fund-raiser. Barone's Tuscan Grill Chef Joseph Palombo, also joins the photo.

