

TRAVERSE CITY PHILHARMONIC MUSICIANS JOIN AFM LOCAL 56

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (Grand Rapids MI) — Following an organizing campaign, the musicians of the Traverse City Philharmonic (TC Phil) voted overwhelmingly to join the American Federation of Musicians of the United States and Canada (AFM). Management granted recognition to the union, and the TC Phil musicians will become members of AFM Local 56.

The organizing effort began when TC Phil violinist Kaylee Erlewein contacted AFM Local 56 in April 2026 regarding concerns about the orchestra's operations. Over the next four months, a musician-led organizing committee — supported by the AFM's Organizing Department and Local 56 — conducted one-on-one conversations with their TC Phil colleagues to discuss these concerns and the possibility of union representation. The campaign included all of the TC Phil musicians based upon National Labor Relations Board criteria. By joining AFM Local 56, the TC Phil musicians gain collective representation to address the orchestra's artistic and operational future.

"I am so excited for the Traverse City Philharmonic to move forward as a part of AFM Local 56," said Kaylee Erlewein. "The TC Phil has been my 'home' since age eleven, and it is one of the main reasons I became a professional violinist and teacher. However, in recent years, decisions by the TC Phil management, discussions with my colleagues, and years of service on the Players' Committee led me to believe that the musicians needed a stronger voice. The necessary next step was to join with the American Federation of Musicians. We look forward to working with AFM Local 56 to make the orchestra stronger than ever, for many years to come."

"We could not be more pleased to have the Traverse City Philharmonic musicians join our ranks," stated AFM Local 56 President Bennie Keys. "We look forward to working with them on achieving their first collective bargaining agreement with the AFM which reflects the growth of their community."

"The Musicians of the Traverse City Philharmonic are to be congratulated for their grassroots campaign," added Paul Austin, AFM Local 56 Secretary/Treasurer. "By canvassing their TC Phil colleagues, the team realized that it was time to make a move to the AFM, and we are delighted to have them as members of AFM Local 56."

The TC Phil musicians express their gratitude to the AFM for their assistance and guidance through this process.

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Founded in 1905, AFM Local 56 represents over 300 professional musicians in west, central, and northern Michigan.

Contact AFM Local 56 Secretary/Treasurer Paul Austin for more details at (616) 451-4374 or secretary@GrandRapidsMusicians.org
www.GrandRapidsMusicians.org