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Friends of fallen soldier join Crestwood concert

August 12, 2007

By Courtney Greve Columnist

Less than a month before their first gig, the guitarist and drummer quit.

Bassist Phil Serratore refused to cancel.

Too much was at stake.

The concert was more than a launch party for his band, Beauty and the Breakdown.

Playing at his neighbor's homegrown "Rock for Iraq" event in Crestwood was Serratore's chance to honor his former college roommate, Army Spc. Jacob Lowell, a New Lenox paratrooper killed earlier this summer during his first patrol in Afghanistan.

"We had to make this happen for Jake," Serratore said. "What happened to him sucked. I had to do something to help the other guys still over there."

So Serratore and singer Aubyn Beth scrambled to find new backup players. They practiced a handful of times. They said a prayer.

And then they rocked.

On a clear Friday night in July when Serratore's band (check out myspace.com/beautyandthebreakdownmusic) finally took the stage -- a wooden platform in a field between Sandra Lane and Burr Oak Woods -- the crowd bobbed their heads and cheered.

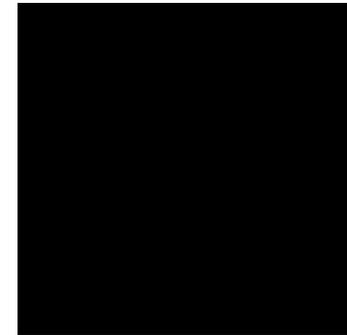
The price of admission? Care package items for the troops.

Kathie Rush, a laid-back artist and mother of four, organized the benefit concert, which also featured her husband's bands, Rhythm Fatar and The Stray Toasters.

Kathie doesn't know anyone serving overseas, but she comes from a military family.

Her father was stationed at Pearl Harbor when it was attacked on that fateful day; her brother served in Vietnam.

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"While it's so easy to be distracted by the music, the beautiful weather and the company of our friends and neighbors, most of us are aware of the fact that it is a very different story for our soldiers in Iraq," she said.

"Which is the whole point. While they are so far away in those arid conditions, far from family and friends, what they're doing is truly appreciated."

The goods will be shipped to Iraq via anysoldier.com, a nonprofit organization that has supplied toiletries, letters and other items to more than 850,000 troops since 2003.

Bill Crawley, 62, and his wife, Donna, brought packages of peanuts, sunflower seeds and trail mix.

"Something to eat," said Bill, a Vietnam Army vet. "That's what they need. Not a razor to shave with. They don't need to look good for anybody."

When neighbor Gloria Castillo got a flyer about the event, she put it in her purse and headed to Walgreens and a dollar store. Both stores donated goods including shampoo, socks, deodorant, lotion and soap.

"This is a great idea, a way for us to do something nice for the guys and gals over there," 70-year-old Gloria said. "I think it's wonderful."

I couldn't agree more. People don't want to be reminded there's a war going on. Doing so with great music and free cups of keg beer makes the reminder that much easier to swallow.

Kathie's benefit concert also worked to reinforce the already strong ties of her neighborhood. It might sound cliché, but this event -- more than many I've written about -- oozed a feeling of community togetherness.

All of Kathie's Sandra Lane neighbors, and many more friends from surrounding streets and from Incarnation Parish, came with lawn chairs and treats for the soldiers.

Olivia and Matt Cachor, the newest homeowners on the block, said they were blown away by the close-knit community when they moved in last year.

"This is the friendliest place ever," said Olivia, a nurse. "Where we moved from, nobody even talked to one another."

Ken Kraft, a neighbor of 20 years, said it's like a "neighborhood of the old days."

"We were able to give our kids something special by living here," he said. "They were raised knowing the importance of neighbors and giving back to the community."

Kathie helps to keep that vibe going. Within minutes of meeting her, I could tell why people would turn up if she asked.

In the spirit of community ...

Less than two dozen street pole banners still are available for current and former Mount Greenwood residents.

The personalized banners, selling for \$200, will be displayed through Thanksgiving in honor of the community's 100th birthday.

Business sponsors claimed the bulk of the 100 banners already purchased, said Mary Kiedrow, executive director of the Mount Greenwood Local Redevelopment Corp.

Some longtime residents, like the O'Connor family, were quick to take advantage of the special opportunity.

"Mount Greenwood has been such a part of my family's life," said Meagan O'Connor, 22, who interned this summer at the MGLRC.

"My grandparents still live in the house where my dad grew up, and we live nearby," she said. "Not everybody still lives here, but everyone still talks about growing up here."

That statement certainly applies to me.

So help offset the costs of the Sept. 8-9 centennial celebration by staking your piece of history.

For more information, contact the Mount Greenwood Local Redevelopment Corp. at (773) 881-0622 or mglrc2000@wowway.com.

A Cubs fan in Sox country

Don't forget to vote Thursday for Mike Giordano, the only Southlander in the running to sing "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" at Wrigley Field.

Giordano, 85, is one of 50 semi-finalists in the Cubs' Ultimate 7th Inning Stretch competition.

Raised in Chicago's Greater Grand Crossing -- considerably closer to old Comiskey Park -- Giordano was converted to Cubbie blue at an early age.

The 85-year-old Oak Forest retired blacksmith dreamed of a career in music. He loves to serenade his family while playing guitar or accordion.

Giordano's audition tape will be posted Thursday in the "Fan Forum" at www.cubs.com. Fans are invited to vote and help narrow the field of would-be Harry Carays. The 10 finalists will repeat their spirited renditions Aug. 27 in front of a panel of judges. The winner will be announced Sept. 22 and sing in the seventh inning.

Tidbits

Geno Randazzo, the top-ranked bean bags player in Illinois, came out on top at the inaugural Windy City Cornhole Classic on July 28. The Oak Lawn man and his son, 17-year-old Geno Jr., beat out more than 250 teams in the competitive doubles division to earn a trophy, \$100 and bragging rights.

Wunderkind Kendall Coyne -- a Sandburg High sophomore from Palos Heights -- has been invited to the 2007 USA Hockey Women's National Festival. The 15-year-old will be the youngest competitor at the Olympic Training center in Lake Placid, N.Y., from Aug. 14-21. Kendall, who first wowed this girl-power-crazed writer in 2004, scored 10 goals in April to lead her 14-and-under Team Illinois to a national title.

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