

Wearing ties in line at Deer Park

By JIM STREIT

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THIS TIME of the year, it's not unusual, even on a weeknight, to see a queue in front the Deer Park Tavern, a parade of patrons waiting to enter the historic watering hole.

However, it is unusual when those lined up are sporting coats and ties or wearing high heels.

Such was the case one Thursday evening last fall when the Downtown Newark Partnership hosted its annual fall mixer. It is an autumnal opportunity for fellowship and networking that draws Newark businesspeople. Each year, the DNP fills the second floor of the Deer Park with a steady stream of well-dressed, business card-carrying hand-shakers.

However, last fall we had so many attendees that a line was required. As someone left the second floor, another businessperson was allowed up. It was crazy.

The crowd draw was the first public performance of a classic rock-and-roll band now named Club Phred.

The ensemble of middle-aged musicians was formed two years ago by Newark native Fred Dawson. All band members at one time were professional musicians. Some had dreams of making the big time. Eventually, all got real jobs and music became a dormant avocation.

Until 2002.

Now, each Tuesday night in Dawson's basement, a financial advisor, a lawyer, a city building inspector, two furniture salesmen and others gather to practice.

Even though each has a successful career and all are busy, they plan their schedules around the Tuesday night jam sessions.

Dawson and attorney Mark Sisk, both fellow Rotarians, tell me Club Phred has brought a new dimension to their lives. Other band members echo this devotion to the band.

Dawson, who describes himself as "a legend in his own mind," plays his classic 60s rocking Hammond B-3 organ. (Do you like "Good Lovin'"?) Sisk, a columnist for this paper, plays rhythm guitar and attempts to pass himself off as a vocalist. Both played in Newark-area bands when they were in their teens.

I watched the legendary Peter Frampton play at the Grand and he is no better than Club Phred lead guitarist Keith Ayars (though Frampton did at one time have much curlier hair). Last summer, Ayars played with his high school classmate, Bruce Willis, and Grand Funk Railroad's Mark Farner on stage in Atlantic City. (I was there but prefer not to publicly offer details. Let me just say I did not go to school with Keith and Bruce).

Ayars and drummer Augie Parodi are furniture salespeople at Good's. For years, Augie and his father have played at Three Little Bakers.

A claims processor at the Veterans Administration, keyboardist Kathy Littlefield is also the group's bluesy vocalist.

City of Newark employee Brian Daring complements the others with his skilled bass playing.

The only professional musician in the bunch is Bouncin' Vinnie Vinciguerra. His spirited and sometimes soulful alto sax adds depth to Club Phred.

This mid-life-crisis band plays good ol' rock-and-roll classics from the 60s and 70s.

And, trust me, they are good. That's why there was a line in front of the Deer Park last fall. The music was so good, none of those attending the DNP mixer left. Not bad for a band's first public performance.

Those of you turned away last fall and any person interested in supporting a good cause can hear the band on Tuesday, March 23, when they return to the second floor at the Deer Park for their second out-of-basement appearance. Shows are planned at 5:30 and 7:30 p.m.

Deer Park owner Bob Ashby is furnishing the room, sound tech and heavy hors d'oeuvres. That allows most of the \$20 per person fee to go directly to the coffers of the non-profit Christina Educational Enrichment Fund.

I've written about CEEF before; it's a devoted group of volunteers that work to honor outstanding youthful citizens within the Christina School District.

Now, this is just a guess, but if history predicts the future, there will be a line again on March 23. Space is limited at both shows.

If you want to help honor good kids in Christina schools and enjoy some good classic rock while doing so, I urge you to reserve today by calling Carla Grygiel of CEEF, 832-5879, or e-mail your reservation to ceef@dca.net

That's worth standing in line for.

When not wishing he could play more than just a radio, the writer is publisher of this and two other Delaware newspapers. Old 45 r.p.m.'s of "Evil Ways" and "Time Won't Let Me" often can be heard being played loud outside the family home in the Cherry Hill neighborhood of Newark.

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