

Features

# Sock hop recalls music, mood of the '60s

By Karen M. Franz

Attendance figures are a standard means of determining whether a parish fund-raising event has been successful in inducing parishioners to assist with a given project. But when approximately half of the participants at an event are not even members of the parish, it's certain that more than a sense of charity is at work.

Such was the good fortune enjoyed Friday, May 13, by organizers of the fourth-annual sock hop at Irondequoit's St. Margaret Mary Church. A fund-raiser for various school programs, the dance/concert packed the school gym with a crowd ranging from the minimum age of 21 to well into the 60s.

According to event chairman Tom O'Neil, the drawing card for parishioners and non-parishioners alike was the caliber of the performers, many of whom were celebrities in the local music scene during the 1960s. "People who go one year bring back other people the next year," he observed.

Headlining the dance was Giuseppe Scungili and the Screamin' Seagull Revue, featuring a rock ensemble and six-piece brass section in a variety of blues and rock hits. The Showvinnistics — including WVOR's Dan Guilfoyle and former Cadillacs singer Brian McCarthy — and the Showvinnettes entertained the audience with a cappella renditions of such do-wop hits as "Runaround Sue" and "Chapel of Love."

Guest performers for this year's dance were Bob D'Andrea and Chuck Brucato of Rustix, and Danny Labatte of The Brass Buttons. Also joining the band were singers Flora Allen and Ellen Knechtges, assisted in their harmonies toward the end of the show by Phyllis Contestable, who starred in the Rochester company of "Nunsense." Last year's lineup featured former Young Rascals lead singer Jay Capozzi, who once performed on the "Ed Sullivan Show."

Although the parish does rent a professional sound system for the dance, all of the musicians perform for free, O'Neil said. "The event's a good time," he observed. "The people who come to our (dance) always come to have a good time, and the musicians sense that, so it's not a chore.

"In fact," he continued, "they're usually disappointed when it's time to stop, because they've spent (six weeks) rehearsing in my living room." The Showvinnistics called O'Neil two days after this year's dance to make sure they'll be invited next year, he noted.

The St. Margaret Mary sock hop started in 1984, with O'Neil and Janet Valentino as original co-chairmen. O'Neil is former president of the parish school board, and his wife has served for several years as treasurer of Home School Association. The first year, only four or five performers took the stage. Then organizers began recruiting a number of local musicians who had performed with popular '60s bands.

O'Neil noted that few of the performers have an actual connection to the parish, but most are somehow linked to him. Singers Allen and Knechtges, this year's newcomers, are prime examples. He recruited Allen, who sings the National Anthem at the Rochester Americans' home games, while acting as the Amerks' penalty time keeper. O'Neil met Knechtges through his work as president of the board of the Adam Walsh Child Resource Center.

Other than the guest stars and the repertoire, the event has changed very little since its inception. And despite the dance's growing popularity, admission is still \$6 per person.

"A lot of people have told me that we don't

charge enough — that people would probably be willing to pay twice that much," O'Neil said, pointing out that admission also covers snacks and beverages throughout the evening. "But I don't want to get greedy, because you might fall on your face if you do that?"

O'Neil said the proceeds — averaging \$1,000 a year — are divided between the Home School Association, which funds "extras" not covered

by school tuition, and the Athletic Association, which pays entry fees and uniforms for the parish CYO teams.

Despite the sock hop's success, O'Neil remains dubious about its continuing popularity. "Every year is the last year," he quipped. "We thought three years was the limit and that it would just run itself out, but every year it just seems to improve."



Dave DeLuca swings his wife, Susan, as they mix it up at St. Margaret Mary's Sock Hop May 13.

Bonnie Traflet/Courier-Journal



Chuck Brucato, formerly of the Motown group Rustix, gets down with the band.



Dominic Russo and Melanie Spade share a dance as the band slows the beat to let dancers catch their breath.



Dan and Caroln Guilfoyle swing to the sounds of Giuseppe Scungili and the Screamin' Seagull Revue.

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