

SENIOR LIFESTYLES

Singer wows audiences with personal touch

By Mike Latona
Staff Writer

GREECE — He sang "My Way" while offering handshakes to male audience members. He held hands with women as he crooned Elvis Presley's "Are You Lonesome Tonight."

He even invited one woman to stand up so they could shimmy to Tom Jones' "She's A Lady." When the song ended, Nahas feigned exhaustion as his new-found dance partner, Edith Barone, announced, "I'm 92 years old."

Donned in a tuxedo, Andy Nahas worked the room expertly for more than 100 people — mostly senior citizens — on Feb. 3 at West Ridge Community Center, where he was the opening act for a dinner theatre.

Nahas, 40, is making quite a name for himself on the senior-citizen circuit. Among his growing list of venues are several Catholic facilities, among them St. Ann's Home, Catholic Family Center and St. Andrew's Church, all in Rochester; and MercyCare Health Facility in Hornell.

Nahas, a Rochester resident, is an investment portfolio manager by day — but his side work is quickly starting to resemble a second full-time job. He estimated that he's done 90 concerts over the past year, compared to 60 the year before.

The lion's share of Nahas' performances is at senior-citizen facilities. He said that his shows, because of their interactive nature, provide a special kind of lift for seniors.

"They can feel alive, not just be alive," he said. "If you can lift somebody's spirits, especially when it's a younger person doing it, they love that. They still feel like they're connected to the real world. I get a lot of kisses on the cheek."

Nahas routinely shows up early for performances so that he can mingle and get to know people's names. Once the show begins, he strolls through the crowd with a wireless microphone and sings to recorded background vocals and instruments, a la karaoke.

Nahas said that his repertoire ranges from such earlier classics as "Ain't She Sweet" and "Let Me Be Your Sweetheart" right up to "Achy Breaky Heart," a late-1980s hit.



Mike Mergen/Photo intern

Andy Nahas performs for seniors Feb. 4 at Greece Ridge Community Center.

Over the years, he said, he's gotten many heartfelt thanks from his audience members. Among his favorites are:

"If you'd come here more often, we wouldn't have to take as many pills."

"Tonight you made me remember all the wonderful things I've had in my life — and that's a lot more important than money."

And, from a staff member: "I had never seen that woman smile in three years."

Nahas will be busy with senior-related activities this coming weekend. He's set to perform two Valentine's Day shows: on Sunday, Feb. 13 at MercyCare in Hornell at 3 p.m.; and Monday, Feb. 14 at Rochester's Monroe Community Hospital at 7 p.m.

For the Feb. 14 show, he's enlisting volunteer help from Odyssey, the diocesan young-adult network.

"I thought it would be very enlighten-

ing for Odyssey people to work with other people who have a lot of physical and mental problems, and are alone," said Nahas, who has participated in Odyssey events.

Nahas emphasized that he also seeks to raise awareness among his fellow musicians, as well as private donors who may wish to sponsor such acts as his.

"People always say to me, 'We need this more, when are you coming back?' There's a serious need for professional-

quality entertainment at these places," he said.

Interestingly, Nahas didn't begin performing regularly until about five years ago, after years of urging from friends who said he had the potential to sing professionally. Starting out at 35, he noted, enabled him to view his concerts as a ministry rather than a career.

"I finally figured out a way to do music and have a wholesome way of life. If I'd started at 20, I wouldn't have been doing this," he remarked.

Edith Barone, his 92-year-old dance partner from West Ridge Community Center, is one person who's glad he pursued this line of work. With an ear-to-ear grin, she accepted congratulations from other audience members about her unexpected moment in the spotlight with Nahas Feb. 3.

"It was wonderful, wonderful. He really enhanced me," said Barone, a parishioner at St. Ambrose Church in Rochester.

Barone's daughter, Katherine Luciano, 74, was also impressed by Nahas.

"I enjoyed his singing very much. He's got a nice voice," said Luciano, from St. John the Evangelist Church in Greece.

Upon learning that Nahas performs almost exclusively for seniors, Luciano offered an apt commentary:

"He's found his vocation."

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