

# Local rockers perform to help others

## *Cruisers an area institution for 20 years*

by Lauren Nelson  
Contributing Writer

WHITE BEAR LAKE — Ten years after their first Marketfest performance, local rock group The Cruisers returns to the stage on July 10th.

The 11-member band, which began as a contemporary music group at St. Stephen's Lutheran Church in White Bear Lake, celebrates its 20th year performing in and around the Twin Cities.

The band's three female vocalists — Sandy Knutson, Brenda Steady, and Karen Smith — allow it to cover a range of classic music from the late 50s and early 60s including everything from the Beatles to Elvis. However, as vocalist Phil Dahl explains, "The biggest influence in our music has been the people we play for."

Dahl said The Cruisers use rock and roll as a means of bringing people together, but the group gives more than entertainment to the community. Since its formation, the band has donated all of the proceeds it earns to a variety of charities and supports causes both local and international. A fair amount of the group's earnings goes back to St. Stephen's Church, the band's home since the beginning, but in the past it has also donated to victims of the Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina. Most recently it has been sending donations to St. Stephen's sister congregation in Tanzania where keyboardist Randy Amborn and band members Ken and Karen Smith have traveled on mission trips. The band's donations pay for books and scholarships for the Tanzanian students.

Members of the band include a mix

---

The Cruisers use rock and roll as a means of bringing people together, but the group gives more than entertainment to the community.

---

of people from all walks of life, including teachers, nurses, engineers, security guards, project managers, and lawyers.

"It's really been a fellowship thing," said band manager and saxophonist Ken Smith.

"I think that's important," agrees Dahl. "We're kind of a family."

"A dysfunctional family... but a family," jokes Dan Brumm. The retired St. Stephen's pastor plays guitar for the band along with congregants Dave Ashley, Jim Johnson, and Steve Daves.

The Cruisers began as an in-house church band in 1986 performing at dances and contemporary church services. All but two of the members have been with the band since the late 80s and early 90s. Drummer Kelli Rae Tubbs subbed on and off for The Cruisers before becoming a permanent member last year, and vocalist Sandy Knutson joined two years ago.

The Cruisers started performing at PTA fund raisers and gradually expanded to doing weddings and other private events. For many years it has performed at elementary school carnivals as well as the White Bear Lake teachers' retirement party. The band has played almost every elementary school in the White Bear Lake area, and Dahl said it enjoys the energy and diversity of the audience.

"Sometimes we have three generations up there," said Smith. "It's really a hoot to see kids out there with their parents and grandparents."

"There's such a broad appeal," adds Dahl. "One thing that has kept the band together is that you can't find another band as good as us for as cheap as us."

The Cruisers enjoy a flexible performance schedule.

"Because we don't keep any of the money, we have to balance how often we play," says Smith. "Sometimes we'll go three months without playing and then we'll play three times in one month."

In addition to its Marketfest gig, the band is scheduled to perform at Relay for Life on July 25. That will mark the band's second performance at the event, which will take place as usual at the South Campus of White Bear Lake High School. Two days later, on July 27, it will perform at St. Stephen's Sunday morning service. In late autumn the band plans to perform at a fundraiser for Hope Adoption and Family Services, a private nonprofit agency located in Stillwater.

Anyone interested in booking the Cruisers should contact Ken Smith through St. Stephen's Lutheran Church on County Rd E in White Bear Lake.