

Band

Easy Street members now in 40s and 50s

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of the Who, opened up for an up-and-coming heartland rocker named Tom Petty and told dirty jokes onstage with Meatloaf.

Easy Street did manage to record and release one self-titled EP in 1982 featuring the local hit *Love Tries*, in the hope of getting some national attention and a record deal, but the plan never came to fruition.

By the mid-'80s, big-haired metalheads were gaining popularity on the club circuit and though lion-maned frontman "Westside" Steve Simmons definitely had the hair, the band of thirty-somethings found themselves unimpressed by the hair metal bands, its crowd and its music. So the band decided to call it quits.

"We're getting to be in our 30s and all the bands playing clubs with us were wearing the spandex pants and doing the head-nod thing," original bassist Bob Martin said from the offices of the Source, a computer sales, repair and distribution business he owns in Twinsburg. "We didn't look good in spandex and we just figured, we had a run and let's just go away and not be those guys."

"And by '91 when grunge hit, those metal guys were washing cars," he said laughing. In addition to the rise of hair metal, the club circuit that allowed the band to play as many as five nights a week began to fizzle. Easy Street members went their separate ways, with most getting "regular" jobs, although several have found other outlets for playing music.

Then in 1990, a former roadie suggested the band play a reunion show. "We never even thought about it, and we said 'Well, I guess we could,'" Martin said. "Before we knew it, we were doing it, and then we had the five-year plan, because we figured, well, we're all still in our 40s, so we'll do it every five years."

"Then we realized we were getting too old to wait five years, so in 2005 we said, 'you know, we better do this every year' and people said, 'yeah' and we keep selling tickets. And then it was '06, '07 and here it's '08 and luckily we have Tangiers to play at because there's really no place else for us to play," he said.

The band needs the cabaret at Tangier in order to fit the

Details

What: The Easy Street Band
When: 8 p.m., Saturday
Where: Tangier, 532 W. Market St., Akron
Tickets: \$25, \$40
Information: 330-376-7171, 330-963-1001 or <http://www.easystreetband.com>

many musicians who return to play with their old buddies. The show will be broken down into two sets. The first will feature the "early years" band, an octet that performs an 11-song set of cover tunes for which fans clamor, including *Once Bitten Twice Shy*, *Badlands* and "signature copy tunes" by Alex Harvey *Gang Bang* and *Midnight Moses*.

Following that "small" ensemble will be the "album band," an expanded 14-piece band with two drummers, a four-piece horn section and a teenage violinist.

Following the tradition of these reunion shows, the band will be breaking out a few new (old) tunes, including Jethro Tull's *Aqualung*, *Thunder Road* and *Walk Away Renee* and fan favorites such as *Jungleland*.

The band will have its lone CD, which features the original 1982 EP plus 10 unreleased tracks, available for purchase, and, of course, T-shirts and hats.

Martin says that though the concerts consistently sell out, the band doesn't do these shows for the money as the evening's take must be split among as many as 17 people. More importantly, the annual shows are not just fun to play but act as a lifeline back to a simpler time in the lives of the band members and their fans.

With most of the Easy Street members and their fans in their 40s and 50s, the reunion shows have become more than just a chance for the band to jam together again, it's a chance for longtime fans to gather and forget about the kids (or grandkids), their jobs, bills and the vagaries of middle age for one night of unbridled communal boogieing.

"Before we go on, you can hear everyone talking," Martin said. "The whole place is buzzing with conversation because people get to see each other again."

"It's keeping us young, but I think it would be sad for our fans if we quit playing because they'd all think 'man, now we are old. Everybody pretends they are 20 again when they come see us. It's sad but true,'" he said laughing.

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LET'S GO BACK TO EASY STREET

Musicians and fans will reminisce as popular Akron band from 1970s plugs in for reunion show at Tangier

By Malcolm X Abram
Beacon Journal music writer

It's been more than two decades since the popular local band Easy Street officially broke up. The band, which will play its annual reunion show at Tangier in Akron on Saturday, formed in 1975 playing covers from popular artists of the day mixed with its own radio-ready originals. It built up a strong following while gigging in the now-defunct Akron Kent Cleveland Club circuit.

For years, the band ruled the stages of venues such as Filthy McNasty's, Spooky's and the Flying Machine as well as gigs in fairly far-flung cities such as Dallas, Houston, Denver, Miami, Little Rock, Ottawa and Atlanta.

The band also received radio airplay and an on-air approval from vaunted WMMR disc jockey KID Leo. Along with buddy and king of the local music hill Michael Stanley, the Easy Street Band added credence to the credo "Cleveland Rocks."

During its heyday, Easy Street jammed onstage with Santana and Southside Johnny, played in front

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Easy Street's 1977 lineup (above) featured Bob Martin, Bob Wallace, John Marask, Gary Kitzo, Robin Harris and "Westside" Steve Simmons. As many as 17 musicians will perform at the reunion.

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Left: Cover of the Akron Beacon Journal Enjoy Magazine published on 11/6/2008
Above & right: The centerfold article on the band (same issue)
Below: 1979, 1982 and 2002 Line-up photos

