

15 bands for 15th year of rocking against cancer

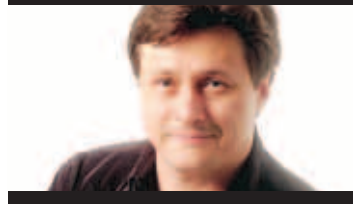
The Band Jam for Cancer fundraiser is one of my favourite gigs to play. It is such an important cause to get behind and I always look forward to giving it my all both onstage and off.

Rocking out in attempts to snuff out cancer? Sounds like a great plan to me!

Those thoughts are echoed by Mark Norris, whose band This Viral Pearl will be kicking things off tonight (Oct. 4) in their first Band Jam for Cancer.

"Most of the time you're just hoping to be heard by anyone," he said. "To stand beside my peers and offer music as a way to help heal is an awesome way to give back. That being said, I feel anyone with a voice has the opportunity to help with any causes they believe in."

Frank McGwire



HAPPENINGS ON THE SCENE

Frank McGwire is a radio personality and booster of the music scene in Brandon and Westman.
» franko1@mts.net

Events such as this are a perfect fit for Norris, who says his music has a message that among many things is meant to help others.

"When I learned of the Band Jam for Cancer and its lofty goals, it was easy for me to say yes," he said.

"This Viral Pearl is about coming to terms with the difficulties we experience in life, it's about reaching out and offering your voice and emotions to others as a way to communicate through the pain and heartache that we all experience at some point; and in that reaching out, finding the healing from within through the courage of those around us."

One of the newer Brandon-area bands known for high velocity versions of popular rock cover tunes, The Hollywood Pinups, is on the bill Friday night. The group's guitarist Don Hines says this event is an ideal way for any musician to lend their support and there's also the social aspect of it.

"As a poor musician, it's a fabulous way to volunteer and donate. We used to volunteer directly with the cancer society but this is way better," he said.

"Everybody is touched by cancer and it feels good to fight it. I love playing with other local bands."

This year's lineup will include a little bit of everything for the varied musical tastes out there.

One particular group that covers several rock music genres with their unique arrangements and on-stage aplomb — all while not taking themselves that seriously — is Brandon's Clubbing Fraggles.

They'll be closing out Saturday night's lineup and the man who pounds out the solid beats on the skins for this power trio, Tim Epp, says he looks forward to helping the cause this year and wishes he could have gotten involved sooner.

"I think the first one I participated in was the seventh and I had to miss the 10th anniversary but I have been in every one since," he said. "I started too late! But I am delighted to say this will be my seventh time participating."

Epp says it is remarkable to see the growing support that is shown year after year from our city's music scene that is also showing growth.

"I find it surprising the number of people in the local band scene to be honest. With an average of four people per band and five bands a night over a three-night period, that equals approximately 60 people giving their time and talents to this cause. That's remarkable given the size of our city.

"I personally enjoy the camaraderie and friendships I have formed with other musicians and bands at this event."

Epp says the cause hits close to home for him, as I'm sure most who take part will be doing so in tribute to a friend or family member who suffered through the disease.

"For me personally, it will be my father-in-law Mike who succumbed to the disease many years ago and my former friend and employer (also named Mike) who has now been diagnosed."

Epp concludes with a comment most would agree with when it comes to priorities in today's world.

"I would like to ask somebody, with a brain much larger than mine, to please use it to fix this thing. We really don't need another smart phone or tablet!"



Event organizer Chris Kemp (right) will step out from behind the scenes to the forefront of FUGR in order to rock out against cancer. FUGR hits The 40 stage Saturday at 11 p.m.

Q & A WITH EVENT CREATOR CHRIS KEMP

Frank: First off, congrats on keeping this event going for 15 years. When you first started the Band Jam for Cancer research, did you imagine this day would come?

Chris: When we started this thing I had no idea that it would still be going stronger than ever 15 years later. I figured it'd be "one and done" and we'd all move on. I could not be happier to have been wrong on that one!

As the story goes, this event is a tribute to a former bandmate's mother who succumbed to cancer. I understand it gave you a major opportunity to not have any regrets?

It did indeed. I've told the story of Georgette Williams many times over the years but I never get tired of it. She was the inspiration that started the whole thing. I came up with the idea for the band jam as a tribute to her after she passed. I wanted to try to make things right after I failed to say anything at her funeral. She meant so much to me and she deserved so much more than my silence. I like to think she would have understood as I never fully expressed my gratitude when she was here but I needed to do something after she passed away and the band jam seemed like the perfect way to tell everyone what she meant and to raise some much needed funds for a worthy cause. It's her memory and inspiration that keeps me coming back every year.

How cool was she that she'd let your band practise as loud and as much as you liked. Is there anything you'd like to say to other supportive mothers in Westman who have kids that are aspiring musicians?

She was the coolest! We were loud, obnoxious and terrible when we started and she, along with her husband Dave, welcomed us into her home without a second thought. If I could talk to other supportive mothers and parents in general, I'd say thank you. On behalf of young musicians everywhere (I used to be one of those), thank you! Your love and support means more to those young bands than they will ever be able to really tell you. You're helping make dreams come true and supporting a child's dream is one of the best things any parent can do. Thank you for that.

Not only is this a super opportunity for a reunion of sorts that Brandon's music community and all of its supporters can enjoy, it is also great way to gauge how far our music scene has come. What are your thoughts on that?

The local music scene has come so far in the last 15 years. When we started this thing I didn't even know most of the other bands and musicians. We filled the spots using lists from previous "battle of the bands" contests and things like that. The bands were pretty much all top 40 cover bands and didn't really know each other either. Everyone was basically out for themselves at the time and there was almost no support or camaraderie between bands at that time. Now we have original bands and cover bands of pretty much every style and genre. We all know and support each other as well. It's a much better scene to be a part of, for sure. Some of closest friends play in other bands here in town and in the beginning I didn't even know anyone outside of my own band. I much prefer the way things are now!

How many bands will be performing this year?

There will be 15 bands over three nights this year — everything from classic rock cover bands, pop bands and singer/songwriters to original punk and metal bands. Something for everyone.

The band jam has grown to a three-day event since its humble beginnings. Other than the bands playing, what else can people expect when they head down to The 40 to show their support?

We'll also be holding 50/50 draws and giving away passes for Rocking The Fields of Minnedosa all three nights. I'm working on some other prize draws as well, but until I confirm them, I'd like to keep them to myself so as not to disappoint anyone if they don't work out.

After 15 years you've managed to raise tens of thousands of dollars for cancer research. What is the magic number thus far?

I think its near \$100,000 give or take. I've never really paid much attention to the numbers. I just want every year to be better than the year before and so far so good. As important as the money is, I'm usually more focused on the number of bands who want to be a part of the event every year and how many people come out to the show. I know that everyone comes out for their own reasons but I'm always thinking, "Wow, look at these people that came to help me honour the memory of a wonderful woman and support the local music scene!" I should pay more attention to the money side of things because it is important and it's a very worthy cause to raise money for, but my heart is in it for Georgette and the local music community. I've gotten so much from those two that I feel the need to give back every year.

What does it mean to you to be able to see our music scene make such a difference with this horrible disease that affects everybody?

I think it's incredible that the local music community can come together every year to entertain and help raise money for what I feel is a very worthy cause. I've never had to deal with any egos or attitudes or anything like that. It's always been a group of talented people willing to play for free without complaint. Some of these bands have come from a long way away to play a 40-minute set just to help and support the event. I've had bands from Saskatchewan come all the way to Brandon. This year we have bands from Winnipeg and Dauphin making the trip. Lots of bands have played their first set at The 40 as part of this event, some have played their first ever show as part of the band jam. I've also had a lot of bands that keep coming back year after year. I'm the only person to have performed at every single band jam but there are more than a few bands out there who are not far behind me. I'm humbled every year and deeply moved by the support the local music community shows every year. I'm almost always a crying mess at the end of the last night and I don't expect this year to be any different. I don't think I'll ever be able to fully express what that level of support means to me. I just hope everyone knows I appreciate what they do and I will be eternally grateful to everyone who's ever played the band jam with me. The local scene is full of incredible talent and incredible people! Thank you all.

Anybody else you'd like to thank or acknowledge?

I have to thank Heidi Howarth first and foremost. I wasn't sure she'd go for it when I first approached her with the idea but she was on board right away and she's been right there every step of the way. She basically hands me control of her bar and stage for three nights every year and rarely if ever questions anything I want to do. That's awesome. She doesn't have to do that but it goes to show what the cause means to so many people that as a business owner she's willing to take the chance on me and my crazy idea every year. I got to know her when I worked for her as a DJ long ago and she's an incredible woman. I think of her as a friend now and cannot thank her enough for everything she's done. I especially need to thank anyone and everyone who's ever come out to volunteer or help out in any way. There are far too many to name but they should know that it means a lot to me. Last but not least, a huge thanks to everyone who has ever come out to just enjoy the event. You people rock! Keep supporting live music and the cause!



Brandon's Clubbing Fraggles will close out this year's Band Jam for Cancer with their unique tongue-in-cheek arrangements. Catch their set Saturday night at 1 a.m.

At right, Mark Norris and his band This Viral Pearl will kick off the band jam at The 40. TVP's set starts at 9 p.m. Thursday.



The Hollywood Pinups are relatively new on the scene. Catch their set this Friday night. (L-R) Blake Neufeld (bass), Rennen Rommelaere (drums), Allie Brown (vocals) and Don Hines (lead guitar). (Submitted)

BAND JAM FOR CANCER LINEUP

THURSDAY, OCT. 4

9 p.m. — THIS VIRAL PEARL
10 p.m. — COMMON SENSE HERO
11 p.m. — RAYYYGUNS
12 a.m. — MISTY STREET
1 a.m. — 10 STONE

FRIDAY, OCT. 5

9 p.m. — OUT 'F SYNC
10 p.m. — HOLLYWOOD PINUPS
11 p.m. — BENEATH IT ALL
12 a.m. — RECOVERED
1 a.m. — NUTHIN BUT TROUBLE

SATURDAY, OCT. 6

9 p.m. — DAYS OF ANARCHY
10 p.m. — A PURPOSEFUL GRIMACE
11 p.m. — FUGR
12 a.m. — THE JUNK
1 a.m. — CLUBBING FRAGGLES



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