



COMMUNITY
NEWSPAPERS
PHOTO BY MARY
CATANESE
Bill Sargent,
who started
drumming
when he was
10 years old,
poses with
his drum
sets in his
West Allis
home.

Not-so-little drummer boy

Being cool was his gig, but now man drums for Jesus

By Denise Lockwood
Staff Writer

Music can make the connections when words fail. The tones, the rhythm, the energy — it all comes together and unites people. This is the Spirit in which Bill Sargent hopes to unite people in their faith — one drum beat at a time.

When Sargent, of West Allis, first learned how to play the instrument, being cool and drumming seemed to go together. Now Jesus, being cool and drumming goes together.

In January, Sargent founded the Wisconsin chapter of Drumming for Jesus, an international group that combines Christian fellowship, worship and drumming. It started with a handful of people, but now membership has exploded to 70 people, of all different ages and types of ethnic backgrounds, in a common purpose.

The group gets together once a month, but there is also a performance group that tours around the area to perform in various venues. That group involves a half-dozen

drummers and percussionists and a couple pastors.

"We're guided by the Spirit," Sargent said. "So we don't come in with any ideas of what we're going to play. But we play for a 1 1/2 to 2 hours... and we play the way God orchestrates it. That way you are going to hear something or see someone you can relate to."

For Tim McHatten, a youth pastor from Milwaukee who started with the group a few months ago, the experience of drumming has been a way for him to use his talent in uniting people.

"It's important for people to see that there are different ways of communicating," McHatten said. Several co-workers that have seen the group perform are now going out and buying drum sets to be part of the group.

Jerome Spencer, a pastor at New Beginnings Church in Waukesha and also a member of the performance group, said drums do more than set the pace for bands — they also build relationships.

"All barriers are broken down," Spencer said. "When you see the drummers perform

AT A GLANCE

- Drummers for Jesus meets at 7 p.m. the first Monday of every month.
- For more information on where the next meeting will be, please visit Billsargent.com.
- It is open to people of all ages.
- For information, call Bill Sargent at (414) 777-0100.

as a group, a unit, absent of the color of their skin or their beliefs, you are exposing others to what God is doing, which is bringing them together. That's how the Gospel is spread."

While the group's formation is the story Sargent wants to share today, he can tap out an interesting story about how he got interested in drumming.

The middle child of three boys, Sargent came from a family with a strong musical background. His great-grandfather played the coronet; his grandmother played the

Drummer

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piano even though she had just one hand; and Sargent's father played a guitar at barn dances.

In deciding to learn to play the drums at age 10, Sargent had one purpose in mind: He wanted to be as cool as the high school kids that lived down the street playing in a garage band.

His father took him to meet Buddy Rich at radio stations in Madison. His mother often took him and his friends to rock concerts while she stayed inside a van.

A few years after learning to play, Sargent played in the Wisconsin Youth Symphony and earned high honors.

"By the time I was in seventh grade, I pretty much knew I was going to be a professional drummer," he said.

So, it wasn't a shock that Sargent ditched school in the seventh grade after he was

punished for not attending a physical education class one day.

"I didn't see any reason to go," he said. "I figured I got all the physical education I needed by jumping around on the stage doing Polka-band gigs the night before. So I didn't go and they suspended me and they never asked me to come back."

Two months after quitting school, Sargent met Clyde McCoy — the same guy who invented the wah-wah pedal and played the blues all across the nation — at what is now the Country Springs Hotel and Water Park in Waukesha.

"So I hear their band's drum solo and in the middle of the show I told him I'm working six nights a week in a band and if he knows anyone who needs a drummer to give me a call and I gave him my card," Sargent said. "I didn't realize at the time who I had just met, but my mom knew him."

Two weeks later, Sargent got a call from McCoy's band manager and they told him to come to Jackson Mississippi for a show.

"And that night, they drove all night to come see me and they walked in as I was playing my first song," Sargent said. "They were just so proud of me."

Since then, he has played in just about every kind of band — Polka, Big Band, Dixieland, Christian Dixieland, Top 40, trios, and quartets. He has even performed in a war drums group, which takes place in the middle of a prayer or worship session and is when drummers play "in the Spirit," Sargent explained.

Drumming defines everything Sargent does. But over the past year — his talent has thrust him into a higher calling as it has become a direct link with his faith. He said he has found he is not alone in his passion for the Holy Spirit.