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January 28, 2012

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Mission Dance to celebrate 20-year career at concert

Well-known party band will thank its friends with show in Freehold Borough

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Mission Dance will celebrate its 20th anniversary as a party band by performing a free concert at 7:30 p.m. Aug. 11 in downtown Freehold Borough. Mission Dance was started by former members of the club band Bystander. After performing at about 1,800 parties over 20 years, Mission Dance, one of the most popular party bands to come out of Freehold, is still going strong. After all those years the band's members are still dedicated to their initial mission to keep people dancing, a concept that sparked the band's name.

Mission Dance's three original members, Lee Deedmeyer, Andy Kiely and Jeff Comer, along with a variety of vocalists, percussionists and brass musicians, are welcoming all of their hometown friends and fans from all over to celebrate the band's milestone anniversary at a free concert to be held in downtown Freehold Borough on Aug. 11.

Mission Dance will be performing in front of the Monmouth County Hall of Records on East Main Street at 7:30 p.m. as part of the Downtown Freehold Thursday evening concert series.

Celebrating the band's anniversary has elicited poignant memories for Deedmeyer and Kiely, who met when they were in high school — Deedmeyer at St. John Vianney High School in Holmdel and Kiely at Freehold Township High School. After graduating, they joined musical forces and founded Bystander in 1976. Bystander was a local success, but Deedmeyer and Kiely eventually decided to change things up and form a band that would cater to corporate events and special occasions in people's lives, in addition to performing publicly.

Mission Dance was born in 1991 and Comer was brought on board.

Deedmeyer and Kiely said if anyone had told them they would be in a wedding/party band for 20 years, they never would have believed it, as they had dreams and aspirations of living the rock star

life.

Speaking of rock stars, they both recalled meeting Bruce Springsteen in 1984 when Bystander was performing at a local club. They invited Springsteen to come on stage with the band to perform "Dancing in the Dark," which had just been released on the "Born in the USA" album. That performance is documented as the first time Springsteen performed the song in public.

Upon speaking to Deedmeyer and Kiely, you can tell they still love their chosen careers and have no regrets. They enjoy helping create special memories in people's lives.

"Music is a pretty powerful thing. When people hear music, they feel happy," said Kiely. "Sometimes it can be emotional as well."

He recalled performing at the wedding of a young woman whose father was killed on Sept. 11, 2001 at the World Trade Center in New York. She got married as planned in January 2002 because that is what her father would have wanted.

"There was not a dry eye in the house when she danced with her mother and her sister," Kiely said. "Once you're part of people's lives like that, you're there at a major event in their lives, and if it's a really special one you walk away saying, 'Wow, I just played at a really nice person's party and I'm really happy that I can make them happy.' I don't want to sound corny, but that kind of stuff keeps us doing it."

Deedmeyer recalled performing for an event at Ellis Island.

"I stood in that place and played to 500 people and wondered what my ancestors would have thought if they knew I was playing in the place where they came to America," he said.

"We've played a lot of special events for many people throughout the years that I have enjoyed being a part of," Deedmeyer said, "but my very best moment was dancing with my daughter at her wedding for the father-daughter dance, singing the song 'Lullaby' while my band played on stage."

Mission Dance's success is reflected in the widespread recognition the band has received over the years, including being named a top wedding professional in The Knot Best of Weddings list awarded by "Knot Best of Weddings" magazine several times.

Mission Dance has also been selected for the 2010 and 2011 Best of Freehold award in the entertainers category by the United States Commerce Association.

In honor of its 20th anniversary, Mission Dance has performed several special events already this year, including a celebration of St. Rose of Lima Church's 135th anniversary on April 9.

That was an especially poignant event for Deedmeyer, as a portion of his Freehold roots began at St. Rose of Lima when his great-grandmother, Mary Madden, and great-grandfather, John Norkus, were the first couple married there.

Norkus was the manager of a movie theater that used to stand in what is now the parking lot next to the Hall of Records annex, not more than 50 yards away from where Mission Dance will be performing on Aug. 11.

Deedmeyer enjoys performing with Mission Dance at community events, as well as for special events in people's lives. "I want to say that I have had the opportunity to play with a lot of fine, talented people throughout this 20-year span," he said. "We're like a family because we spend all our weekends together. I have also met a lot of great people who had a lot of hopes and dreams of building a life together and they taught me a lot."

Mission Dance, in turn, works hard to help people have fun and teach them to enjoy life.

Kiely's advice to young musicians is to "keep a balance. Do well in school, because the more you learn about other things, the better a musician you will be. A lot of people put all their eggs into one basket, but if you pay attention to your other sides and become well rounded, you will succeed."

For the two-hour Downtown Freehold show, Mission Dance will perform an array of approximately 30 popular tunes from today and back that appeal to all audiences. Special guests Gary Oleyar, a violinist who tours with Loggins and Messina, and Latin percussionist Maximo Vasquez will be join the band on stage.