

Have brews and blues, just add barbecue

Board member with brewery, band connections helps create new HCS fundraiser

By Pamela Lannom

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Hinsdale's Bob Lassandrello enjoys a good beer — especially if it's served up at Motor Row Brewery in Chicago.

He spent his adult life trading at the Mercantile Exchange before deciding to build the brewery.

"It was a really good time for me to transition out," Lassandrello said. "My son is a brewer and we had some partners who were interested in putting this together, so we did."

The brewery is at 2337 S. Michigan Ave. in a neighborhood once known as Motor Row. To the north sits Record Row, former home to Chess Records, a blues label that signed artists such as Muddy Waters, Etta James and Chuck Berry. The building at 2120 S. Michigan Ave. now is home to the Blues Heaven Foundation, and one day Lassandrello dropped by to introduce himself to his neighbor.

He met Freddie Dixon, son of legendary blues artist and record producer Willie Dixon, and the two hit it off.

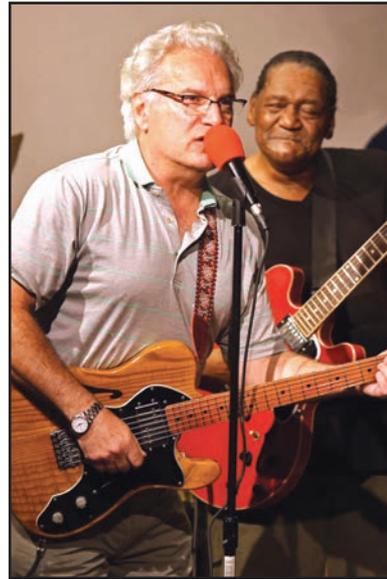
"We immediately connected over our love of music and just being similarly aged and with a similar outlook on life," he said.

Lassandrello invited Freddie and the rest of the Original Chicago Blues All-Stars band, whose members were in Willie's band back in the day, to play at the brewery.

"That turned into this regular Thursday night jam that has been going on almost three years now," Lassandrello said. "It's just a wonderful event. It's hard to even describe."

People who show up are invited to play with the band.

"We've had people perform of all skill levels and some fantastic people. We've got a lot of young



Bob Lassandrello will join the Original Chicago Blues All-Stars — with Dr. Jimmy Tillman on drums, John Watkins on guitar (pictured) and Freddie Dixon on bass — at Blues, Brews & Barbecue Oct. 14. One hundred percent of ticket sales will support HCS Family Services' hunger relief efforts. (band photo provided; photo by Jim Slonoff)

people who keep coming back. Watching them grow as musicians has been cool," he said.

Lassandrello, a self-described frustrated guitarist, has enjoyed the opportunity to get up on stage with the guys. He also enjoys serving as a board member for HCS Family Services, a position he's held for about three years after his friend, former board Chairman Roland Porter, invited him to join.

"When I did a little bit of homework about the issue of food insecurity in DuPage County and then I did a little homework about what HCS Family Services was doing, I was really interested and decided to come on board with them," Lassandrello said. "I like the fact that they are such a locally focused operation and they do such a great job of gathering resources, food and other things, and delivering them

to people in a really efficient way."

His work on the board has given him new insight into what food insecurity looks like.

"The fact that there are so many working people who are food insecure was a real shocker for me," he said. "Most of our clients are sort of the antithesis of what one would expect when you hear about welfare or food stamps that connote a lot of negative images."

During the organization's two-year partnership with the Hinsdale Junior Woman's Club — which was instrumental in opening a new food pantry at Anne M. Jeans School — one of that club's members asked Lassandrello when HCS would hold a fundraiser of its own.

"At some point it dawned on me, I've got a couple of pieces of the puzzle in my

own hands that we could bring together and put together something like this," he said.

And so Blues, Brews and Barbecue was born.

The Sunday, Oct. 14, event will feature music by the Original Chicago Blues All-Stars, beer from Motor Row Brewery and barbecue by Pickens' Place Smokehouse.

Lassandrello plans to bring Reclamation Lager, the brewery's best-seller, and three other beers. Beer and wine are included in the \$60 ticket price. The cost drops to \$10 for kids younger than 18, and organizers hope families will come out for the event.

"This is sort of an extension of the jam," Lassandrello said. "The jam is super family friendly. My grandkids have been there. We like to see young people come out and get exposed

If you go

When: 3 to 7 p.m.
Sunday, Oct. 14

Where: The Community House, 415 W. Eighth St.

Cost: \$60 for adults, \$10 for kids under 18

Tickets: squareup.com/store/hcs-family-services

Questions: (630) 323-2500, ext. 102

to this music."

The idea has been well-received, with 30 businesses and individuals signing on as sponsors, said Stan Cook, executive director at HCS.

"Sponsors have underwritten 100 percent of the event costs, so when we've been talking to people about ticket sales, we've been saying 100 percent of your ticket sales goes to our organization and hunger relief efforts," Cook said.

Typically HCS supporters have donated food during the Fourth of July parade or contributed to one of the holiday food drives.

"I think part of what we're doing as an organization is we're trying to find annual events that we can use to give the community chances to support our organization," Cook said.

Talking about the event also gives Cook a chance to share some sobering statistics.

"What always surprises people is when I tell people DuPage County is the second largest hungry population in the state. Only Cook County has more hungry people than DuPage," he stated.

Lassandrello is looking forward to showing his neighbors a great time.

"When the Hinsdale people meet the South Side blues guys, it's going to be a match made in heaven," he said.