

Fiskevold
Columnist

Parrot Heads group is about more than just Jimmy Buffet

The Lakes Area Parrot Heads Club has little to do with bird watching, nothing to do with bird flu, and rarely gives crackers when Polly wants one.

Parrot Heads are dedicated fans of Jimmy Buffet — a country-folk-pop crooner who has recorded over 30 album projects since 1970. Buffet's music and lyrics have a tropical Key Western oceanic flavor that is breezy, adventurous and carefree — one can taste the salt without even sipping a margarita cocktail.

His songs tell witty stories and the music leaves listeners with thoughts of stowing away on a cargo ship, sailing off into the sunset or even leaning towards a life of larceny and luxury through smuggling or piracy.

I first bumped into Buffet's music in the great melting pot of the U.S. Navy in the early 70s. When I got out in 1973, the Jimmy Buffet record albums *A White Sport Coat and a Pink Crustacean*, *Living and Dying in Time*, and *AIA* were three more in a duffle bagful of records that I hauled home.

Buffet has definitely and definitively stood the test of time. His No. 1 Country Song, "It's Five O'Clock Somewhere" that he recorded with Alan Jackson in 2003 sold millions. And his 2004 album project called *License to Chill* sold over 200,000 CDs in its first week out.

Jimmy Buffet has developed a line of clothing, created a chain of "Margaritaville" clubs and "Cheeseburger in Paradise" restaurants (both are titles of Buffet songs), written New York Times Bestseller's List novels and has been featured in a range of films. Standing "the test of time" nets Buffet an estimated \$30 million to \$40 million a year and the A-1-A Parrot ranks high on Fortune mag's list of highest-earning entertainers.

All of this has also netted Buffet a huge fan base that ranges from hippies to rednecks, lefties to righties, and beach bums to billionaires. One never knows who or what one might bump into at a Buffet bash or especially at a Buffet concert.

Buffet had been in the biz about a decade when a cultish group of fans started showing up at his concerts dressed in flowered shirts, skirts and other tropical attire; carrying flowers, palm leaves or wearing leis; and wearing funny parrot hats or pirate hats, perching stuffed parrots on their shoulders, and even bringing occasional real parrots (Polly does get a cracker?). These fanatical Buffetites became known as "parrot heads" and newly-initiated imitators were briefly called "parakeets" until they grew into "parrot heads."

In 1985, an official Parrot Head Club was started in Atlanta, Georgia. In 20 years, nearly 50 chapters have formed that belong to the Parrot Heads in Paradise (PHIP) — the international organization of Parrot Head Clubs. The difference between the "parrot heads" and the card-carrying members of Parrot Head Clubs is not only the card, but the cause. Parrot Head Club do charitable works and improve the community around their chapter through service and music, while at the same time enjoying tropical music and emulating Buffet's tropical persona.

Jim Brogen has presided over The Lakes Area Parrot Heads Club since it was founded in October of 2003.

The chapter covers a 50 mile radius from DL, but Brogen proudly boasts, "Also has members as far away as Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada and Omaha, Nebraska, USA."

With the slogan "Northern Latitudes, Caribbean Attitudes" (a twist on a Buffet album name and title song), the Lakes Area Parrot Heads have accomplished a lot in a short time.

They give gifts to the Mahube Christmas Giving Tree, hand out teddy bears to patients and residents at local hospitals and nursing homes on Christmas morning, host the Margaritaville station at the last mile of the 25-mile annual Fargo Marathon, and they gave 10 grand to the Becker County Humane Society (Polly gets crackers?) in conjunction with the Lakeside Tavern through a "Beachballs and Bongos" event.

On Saturday, the Lakes Area Parrot Heads' First Annual John Orcutt Memorial Music Scholarship event was held at the National Guard Armory.

The Armory Hall was decorated with a tropical motif — lots of leis, flowers, palm trees, maracas, Mardi Gras beads, and sunshine. Parrot Heads and parrot heads wore tropical attire and feasted on stewed chicken, red beans and rice and coleslaw — all accented with spices from Belize. The Parrot Heads also hosted a garage sale at the Armory earlier that day to raise funds for the scholarships.

Scholarship applicants each performed a musical piece with a tropical flavor. The second place (\$250) winner was a 13-year-old female piano player, Katie Kelsven of Detroit Lakes. The first (\$500) and third (\$100) place winners were our son Hank, 16, and our daughter Gwena, 17. All music teachers and instructors in the area were informed of the scholarships, but there were only three applicants. All three worked hard on their pieces and contributed greatly to the fun and spirit of the event.

The Parrot Heads told me they want to make this annual event bigger, bring more money to their scholarship fund, and get more applicants, parents, people and Parrot Heads involved in this fun musical event.

And they'd like to recruit some new club members.

That sounds like a good idea to me. I knew about the Parrot Heads and parrot heads, and I knew our kids were practicing for some kind of music scholarship. But until last week, I didn't even know DL had a Chapter of Parrot Heads.