

the Week

Walworth County, Wis.

OUR TWENTY-FIFTH YEAR

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'I knew I would do this forever'



friends and neighbors of the Meisner family can attest to Steve's passion for music. It goes way back to the early sounds of music rocking from the Meisner basement in 1970s Whitewater. Steve would recruit kids from the neighborhood and around town to bring their instruments, or use one of his many spares, and play their hearts out with him while the reel-to-reel spun, recording the first sounds of what was to become the Steve Meisner Band.

Steve worked for years before forming his own band. He won talent shows and awards with his squeezebox, and in 1978 his first band had their first paid gig in Jefferson for the Gemuetlichkeit May Ball. That was the beginning of what was to become Steve's life passion. Now 25 years later, he is celebrating the silver anniversary of the Steve Meisner Band, and anticipating many more.

"When I was 5 years old and strapped on my first accordion, I knew I would do this forever," he said. "Deep down I always knew that music would be my life's work."

The Meisner name has been synonymous with polka for generations, beginning with Steve's father's band, Verne Meisner and the Polka Boys, formed 54 years ago. By the 1960s, the Verne Meisner Band was—and still is—one of the best-known polka groups in the region.

Now in its second generation, the "Meisner-Hartmann Dynasty" carries on, so dubbed by Richard March of the Wisconsin Arts Board in his book *Down Home Dairyland*. In the first generation, Verne was joined by his cousin Carl Hartmann, along with Bill Hagemann and Jake Contania. In this second generation, Steve's band often includes



cousin and son of Carl, Rick Hartmann, along with Larry Sokolowski and other local musicians when he plays in the area.

Polka has left deep prints in the history of Wisconsin. It was a rebellious dance in the 1800s with the arrival of incoming Europeans and has become an American folk tradition, according to Steve's Web site. The Slovenian-style polka, with some modern innovations, has become Steve's trademark.

After World War II, almost exactly a century after the

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Steve Meisner has spent 25 years spreading the joy of polka

Story by Donna Lenz Wright ♦♦♦ Photography by Dan Plutchak

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Home & Food Celebrate Cinco de Mayo

While Cinco de Mayo is a holiday in Mexico, food writer Frank Kourt says it is celebrated with at

10C

least as much or more vigor in Mexican-American communities.



Automotive A car-like drive

Walworth County's comprehensive classifieds have everything from real estate in the Home & Food section to automotive and help wanted in section D.



1D

Contributing writer A. J. Goldsmith previews the program of music, poetry, dance, storytelling, and fine arts coming to the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum of Chicago.

Del Corazón Festival



1B

Entertainment