

The Times

February 4, 2007

Mansfield man lives rock 'n' roll dream

Charity event aims to bring music to New Orleans children

By Vickie Welborn, Gannett News Service

MANSFIELD — By day, Randy Ryder, of Mansfield, serves as director of nuclear cardiology for Cardiovascular Consultants in Shreveport.

The weekends might find him putting the finishing touches on a new home shared with wife, Amanda, and their two children, or playing guitar in the worship band of First Baptist Church in Mansfield.

But over the past year, Ryder, 43, has managed to squeeze into his busy schedule a lifelong passion to play rock 'n' roll music. And the opportunity has exceeded even his most far-fetched dream by opening the doors of friendship to some of the industry's most well-known musicians and at the same time putting them on a common path to bring music back to the children of hurricane-ravaged New Orleans.

A step toward that goal will be realized Tuesday when Ryder will co-host a VH1 Classic show with veejay Lynn Hoffman. The one-day shoot in the New York studio, with a broadcast date to be announced later, will feature Ryder and Barry Goudreau, one of the original guitarists of Boston. **Ryder will introduce clips of rock stars with whom he's become friends and he hopes to talk about a charity event he and those friends are planning in the New Orleans area.**

Ryder's introduction into the rock 'n' roll arena began a year ago when he attended his first Rock 'n' Roll Fantasy Camp, a five-day event that brings professional rock 'n' roll stars together with everyday music lovers. Skills are honed, the ins and outs of the music world are learned, all culminating with on-stage performances with the stars at popular venues.

Ryder, an accomplished guitarist since high school, vowed to try out the camps following a serious vehicle accident nine years ago. He never forgot passing on a chance back in college with a Northwestern State University when a fraternity brother put him in touch with Tim Smith. Smith wanted to see if Ryder was interested in teaming up.

"But I told my friend that guy was going to starve," Ryder said. Years later, "that guy," who now goes by the name Tim McGraw, had the last laugh.

"I visited with him back stage at a concert and we had a good laugh about it. So much for my intuition," Ryder said.

That's why the fantasy camps piqued his interest. "I saw something about it on TV, and I never got that dream out of my head to play music for a living."

But his medical career was paying the bills so Ryder put it off until years later. The first fantasy camp last February in Hollywood led to an immediate connection with Mark Slaughter, founding member of the rock band Slaughter known as the voice of "Fly to the Angels" fame, and Kelly Keagy, founding member and vocalist/drummer of Night Ranger.

In August, Ryder attended a second camp held in New York City, which is where the idea for True Jams Charities was firmed up. A one-day camp in Ohio in September put Ryder on the stage with Artimus Pyle, drummer of Lynyrd Skynyrd, where they were the opening act for Def Leppard and Journey.

"From the first camp on, we developed this idea to help the people of Louisiana," Ryder said. "It's something these rock star guys want to do but they didn't know how or where to get started."

True Jams, a non-profit corporation started by Ryder, has a goal of taking people who have achieved success in the business world and who are musically inclined or talented and putting them in a position to experience the musical heritage of New Orleans. The net profits of the venture will benefit children, whether it's distributing the proceeds to deserving children or to a musical foundation.

Slaughter, who is serving as musical director and board member of True Jams, said in a telephone interview with The Times that he jumped on board with Ryder because he hopes to see their effort "pick up where the government never picked up to begin with."

A lot has gone wrong in the rebuilding effort in New Orleans, Slaughter said. But music, like comedy relief, can bring change.

"We can begin making a difference and create an awareness of what is going on there," Slaughter said.

Joining Slaughter on the True Jams board are Keagy and Bob Miller of California, one of Ryder's high school classmates who is vice president of Globalstar Inc. A Web site that will fully describe True Jams' plans and five-year goals is in the works.

The Rev. "Thumper" Miller, pastor of First Baptist in Mansfield, also is a board member. Ryder, a born-again Christian, doesn't shy away from acknowledging the call of God on his life and for putting him in the path of kindred rock stars who share his desire of changing people's lives.

"At my church, I often tell the youth you can be in the rock 'n' roll world, but not be of it and you can still make a positive difference in people's lives."