

Good times rock n' roll at the Barrelworks

The atmosphere is smoky, dim, easy and comfortable. There's a live band up front, and the dance floor's alive with swaying bodies. They're moving to the music of today — a ripe blend of raunchy blues and ballad, hanging on a crackling driving rhythm. It's loud, and drenched in silky synthesizer.

Their jeans and linear T-shirts. The shiny-haired girls are here, lissome in tube tops and white pants. The beat pulses through to the next room, where late diners make connections with steaks or spaghetti.

It's Saturday night at the Barrelworks, and the kids are raving. "This is a fun place, a

social place," says owner Ralph Poole. "But it's not a tough place. If it was tough, I'd sell it and move on."

Poole is dead serious about running a straight and level operation. "This is a family business," he says earnestly, "and the whole family works on dance nights. I have eyes everywhere, and things just don't get out of hand. And there are no drugs in this building. I want the place to have a good name."

And it does, certainly among the young — and some not so young — who go there Thursday, Friday or Saturday nights.

There's been a dance hall on the Barrelworks location for years. Poole bought the place from Midland's Beauchamp family in 1959. It was the Wagon Wheel then, and it's gone through several changes of name since. "We called it Danceland, and Club Malibu and finally — the Barrelworks," says Poole. "There's no direct reason for the name, except that it seems to fit

the trend of the times, and it's something that fits the kids' tongues."

Poole freely admits that the first ten years were rough ones. "I was working at two jobs in Toronto, and coming up here weekends and running dances and redecorating and renovating. The whole thing just about wore me right out."

In 1972, chronic fatigue caught up with him. He fell asleep at the wheel of his car during one of his trips back and forth from Toronto. "I darn near killed myself," he says. "That was the turning point for me. Since then, I've concentrated all my efforts in one direction — right here."

It hasn't been a single handed effort. The whole family worked together, and still does. Mrs. Poole (Margaret) is in charge of the kitchen and with the help of daughter Renee looks after the 60 seat dining room.

Sons Russell, Robert, Ralph Jr., Ricky and Randy work at the bar or in the dance hall.

Every Saturday night,

Poole himself takes a set, up on the bandstand. He's qualified. He's been into the music scene since pre-Presley days. "I started out in country music, playing guitar and singing. Then I got into rock and roll — had my own band — Bobby Bishop and the Rebels." (Bishop is Poole's stage name.)

"We played arenas and clubs around Toronto, and we played up here too. We were one of the first rock and roll bands to appear in this area."

He sees a big difference in the kids who crowd the Barrelworks today, and the rock and roll audiences of yesterday. "Used to be all slicked back hair and leather jackets and pointed shoes. They were a tough crowd, but today's kids — at least the ones that come out here — just aren't like that. They're courteous and reasonable and we don't have any

trouble. Sure — I've got a bouncer here — a big guy. But he's a gentleman, and he talks kids down if he has to."

The music is a big attraction at the Barrelworks. In the past, Poole has hired show bands from Toronto. For the last three years, the house band has featured local talent and has included Keith Stratton, Andy Camp, Roger LaCroix, Wayne Redditt, Gerry Holden, Peter and Scott Whittington and Neil Dragoman among its members.

Above all, the kids have a good time, and Poole talks wistfully about expanding the social scope of the place. "I have a lot of space here," he muses. "I'd like to make use of it, maybe with tennis or badminton courts."

Meanwhile, his plate's pretty full. Summer dances on Thursday and Friday and Saturday

nights have been a big hit — so big that if you don't get there by 9:30 on a Saturday night, the dance hall's 350 seats may well be filled.

There are dances on the

weekends in the winter, and Poole's considering the possibility of winter Thursday nights as well. And as long as there are dances, there'll be ravers.



Ralph Poole

Community calendar

Saturday, September 10
— Penetang Legion - corn roast and dance. Music by Rick Lemieux.

Monday, September 5
— Registration for Cubs and Scouts and Venturers will take place at St. Ann's Church, Penetanguishene, 7:30 p.m.

Notice
— Ladies, are you interested in an afternoon of fun and good fellowship? Join the Topperette Bowling League, Tuesday afternoons 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. starting mid September. Phone 526-9483 or 526-8234 evenings.

Saturday, September 24
— 25th Anniversary Dance will be held at Penetanguishene Legion Hall. An invitation is extended by the Ladies' Auxiliary Branch 68, to help them celebrate. Marcel Maurice orchestra. Lunch will be served. Small nominal charge at the door. All Legion members and guests are welcome.

— Organizers are invited to publicize their upcoming events free of charge in the Times Community Calendar. Please call the Community Calendar editor at 526-9369 or drop your message into the Midland Times office, 525 Bay Street.

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