

'Old guys rock,' too

A favorite local band from the 1960s hopes to give fans a blast from the past this summer.

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If you remember dancing or singing "The Hump," a little pink bar called Tiny's Bengel Inn or the local band that traveled in a black Cadillac hearse – well, you might be dating yourself.

That's OK with Herb Gross and the Invictas, a 1960s-era rock and roll band whose history is closely tied to Irondequoit's.

Gross, a member of the Invictas, remembers the era well, and playing at Tiny's Bengel Inn, which was located about where the bus loop at the north end of St. Paul Boulevard is today.

He and the band remember it so well that for a brief time this summer, they'll be doing what they can to bring the good times back.

For the first time in 20 years, three of the four original Invictas – Gross, Dave Hickey and Jim Kohler – are getting together, along with some other musicians, and going on tour in the area.

Tiny's Bengel Inn is long gone, but the band will be stopping at favorite Irondequoit haunts like the House of Guitars June 4 and Shamrock Jack's on Culver Road in Sea Breeze, June 12.

The band will even be arriving in black Cadillac hearse, a 1984 vintage one that Gross located in Oklahoma City. It's being "fixed up" and lettered with the band's name at a garage in West Bloomfield, he said.

The reunion tour came up after Gross, a former longtime area resident who moved to Charlotte, N.C., eight years ago, was in Rochester last summer having dinner with former bandmate Dave Hickey and his wife.

Gross, now 61, agreed to join a performer onstage "for just one song," he recalled, "but that's all it took . . . It lit a fire deep down in all of us, and it's still there."

During its heyday in the 1960s, the band became popular playing at Tiny's.

"It was *the* in place to be, especially for rock and roll," recalled Joe Genier, today a retired Monroe County sheriff, security business owner and town justice in Irondequoit. In the '60s, he tended bar at the Summerville inn, as well as waited tables and bounced. It probably

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remained a hot spot from the late '50s to early '60s, Genier guessed, when it was taken down – in 1966, he thought – to make room for the bus loop, then in front of a development called Harbor Square (today's Westage at the Harbor condominiums).

"Remember, young people could drink at 18 in those days," Genier said, adding Tiny's Bengel Inn "was just a great, great place."

It could probably "legally" hold 150, he said, but on big nights, like when the Invictas or another legendary local band, Wilmer Alexander and the Dukes, played there, lines out the door often extended more than 300 yards.

The hot spot was owned in those days, he said, by Fred Watson, who lived above the bar

with his wife, Marian, and their two sons.

It had previously been owned by someone named Bengel, Genier said, but "Tiny's" got added to the name when Mr. Watson, who weighed over 300 pounds, became the owner.

"There are stories and legends about Tiny's Bengel Inn that cannot be repeated in print," Genier chuckled, recalling one of the most popular drinks at the bar was named "The Skip and Go Naked."

The Invictas just may bring back some of your own happier memories of the '60s, Gross said. The band will be raising funds, during its tour, to benefit blood cancer and leukemia research.

They've even written a new song, aptly titled "One More Time."

"We even say to one another: 'Old guys rock,'" Gross said.