

Live and kicking in the night

Fame . . . fun . . . money . . . glory . . . groupies.

Start a local band and all of this can be yours.

It probably won't, of course — especially fame, money, glory and (sigh) groupies.

But most local band members we talked to say that it is, at least, fun.

Being in a band must have something else going for it too, because there are

a lot of other ways to have fun. Here's what some local musicians had to say on the subject.

Sneaky Pete and the Neon Madmen

Sneaky Pete sounds like a guy who should be in a maximum-security prison with guys named Mugsy, Fingers, Icepick and Knuckles.

The Neon Madmen sounds like a name for an eccentric group of interior decorators.

But, put those two together and you've got Sneaky Pete and the Neon Madmen — local musicians extraordinaire — a good-time, kick-butt, dance-til-you-drip purveyors of popular tunes from the '50s and '60s.

Chances are that if you've seen the band, it's been at Northgate's Sunset Grill. Sneaky Pete and the Neon Madmen are well known among fans of the current nostalgia music movement.

Sneaky Pete is Dr. Pete Rizzo — rhythm guitar and vocals for the band.

Yes, he's a highly educated man who, when wearing his performing outfit, might remind you of an Artie Johnson character.

Rizzo, who's better known as "Dr. Sneak" (or just "Sneak" for short) teaches in the biology department at Texas A&M.

"I'm a cell biologist," Sneak says. "I work on chromosomal proteins."

Dr. Sneak was drawn to A&M from his native Indiana by the research opportunities. He's lived in College Station and taught at A&M since 1975.

"I started performing solo in January of '76 at Mr. Gatti's with folk songs and a little bit of progressive country," he says.

Sneak says he's 34, but since the rest of the band members fell off their chairs when their leader announced his age, suffice it to say that he's at least very young at heart and is probably not 34.

"Sometimes I feel 19 when I get a few beers in me," Sneak says with a laugh.

"I played in the '60s," he says. "I did this music when it was out. I was underage and playing in bars around Chicago and Calumet City. We played a

lot of blues but we also played the current stuff."

How about that name? Sneaky Pete?

"When I got out of high school," Sneak explains, "a chubby Lithuanian friend of mine named Bucky Bekitis pinned that on me in a bowling alley."

"We used to hang out in the bowling alleys. He called me Sneaky Pete due to that sneak look. It was a habit I had of talking to people and looking at them with shifty eyes."

Dr. Sneak first thought about getting a band together about 3½ years ago. His first bands didn't hang together for various reasons, so he finally put an ad in the newspaper and got things started in earnest. That's how he ended up with the Neon Madmen.

David Goff, drums and vocals, is the newest member of the band, a San Francisco native and currently a political science student at Texas A&M.

"I've got about ten years in and out of bands out in California," Goff says.

"It's a low pressure situation (playing with Sneak and the Madmen) and it's a lot of fun to play with these guys."

Even though music is prominent right now, Goff figures on heading back to California after graduating. He sees teaching in the future.

John Ward, lead guitar and vocals, manages a Northgate burger shop.

Of course, what everybody wants to know about a band's lead guitar player is whether he's any good.

They're a humble lot, lead players are, and Ward is no exception.

"No, I'm not any good," Ward says, "and I've been playing for about 12 years."



Sneaky Pete and the Neon Madmen

Photo by Bill Hughes