

AREA ROCKERS UNITE IN TRIBUTE TO ONE OF THEIR OWN

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Music has always been Bob "Chip" Chipak's life. Specifically, the music of Bruce Springsteen. Back in 1980, Chipak and his friend Bob Forte formed Backstreets, a Springsteen cover/tribute band. It's over a quarter-century later and the group, now known as the B-Street Band, with Chipak and Forte and others, are still out there playing the music of the Boss.

But lately, Chipak, 51, has not been onstage as much as he'd like. Back in April, he was diagnosed with esophageal cancer, a burden he faces without medical insurance. But not without a loving family and many, many friends. These same friends have decided to get together and do what they can for Chip and his family.

A "Benefit For A Friend" concert will be held Sunday at Jenkinson's Club in Point Pleasant; the show date is Feb. 25. The six-hour event will begin at 3 p.m. and include performances by such Jersey Shore stalwarts as the B-Street Band, Brian Kirk and the Jirks, The Nerds, the Party Dolls, Sensational Soul Cruisers, and Yasgur's Farm.

"Have you seen such a great line-up?" asks family friend Sandy Leibfried. "We're suggesting that everyone who comes make a \$20 donation." Chipak, who lives in Point Pleasant Borough, can't help but get emotional when he thinks about all the support he's received.

"For the first three weeks after you're diagnosed with cancer, nobody knows what to say to you," Chipak said. "And then, it's like the flood gates open. The amount of support has been miraculous. Good wishes and help have come from the community and from all over, from people who saw us play down through the years." And through the years, the B-Street Band has played from Maine to the Bahamas for well over what the band estimates as three million people.

Chipak says he's doing all right these days. "The chemo and radiation knocked out the tumor," he said. "And hey, I never lost my hair. But the cancer had spread to the adrenal glands. And there's another round of treatment." Even that hasn't kept him from playing the drums for his band.

"I'll play six or seven songs with the band," he said. "Around the holidays, I was playing with the chemo therapy machine hooked up to me."

Chipak's longtime friend and Jersey music impresario Steve Tarkanish, president of STARS Productions in Newton, is the driving force behind the benefit concert.

"Chip's a musician's musician," Tarkanish said. "And when we heard he was sick we knew we had to do something. He's one of our own. And I've never seen a coming together of so many people. It's going to be a great show."

Chipak says that he doesn't have the words to express his gratitude, except to say thank you and have hope in the future. "I'm not going anywhere," Chipak says. "I'm going to be playing for a long time."