



Members of New Pay Dirt Bond

Local Band Changes Its Name and Image

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Staff Writer

Sunday, in the murky depths of The Other Place on Salem Avenue, a wake was combined with a coming-out party and a high old time was had by all.

Coproprietor Roger Kingery had sold five kegs of beer at two bits a pop by 4 p.m. and was looking harried but ecstatic. While slinging suds faster than a rattlesnake strikes, Kingery said in wonder: "This is the drinkingest crowd I've ever seen—and I'm working with the awfulest hangover I've ever had."

The occasion was the official demise of the Vikings and the birth of a new band, Pay Dirt.

For 15 years, the Vikings have been a popular musical tradition in the valley, and, one would think, would be as enduring as the Mill Mountain Star.

But singer-guitarist Allen Nelms said: "We weren't getting the young crowd. The Vikings name was associated with something like 'Glenn Miller's Greatest Hits.' We decided it was time to let the Vikings die and bring in some new blood and a new approach."

The new blood Nelms was talking about came to the band in the veins of Jerry Garfield on lead guitar, pedal steel and dobro; Cliff Mascitelli on drums; and Roanoke Symphony violinist David Lipps on bass, fiddle, guitar and trombone.

Fifteen-year Vikings Nelms and Lane Craig and veteran Vikings Fred Freland and Alan Francis comprise the rest of the band.

Pay Dirt didn't come up with its name until the morning of the Sunday gig. The band had been practicing for two-and-a-half months and had only played one gig at a private party before Sunday. Sunday was the official debut and the band went about it in an original and appealing way.

Nelms contacted brother-in-law Roger Kingery and his partner Don Strickler and asked if the band could have a party and official debut session at The Other Place from 2 to 6 p.m. Sunday. Kingery said sure, and caught up in the spirit of the thing, decided to sell beer at 25 cents a draft.

Each member of the band issued 25 invitations to friends and fans and any guests they wanted to bring. The result was a packed house and copious beer consumption.

Most of the crowd was on the far side of 21 and a good representation of musicians, coming from Truckers Delight, Woods smoke, The Flys and Rock Salt among others, was on hand.

"We thought we could minimize the heebie-jeebies while giving the Vikings' fans the first shot," Nelms said. "Seeing old faces would make us feel more comfortable. We felt we could get a more honest reaction from our old fans."

The approach of Pay Dirt is decidedly California country and Texas outlaw. Waylon Jennings, Linda Ronstadt, Emmy Lou Harris, Guy Clark (Nelms was recently impressed with Clark at the last Waylon concert in Salem) and the Flying Burrito Brothers, are influences. Various band members have taken to wearing cowboy hats on stage.

