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Career milestone

Pop band plays 1,000 times

By Pat Andrews
FOCUS EDITOR

Don't be taking the brothers Caruso for granted. This year is sizing up to be one of the best for them careerwise and the sky just could be the limit.

The Trenton based pop band still gets calls to do weddings. People Downriver have become so accustomed to their appearances over the years. "We tell them we just can't any longer and the question is usually, why not?" explains brother Joe. "One reason is that we played 295 dates last year, most of them out of the state and the other is our equipment, roughly some $100,000 worth, wouldn't fit in the usual hall anymore."

Caruso is past that stage, fast approaching a milestone in their musical career, the 1,000 performance. "We didn't think it was a big deal, but our backers, Miller Brewing Co. did. We're booked into Jagger's in Waterford for a special anniversary show," Joe continues.

The group are show biz veterans even though their ages, 22 to 27 years, are just about par for new bands breaking on to the scene. They performed as early as junior high days, rehearsing in the basement of their Trenton home under the guidance of mom and dad, Mickey and Ruth Caruso.

Mike, the eldest, plays bass, trumpet and does vocals. He also contributes to the group's songwriting. Joe is next. He attended Central Michigan University for two years and had a bout with cancer and now is completely cured. He plays saxophone, guitar and does vocals and is more or less the group spokesperson. Dave is the keyboard artist, guitarist and vocalist and the primary songwriter for the group. He has won national songwriting competitions and written jingles for radio spots. The youngest of the brothers, Rob, usually sets teens hearts afire with his looks and drum ability. He's played since age 4 and also writes songs.

As the group travels round the country, there are the skeptics who don't believe, despite the similarity in features, that the musicians are really brothers. "Actually it is a compliment," laughs Joe. "They say that one family couldn't really have that much individual talent."

Like all bands, Caruso has been waiting in the wings for the big break. They haven't been idle. They have been back-up to Joan Jett and John Cafferty, played prom dates and college dates. Twice they have been nominated by the National Association for Campus Activities in the category of Contemporary Artists of the Year, putting them in the company of Huey Lewis, The police and Journey.

Caruso has set attendance records at college performances across the country. Their appealing image, professionalism and music bring out the crowds and convert the audience the fans. "We're probably better known in Oklahoma, Indiana, Illinois and Texas than we are in Michigan," suggests Joe. "We found early in our career that the Detroit market was not as accessible to original music bands. We had to hit the road to make noise and our reputation."

The travel attracted the Miller Brewing public relations people and the group was tapped in 1985 for sponsorship and renewed in 1986. "That means, Miller thinks we're one of the top young bands in the country. They follow our appearances and do the promotional work like distributing t-shirts, posters, jackets and bumper stickers," Joe states.

Life on the road isn't what the brothers would like to do forever, but for now, it is giving them exposure and the experience and training of a lifetime. They have been flown to Miami to perform at the Fountainbleu Hotel, called to Dallas for a special show and provided background music for UN40 and Rick Springfield.

Three of the brothers still live at home, the fourth resides a few minutes away. They hold weekly meetings to chart their future activities and everything is handled by vote. "We pour all of our money back into the band," explains Joe. "That means we may vote on whether or not one of us really needs a new pair of jeans," he laughs.

Caruso also employs a secretary and a stage manager and production manager. Vans carry the equipment to the concert sites and the brothers follow. The hectic schedule doesn't provide much time for anything other than playing dates, rehearsing, writing songs and plotting their future. In other words, little time for social-type dates. "It is hard to tell someone that the next free date you might have to see them is three weeks from Tuesday. I usually end up going to the movies alone," states Joe.

The brothers have also set a realistic timetable for their career. "We charted it out and surprisingly, we're ahead of the prediction," Joe offers. They know that if the major recording contract and national recognition does not come within a certain period, it may never. "Could be time to think about doing something else," said Joe. "I've got friends from high school who are doctors and lawyers and when we see one another, they

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Milestone

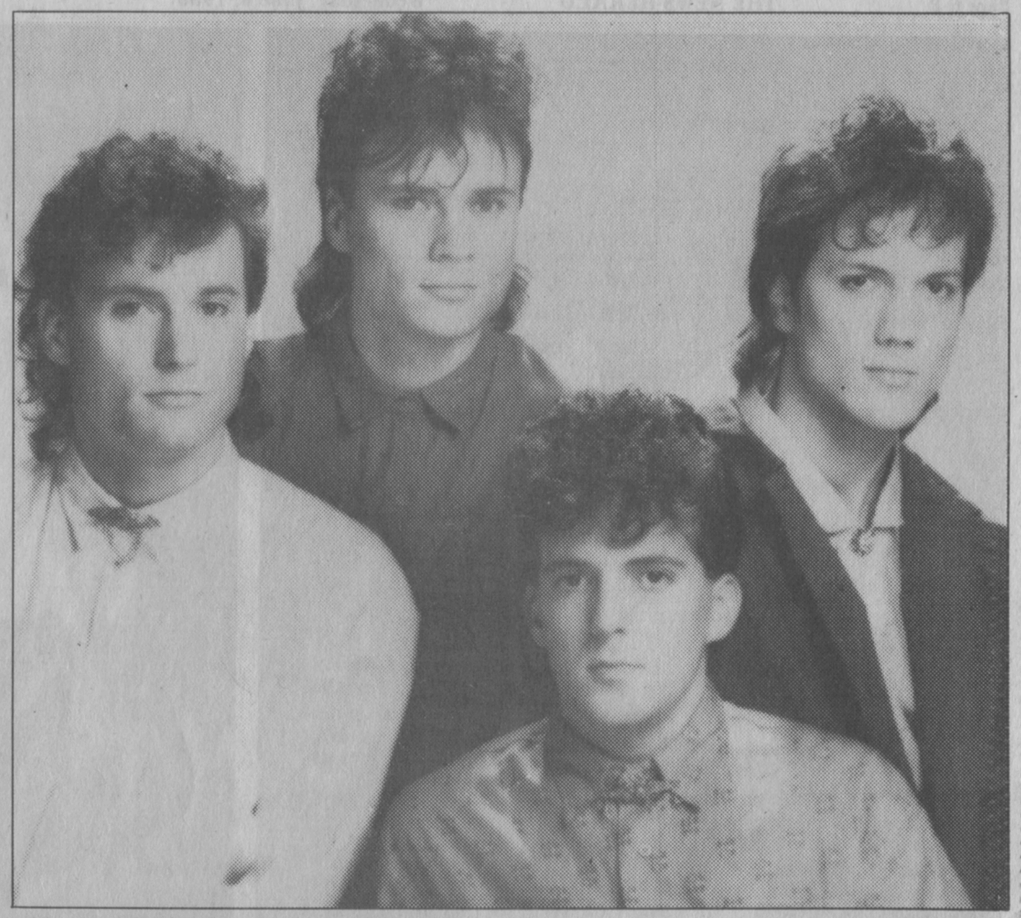
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ask, are you still with that band?"

They might not be asking that question too much longer. "Good things are happening to us," reveals Joe. "Promoters and radio stations that wouldn't accept our phone calls two years ago are now calling us. We have been contacted by a number of record labels, but the deal has not been what we want—yet."

One thing for certain, the brothers won't forget the home town. They have been making appearances in several of the local schools talking about drugs and why to avoid them. "So many people naturally assume if you are in music, you're on something. This is one band that isn't," stresses Joe. "It almost makes me laugh. When it was a life or death situation with my cancer and I had to take all kinds of drugs to have a hope of staying alive, it made me realize what life is all about."

Jagger's is a multi-level lounge with capacity for 1,000 persons. It is located at Elizabeth Lake Road near Cass Lake Road just west of Telegraph in Waterford. For more information call 681-1700 or the Caruso Hotline at 671-8341. Other performances for the group include New York New York in Warren on June 19, 20, 21 and 22; Summerfest in Milwaukee, Wis., June 26; The Casino in Waupaca, Wis., June 28 and 29 and The Drop In, Windsor, Ont., July 1 thru 5.



Joe, Mike, Rob and Dave Caruso.

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