

Dancing into Sunset Fruitport 2021 Season Recap

By Sue Halter

Fruitport, Spring Lake and the surrounding communities, you rock! Stand up and applaud yourselves for coming out and enjoying and supporting the 5th season of Dancing into Sunset Fruitport down at Pomona Park overlooking beautiful Spring Lake (Dancing into Sunset – Fruitport on Facebook). Our attendance once again increased tenfold. We averaged 250 plus each night, to well over 3,000 in attendance for the season, who came to listen and dance to live bands. And now, wait till you read this, over 84,000 views on Facebook (Yes, I went back and counted every single post and how many views it received this season), thanks to Diane Campbell for all her time of posting each week.

We kicked off the season with The Silverado Band followed by The Bourne Bros, who filled in at the last minute for Sonny Boone and his Valken Band, when the scheduled band had to pull out at the last minute. We will have Sonny and his band back in the lineup for season six. Then Mother Nature took control of the 3rd Thursday when The 6 Pak Band faced a rainy day into the evening, so we took a chance and rescheduled them for Tuesday, August 10th, with much success as the word got out for Tuesday, and produced a great crowd once again. Let's say Mother Nature liked following The 6 Pak Band on the rescheduled Tuesday night, since within a half hour of getting everything packed up, the skies opened up again! Whew! That was a close one.....!

July 1st was the week of our Salute to the Military and, like in years past, with the help and entertainment of The Silverado Band we had a fantastic evening! We collected non-perishable items through the week at Orchard Markets Fruitport and passed it along to The Blue Star Moms to send off to the troops. What a wonderful night of celebration with the help of local Scout Troop Pack 4023. Many thanks to Scout leaders George Kotkowicz, Andy Peck, Becky Hudson, Windi Sievers and Jerry Mabrito; Boy Scouts - Arnold Mabrito, Lance Mabrito and JJ Mabrito; Cub Scouts Penelope Stidham, Xander Fox, Matthew William and Jordan LeMoine for carrying each branch flag (for which the Fruitport Lions Club donates use each year for the celebration) across the stage. As always, we thank Fruitport Orchard Markets for donating those delicious cupcakes, and to Spring Lake Floral for the red, white and blue carnations that the scouts pass out to those in attendance. A special thank you to Tami Hall for taking photos. It was a very proud night for all.

July 8th brought back The Bourne Bros Band for their regular scheduled date for all to dance, and then on July 15th was the return of The Adams Family Band for which a special, very special, moment came to light for one of our attendees. While the band played the song Runaway by Del Shannon, that tune hit the heart of Blanche Dykehouse. Why you ask? Well, Del Shannon (Chuck Westover) who wrote and sang that song for years, and is still played on the radio today, was her brother. When I received a call the following day from Roger, her husband, on how much that meant to his wife and how it bought, just for those few minutes, her brother back to life, she was thrilled! "It was just amazing!" he said. "The smile on her face, and that they will be coming down every Thursday as they are both looking forward to it," and, indeed they did and even brought family members with, too. The Sea Cruisers from Lansing heard that Del Shannon's sister was present when they played on July 22nd, so they played (you guessed it) Runaway and made sure to go over and introduce themselves and take a picture with her. More smiles to be had by Blanche and Roger, a married couple for 64 years.

Now, Roger, I have to say, has been educating me more and more regarding the history of where we all sit and dance to the music. As many of you know who have grown up in the area, there was not only a grand hotel called the Pomona House, but a grand dance Pavilion located on the shores of Pomona Park. Roger has added to my poster of the photos of the park by donating a three-ring binder with pages and pages of pictures and history. One of the items in the book is a original dance ticket, with signatures of the gentleman who wanted to have the next dance with the holder of

the ticket, and a reminder that the last train car left at 10:13 pm back to Grand Rapids. Yes, right where we dance were the train tracks that lead down to the water in front of the Pavilion. Oh, if only those old pilings that still stand today in the water, could talk. One of Roger's stories is Blanche and he would bring their little boat right up to the Pavilion and park it underneath this one area to listen to the music. Pat Dietz who attends with her husband, Dick, Dancing into Sunset regularly shared her story that, not one, but two of her prom dances were at the Pavilion. How special is that to be back dancing on the same grounds as she once did as a teenager.

This gave me the idea to purchase a blank journal book to pass around. If anyone had any memories like Pat's or Roger's, I wanted them to write in the journal, or for new memories that were now being created. Or, bring a photo and put in the book. I would like to have this book stay with the Village of Fruitport, and, who knows, perhaps in fifty years our children and grandchildren can say, "My parents and grandparents used to dance at the Bandshell in Fruitport and, look, here is their names!" So I hope many of you were able to write, or at least, sign the book. So far, 20 pages have been filled in and are being posted on the Facebook page. The Memory Journal will return in 2022 as well, so start collecting those memories from family members to write in it.

Next up on July 29th was The Carl Webb Band which came with a great following. The dancers love dancing to all his music. Another nice evening in the park. Mother Nature was on our side this time all night long.

In August was the return of Butch Grenell and the Unbreakable Pride Band, with his country style music for line dancing.

The second week of August brought to the park retired and active police and fireman with a sound board man to make sure all heard the band, and we sure did.....! :-)

As we approached the middle of the month, Woody, Cheryl and Tom of The Silverado Band once again played to the growing crowd. My, we have come a long way from only 40 to 50 a night back when we started in 2017!

Silverado Band usually is our last night but with Labor Day still being a week late, many had asked if I could run one more week in August. So I listened and booked a newcomer to Dancing into Sunset Fruitport, Steve Spees, on our Wesco Popcorn night where Tory, Luke and Allison took over passing out free popcorn buckets while they lasted. Very pleased was Steve Spees and those who ventured out to listen to this 'unknown to the area' entertainer, all got a nice surprise from his one man talent for the evening, and Steve appreciated the response from the audience of dancers and listeners. Saxophone accompanied as background music, and singing was easy for him along with a book of over 400 songs listed to request from, which many did. Overheard from those in attendance after the first half hour, they were on their phones telling family and friends, "to come on down, this guy is good." That's what this community does. I am so proud to represent a community who supports, appreciates, and is respectful to all those who put their heart and soul into entertaining all of us!

Now, much to my surprise after we started the season, I received a call from a member of the Scottville Clown Band who heard about Dancing into Sunset Fruitport through one of the sponsors who has a relative in the band, and wanted to play one of the nights. With the schedule already being filled, we worked together with their schedule and the Village schedule, and decided to try another Tuesday night, which we did, to end the season on August 31st, 2021. And, we sure did end the season with a bang! Oh my, did the community come out to see the Scottville Clown Band by the hundreds. By far the largest crowd since we started in 2017. Very little green grass was showing on the hillside that night. Plus it was the largest participation of music playing clowns for them all season, with last count of 51 band members who came by way of their large bus and cars. Could not thank them enough for making Dancing into Sunset Fruitport one of their stops for the season. We both thank the crowd for helping not only Dancing into Sunset have a start for next season, but funds collected in the clown shoes went back to the band's scholarship fund. It was a win-win for everyone who attend August 31st, 2021.

Looks like Dancing into Sunset Fruitport is here to stay thanks to all of you. I would like to say thank you to all of you who had the chance to sign the card and say such nice words, that was given to me on the last night with the flowers. It most certainly warmed my heart in more ways than one. I will keep volunteering my time all year long to make sure it does, so we can continue to keep making our own memories to write in the Memory Journal Book that gets passed around during the season.

Dancing into the Sunset would not be the same without our group of regulars. I must add 'thank you' to all those that would help the newbies learn all the different dance steps throughout the season. It made for such camaraderie and, in turn, a lot of fun for all to keep coming back. So many of you are ambassadors for your community and it showed in the responses and comments that I still keep hearing. Many thanks as well to all the volunteer dancers who help me either set up or take down, and sweep up the shredded rubber. Your dedication week after week was so appreciated.

I think we have it down pat now with the food vendors. Parkside Pizza and Sub down at the bottom of the hill was a perfect fit with hot pizza on site, and calling in orders and them delivering directly down to park (was very convenient since they're right across the street).

Dessert was available from the aroma of Carlson's Almonds on the top of the hill.

As always, I am open to your suggestions and ideas to continue with the success of Dancing into Sunset Fruitport.

And there you have it folks, great fifth season in the books and the sixth season shaping up with old and new joining together for this once again FREE enjoyable evening which starts with blue skies and ends with the colors of a beautiful sunset. Together we work for the better of our community to bring dance and music to all, and we will continue to do so right into 2022. Before I close, I want to once again personally thank all the sponsors and/or contributors below who make Dancing into Sunset Fruitport possible.

I would like to thank: The Village of Fruitport, The Storage Group, Fruitport Orchard Market, Tractor Supply, Wesco, Ginman Tires, Tami Hall (Military Night photographer), Diane Campbell (Video/photographer/Facebook postings all season and beyond), Community Foundation of Muskegon, One Step Up Lawncare, Excel Propane, Pincrest Bar & Lanes, State Farm Insurance of Spring Lake office Doug Heins, and State Farm Insurance Grand Haven office Michael Heck, A-Team Construction Co., Hazekamp/Premier Foods, ServPro of Muskegon and North Ottawa, Waypoint Dock & Spirits, and Spring Lake Floral.

If you are interested in being a sponsor or may know someone, please send any new sponsors my way to: DancingIntoSunset@aol.com. Also, mark your calendar for June 9th, 2022 and plan to attend this wonderful FREE community event put on for the community, by the community, for all of us to enjoy right here in our own back yard of Pomona Park.

It warms my heart volunteering my time and watching so many enjoy Dancing into Sunset Fruitport, and to see so many gathering together to either just sit and listen, or get up and dance to the music. It has become "date night," no matter what your age, meet new people night, see those you have not seen in a while night. We celebrated birthdays, anniversaries and even remembered those who have passed who once were a regular at Dancing into Sunset Fruitport. It is because of all of you, I do what I do.

In closing, keep watching Dancing into Sunset Fruitport Facebook page in the off season for photos and updates posted by Diane Campbell, which I so appreciate, and we will see everyone in the Spring of 2022.

Thank you to the Fruitport Area News for all that you do for our community, keeping us all informed.

I will leave you all with a famous closing by a brother and sister duo that I closed out the season with:

"May tomorrow be a perfect day, May you find love and laughter along the way, May God keep you in his tender care, Until we're together again."

See you all next season.