

SUMMER BANDS

'Twelve guys in a five-passenger Ford'

Bands make the summer rounds of northern nightclubs

BY MIKE NORTON

Record-Eagle staff writer

PETOSKEY — The tourists really don't care what band is playing at Petoskey's City Park Grill during the summer season.

But the locals do. They'll come flocking back into the bar if they know that local groups like Mojo & The Boogiemens or The Dopes are playing. And they're almost as excited about favorite acts from downstate like Pop Evil or Troll for Trout.

"The Ghattobillies, too," said Scott Love, the Grill's entertainment director. "They're a bunch of nice guys, they play their own kind of music and the crowds really like them."

Nightlife is a strong, year-round constant even in the most tourist-centered communities of northern Lower Michigan, where live entertainment clubs try to book bands during all four seasons.

But there's no getting around the fact that a hot summer night can really bring out the crowds — and the bands who travel north each summer know it.

"It's beautiful in northern Michigan, and it allows us to have some nice vacations," said lead singer Rev. Ferris Right Time of Rev. Right Time & the 1st Cuzins of Funk, an eight-piece funk/soul disco band out of Detroit. "Streeter's in

Traverse City is tight, but so is City Park Grill, Limberlost in Houghton Lake and most definitely French Outpost on Mackinac Island."

Bands who tour extensively have usually made their peace with the strange rhythms of life on the road. And at a certain point, touring the beach towns of northern and western Michigan sounds like a dream come true.

As Ferris puts it: "There's an adventure around every corner, and as far as partying goes, no one does it better than us, which can be good and can be mayhem." It's not just hard-partying rockers, rappers and funksters who learn to enjoy summer on tour, either.

Even folk and acoustic musicians can get used to a road trip or two, said upright bass player Dominic Suchyta of the Lansing-based roots quartet Steppin' In It, which plays in social halls, folk festivals and barrooms with equal enthusiasm.

In the year since they quit their day jobs to go on the road, the four members have been touring as far as Oklahoma, Arkansas and North Carolina.

"I really like being on tour," said Suchyta. "It's something that I've always wanted to do, and I try to keep that in mind when we've been in the van for 12 hours. The hardest part about it is the travel. I'd have no problem playing six nights a week anytime if we didn't have to drive from Tulsa to Marquette to do it."

Each band does seem to



Above: Lansing-based roots quartet Steppin' In It. Below: Rev. Right Time & the 1st Cuzins of Funk, an eight-piece funk/soul disco band out of Detroit.

have its favorite places to play. For Steppin' In It, it seems to be a tie between Union Street Station in Traverse City ("great stage and PA and the folks there really know how to have a good time") and the Cabbage Shed in Elberta ("the owner plays jug and sits in with us").

But sooner or later, life on the road begins to lose its attraction. Some bands take a long break between tours; others return to their roots as local heroes, playing a few clubs in their immediate neighborhood so they can sleep at home. And still others simply break up and find less exhausting ways to make a living.

"The Huntunes were like that; we had them coming for years and years and they were just huge," said Scott MacManus at the Loading Dock in Traverse City. "But it just got too much for them. They grew up, got engaged, never really got that record contract. Besides, they all had really good day jobs, so they start-

PLEASE SEE PAGE 67

