

Rhythmic healing

Drummer uses his skills to promote healthfulness

By **ROBIN OLIVER**
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Little granny plays in a rock band.

That's what Dodie Madden's grandchildren say about her Wednesday morning sessions at the Homewood Senior Center when John Scalici leads Madden and a dozen or so others in a noise-making, healthy-living session that inevitably disturbs the bridge players in a nearby room.

"Rock band" might be a bit of a stretch, although they do a mean rendition of "Jingle Bells" with the help of circle member Sarah Buchanan on the senior center's baby grand.

But Scalici's session, called Healthrhythms, is not a rehearsal for a Friday night club show. Instead, he leads this group of seniors in an hour of drumming to help boost their immune systems and encourage movement.

Healthrhythms is only one facet of his business, Get Rhythm. He also facilitates drum circles for business groups to encourage team building, for the mentally challenged to enliven creativity and communication and for school children to reinforce curriculum and teach them about

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working with others.

"Basically I found what I do best, and that's facilitate rhythm," Scalici explained to a group of inquisitive high schoolers at a Youth Leadership Conference this week. "It's all about discovering your talents."

Get Rhythm was born in 1998, when Scalici's Grammy-nominated blues band, Junkyardmen, broke up. While the fallout was discouraging, it came with a hint of relief, Scalici said. He was tired of being on the road or up late playing Beale Street in Memphis, where he lived at the time. He was tired of struggling to pay the rent. He didn't want to give up music, but he was ready for a day job.

He had the idea of somehow using his skills as a drummer to educate others. He created a program targeted toward school-age children and sent a proposal to the Tennessee State Arts Council. They loved the idea, and Get Rhythm quickly became the council's most demanded school program.

"I was just a musician always looking for something that would be fulfilling," Scalici said. "I had never had anything like that go over so well."

"... You learn when times get tough, you have to diversify," he explained to the Youth Leadership group. "That doesn't mean you have to give up what you love. You just have to find your talent."

In 2001, Scalici moved back to Birmingham, where he grew up. It was then that he began to research more about rhythm facilitation. His research led him to Arthur Hall, who runs a program called Village Music Circles in Santa Cruz, Calif. Scalici made the trip across the country to study with Hall.

He also attended a training program with drum manufacturing giant Remo Inc., called Healthrhythms. The program is built on recent research that has shown that an hour-long drum session with a trained facilitator can boost one's immune system, specifically raising the number of cancer-fighting cells.

It's the small victories that prove fulfilling in this unusual career, Scalici said.

Charla Cochran, program director at Children's Dance Foundation, where Scalici hangs his hat, said she remembers one small victory that made a big difference at the foundation's summer camp.

"There's a boy that has been involved in our creative arts camp," she said. "He seems to be typical, but he has some issues with focus and with boundaries. He tends to get up in the face of other kids. He was always kind of a problem. We couldn't find a way to reach him.

"When John started the workshop ... all of a sudden we saw this change in this kid where he was engaged and excited to go to these sessions. It helped him be more creative and to be more a part of the group than he had been able to before."

Scalici said Get Rhythm is part of a movement of drumming for health and wellness that is spreading in California and up and down the East Coast.

"It's not a new concept," Scalici said. "It's just like yoga. Yoga has been going on for 2,000 years, and now you can go to any gym in the city and do yoga."

Back at the Homewood Senior Center, few of the participants in Scalici's drum circle are aware they are here for the scientific purpose of boosting their immune system. To these senior citizens, it is a way to make a few extra friends, they said, and to bring a little excitement to an otherwise typical day.

"It may just be a bunch of noise to somebody else, but for me, it is a rock band," granny rocker Madden said. "And some of my best friends play in it."

Strokes strike again with new album

THE 411
SCRIPPS HOWARD NEWS SERVICE

The 411 is a weekly column by teens and for teens of what's hot and what's not, compiled by youth correspondents for Young People's Press, the North American youth news service:

- **Return of the Strokes** — Remember the "Street Fighter 2" craze back in the early '90s? After playing the heck out of the original version, fans were stoked for "Street Fighter 3." But it seemed the game's publisher (Capcom) didn't know how to count to three and released many versions of the same game until that cash cow ran dry, and it finally released the third installment. Aficionados of New York rock 'n' roll darlings, the Strokes, faced a similar situation. Since the band's debut album, "Is This It," many different versions have been pressed, sapping the hard-earned milk money of the group's followers with each release. The two-year stall in the Strokes' creative engine has left fans rabid with anticipation to hear another album with singles as telling as "Last Nite" or "Someday." Now, with the release of its