

Music In His Heart, A Piano In His Office
Connecticut Law Tribune
Monday, October 22, 2007
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Music In His Heart, A Piano In His Office

Ridgefield lawyer relaxes by playing all that jazz

By JOAN LEE

When most people are stressed out at work, they can only daydream about going home and indulging in their hobby.

Ridgefield lawyer Harvey Kulawitz has a better way. He has an electronic piano behind his desk so that he can play jazz tunes when he needs a break from his personal-injury practice. "I practice keyboard while I practice law," Kulawitz said.

He called music a "common denominator" between him and his clients.

"You end up talking music with the clients. People have a passion for music," said Kulawitz, who is 54. Clients always think it's really cool that their lawyer has an artistic side. They sometimes ask me to play. One guy even asked me to give him lessons."

In Good Company

Kulawitz started playing piano as a little kid on Long Island. "I was in this rock band for years in middle school and high school," Kulawitz said.

Someone most people have heard of fronted another local band, a guy named Billy Joel. "We would play one week" at Baldwin High School socials, said Kulawitz, "and they would play another week."

While Joel went on to become *the* Piano Man, Kulawitz also kept up with the instrument after he graduated high school. "Even through college and law school I played," said Kulawitz, who jammed with friends at Syracuse University and at law school at Temple, in Philadelphia. "I wasn't into sports, I was into music."

He still is. Kulawitz, who admires legendary jazzmen Miles Davis and Bud Powell, continues to take lessons and tries to "keep getting better and better. I really try to practice very day."

He's also in a quintet. The combo doesn't have a name, but its members practice every week and occasionally play at local parties and other venues.

The drummer is real estate lawyer Ken Ginsberg of Trumbull. Julian Barry, a Redding resident who wrote the screenplay to the Broadway show "Lenny," plays trumpet. Dr. Michael Bard of Danbury plays sax. And the bass player is Joe Mato, a retired airline pilot from Redding. "We jam every week at Julian's house in Redding. His house is out in the woods, so we don't bother any neighbors," Kulawitz said.

Great Escape

Even though they get paid when they take on a gig, the group members usually give the money to a professional musician they hire to play with them. "It's better to play with people who are better than you," said Kulawitz, who is married, lives in Redding and has three children.

Kulawitz said he's not in pursuit of fame, just some peace of mind.

Playing piano "helps spark creative thoughts. It's a relief from the constant battles and tension of the law practice," he said. "It's healthy. Some guys go out and play tennis or golf."

He travels a much shorter distance to pursue his hobby. When the muse strikes at work, he just turns around. "It's a way to get away, to relax and escape."