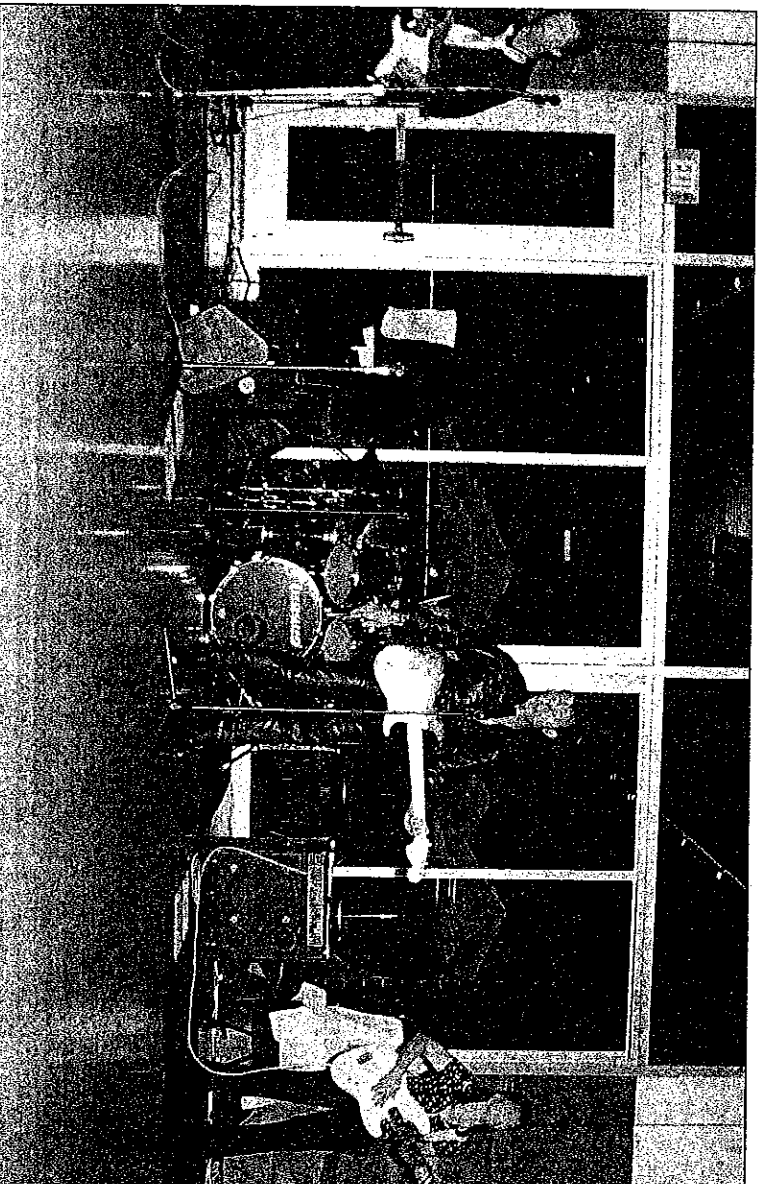


HOME TOWN



Performs at Clatsop-Kanawh/Pear-Raccoon
Mark Schrade, of Washougal, is the singer, backed by lead guitarist Pat Kelly and bassist Diane Kelly, both of Hazel Dell, and drummer Keith Bellisle, of Camas.

THE KING OF WASHOUGAL

Mark Schrade (left), of Washougal, embraces a friend during a performance with his Elvis Presley tribute band, Mark and the Memphis Kings.

□ Local Elvis tribute band Mark and the Memphis Kings looks to take their show on the road

By Charice Keating
Post-Record staff

“Are you Lonesome Tomlin’s?” Maybe it’s time to put on the “Blue Suede Shoes” and get “All Shook Up.”

That’s what Mark Schrade’s fans did Friday night. The Washougal resident is the singer in the area’s newest Elvis tribute band, Mark and the Memphis Kings.

Schrade, 39, was raised on Presley’s music. “It inspires me,” he said. “I have a true love for it.”

The band performed The King’s 50s, 60s and 70s hits at a dance Friday in Vancouver at the Firstenberg Community Center.

Young and old got out on the dance floor as Schrade shook his stuff in three costume changes — a suit, leather pants and jacket and, finally, an ensemble in the likeness of one of Presley’s glibby outfits from his later performance years. Lead guitarist Pat Kelly and wife and bassist Diane Kelly, both of Hazel Dell, and drummer Keith Bellisle, of Camas, dressed snazzy in duds to match Schrade’s ensembles.

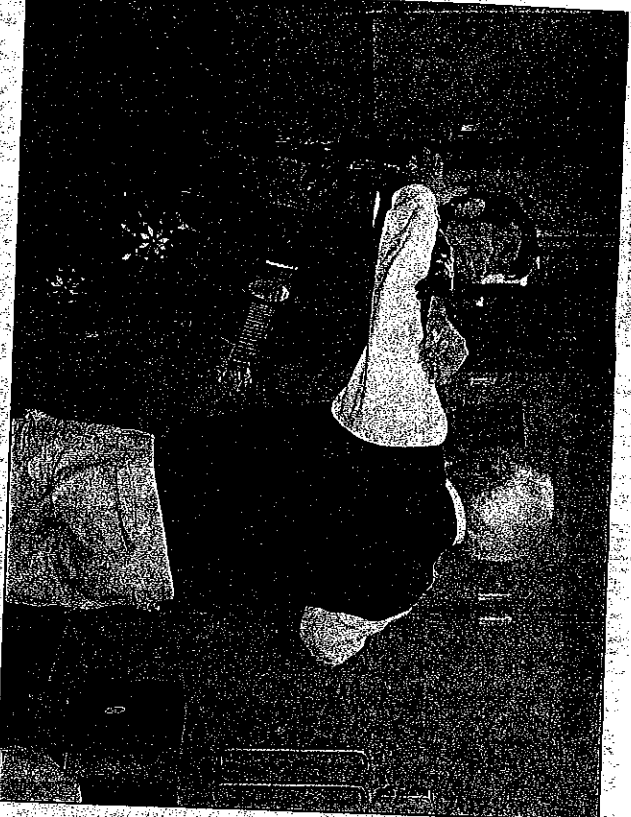
More than 125 people turned out to see their act.

Bellisle is the band’s manager. He’s been a musician for 20 of his 39 years, and when Schrade approached him three months ago to play, he didn’t hesitate in his answer. “An Elvis tribute band seemed like a no-brainer to me,” he said. “Among the tribute acts, Elvis is obviously going to be the most popular.”

Schrade got his start in karaoke bars. “People would be singing, ‘Is that a tape or is that his voice?’” Schrade said. “They’d come up to me afterward and say, ‘Oh my god, you sound just like him.’ People started calling me Elvis all the time.”

He sang everywhere he and his wife Nikki moved or traveled — Vancouver, Camas, Washougal, Vegas, Memphis and even cruise ships.

Finally, members of the Stearn House Theatre Company in downtown Vancouver asked Schrade to play the lead character and singer in “Smoky Joe’s Cafe,” a musical revue featuring



ing pop standards. Since then he has played many roles in local productions. He was in “Jesus Christ Super Star,” and he played the Prindle Avalon character Johnny Angel in a production of “Grease.”

Schrade started studying old movies that featured the King, watching recordings of concerts, taking every hip swivel, facial expression and Elvis’ other moves, to make his own performance seem more authentic. He started dying his hair black and keeping his sideburns trimmed longer. He also dropped a few pounds. “I wanted to be the early 30s Elvis, not the way he was toward the end.”

An across-the-street neighbor, Rebecca Trimble, started designing and sewing his elaborate costumes.

“I have a lot of support,” he said. “There are a lot of people in my corner.”

One friend even has plans to make a short documentary about Schrade and his zeal for the celebrated star.

Recently, Schrade competed in an Elvis tribute contest at the Chinook Winds casino in Lincoln City, Ore. “I did really well,” he said. “Like 20 or 30 people said, ‘You brought back memories for me.’ He even signed autographs. So he came home and started the band.”

The group is looking to take its show on the road. “They have several more performances scheduled in the area, and they plan to compete in a contest in Memphis in August.”

Among Schrade’s favorite songs to perform are, “A Suspicious Mind” (He shakes his hips a lot when he does that one), “Burning Love,” and any of the ballads.

Imitating Elvis gives Schrade a small glimpse of how it may have felt to be a super star.

But what it really comes down to is that love for his hero.

“If you got to play your hero, who would it be?” he said.

It’s also a passion that is shared among the small subculture of men (and women) from all walks of life.

“It’s like a family,” he said. “(At the contest) we actually compare notes, wardrobes and hair. They come from all over the country. Some of them have been doing it a long time. They also get each other fired up about the craft.”

“So many of the guys come up to me and say, ‘Man, you really have it. Whatever the X-factor is, you have it,’” Schrade said. “Hearing that from fellow [improvisational] who have been doing it a long time gets me fired up.”