

BARROW

A Magazine for the Friends of Barrow Neurological Institute of St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center

the doc rocks the house

Neurosurgeon Curtis Dickman plays for philanthropy in his band Crosstown Traffic

When Curtis Dickman, MD, ran an ad in the New Times in April 2005 seeking musicians for a band, he had no ambition to launch a celebrated rock-'n-roll career. He simply wanted to rekindle a lifelong love for music-and find an outlet from his day job as a neurosurgeon at Barrow.

"The ad read: 40-something male with family and real job looking for talented musicians who want to play music for passion and not to pay the rent," Dr. Dickman says. He sorted through several "interesting" responses and auditioned 30 people before settling on six band members. The group's name, Crosstown Traffic, represents the diversity of the performers-a mix of doctors, lawyers and business professionals-who live across the Valley.

'Will sing for philanthropy'

Covering classic rock, blues and vintage tunes from the 70s and 80s, Crosstown Traffic has landed a regular spot in the local music scene, playing a few weekend gigs each month at various venues. "The band places a strong emphasis on vocal capabilities," says Dr. Dickman of their style.

Crosstown Traffic also puts a value on community causes. Proceeds from most band appearances support a range of philanthropic efforts, including Barrow and St. Joseph's, Not My Kids, Juvenile Diabetes Foundation and the Pat Tillman Foundation.

Crosstown Traffic's first event, the Barrow Masquerade in October 2005, raised \$65,000 for spinal-cord injury research at Barrow. On New Year's Eve, the band opened for Blues Traveler at the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl Block Party in Tempe, which benefited multiple sclerosis research. Performing to a crowd of 150,000 was "a thrill," says Dr. Dickman, whose influences include the Eagles, Doobie Brothers, Santana, Pink Floyd, John Coltrane and Chick Corea, among others.

The native New Yorker learned to play the tenor saxophone at age 8 and the guitar at 12, and performed in rock bands and jazz ensembles before

focusing on a career in medicine. "I did want to be a professional musician but realized it would be too difficult," Dr. Dickman says. "I also had a passion to practice medicine, which I felt would be more realistic and valuable to society-and a healthier lifestyle."

A natural-born performer

That decision didn't stop Dr. Dickman from achieving a certain rock-star status in his chosen field. He is the director of Spine Research and associate chief of Spine Surgery at Barrow, as well as a pioneer in endoscopic and complex spine procedures. In 2002, Dr. Dickman used a groundbreaking technique he co-developed to reattach the skull to the spine of an 18-year-old Phoenix man severely injured in a car accident.

Playing in Crosstown Traffic, which he manages, gives the accomplished surgeon a chance to decompress from the intensity of his day job. "I love my work but I wanted to pursue something outside of neurosurgery that also makes me happy."

While the professions have obvious differences, Dr. Dickman says similarities do exist between the two.

"Playing music is much more a right-brain occupation, but both are creative, involve constructing something and require that you work as a team."

Though he had not performed publicly for 25 years as a musician, returning to the stage was a natural leap for Dr. Dickman, who provides vocals and plays guitar and sax in the band. "As an academic neurosurgeon, I speak to up to 5,000 people. Being a physician who does public speaking and being a musical performer is a transferable skill."

With offers to play in Las Vegas and California, Crosstown Traffic could gain a larger following but the band will remain a "garage" band that keeps a limited schedule, according to Dr. Dickman. "We joke in the band that this isn't brain surgery," he says. "We have jobs and have no intent of becoming the next Rolling Stones."