

Soul brothers

For three decades — since their days at Wickliffe High — **Pieces of Eight** has been bonding through music

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To the tune of Sam and Dave's late '60s hit "Soul Man," made popular again a decade later by the Blues Brothers, Pieces of Eight is a "soul band" that for the last three decades has kept Northeast Ohio rocking and grooving with countless gigs.

"We started in 1979 as just a group of guys playing as a Blues Brothers tribute band," said founding member and vocalist/trombonist Dan Hannan, a 1981 Wickliffe High School graduate. "We did a whole Blues Brothers show, and we won a battle of the bands in 1982 at the Cleveland Connection. Things sort of took off from there, and we've been playing ever since. We bill ourselves as dance-able rock, a mixture from The Beatles and Southside Johnny to Bruce Springsteen all the way up to the Barenaked Ladies."

The Lake County-based act — Hannan, Joe Blatnik (drums), Mike Butzback (keyboards), Ken Cali (guitar, vocals), Kurt Kending (guitar, vocals), Joe Lazar (bass guitar), Al Widmer (trumpet, vocals) and Mike Winfield (saxophone, vocals) — formed when all of its original members were in various grades still attending Wickliffe High School.

Back during its heyday in the early '80s, the octet averaged two shows a weekend. It even took part in the downtown Cleveland Rascal House's spring break trips, traveling to Florida and acting as the house band.

"What we remember of it, it was fun," Hannan laughed.

Over time, with band members having careers and starting families, the outfit



This photo from 1979 shows Pieces of Eight in their Blues Brothers. From left are Layne Kendig, Rob Vincent, Jeff Strauss, Joe Blatnik, Al Widmer, Dan Hannan, Bob Matzen and Kurt Kendig.

slowed down to playing out twice a month. Today, its gigs include mostly bars in the winter and festivals, weddings and private parties in the summer.

As for its 30th anniversary show Feb. 28 at the Croatian Lodge in Eastlake, Hannan said every five years the group plans a fundraiser show in the name of founding member and hemophiliac Rob Vincent, who died in 1997. The proceeds from this year's event go to the Northern Ohio Hemophilia Foundation and autistic

charity Share A Vision.

"This is a way for us to have a party, celebrate people's support of us over the years and to make some money for some good causes we believe in," Hannan said. "We'll have some raffles, we have some really nice prizes to give away, like a big screen TV, some pearls and lots of other good stuff."

So why, after all these years, err decades, is the band still active?

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"It's a hobby for us," Hannan said. "We've obviously become good friends over the years, and this is our way of hanging out. Instead of going bowling or playing pool, we play music. It's still kind of a rush to go out and play.

"We never thought it would last this long at all. When we had our 20th anniversary party we said, 'This is the last one.' And then we had the 25th anniversary party and it just keeps going on. Everybody asks, 'How long will this continue to happen?' And we say, 'It'll keep happening as long as we're having fun doing it and as long as people want to listen

to the music that we play.' "

Hmm, maybe Pieces of Eight still have a few spring-break parties left in it?

"I only wish we were going back to Daytona," said a laughing Hannan, "but unfortunately, I don't think our wives would be too crazy about that."