

AROUND THE VILLAGES

LAKE SUMTER LANDING MARKET SQUARE



Submitted photo

Herb Gross, fourth from left, and the Invictas from Rochester, N.Y., will be giving their first performance in The Villages 5-9 p.m. Saturday at Lake Sumter Landing Market Square.

40 years in the making

Herb Gross and the Invictas play Lake Sumter Landing Saturday night

By **MICHAEL FORTUNA**
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THE VILLAGES – It played like a scene from “The Blues Brothers.”

In 2005, two members of the Invictas, a '60s rock-and-roll band – Herb Gross and Dave Hickey – were having a beer at a bar. At the time, the Invictas hadn't played a gig since 1980.

The bar band had asked them to come up and play a tune. Then Gross experienced an epiphany similar to the one Jake Blues had in the movie.

“I walked up to Dave and said, ‘We got to put the band back together,’” Gross said.

The Rochester, N.Y.-based band, known for its hit, “The Hump,” will be rocking 5-9 p.m. Saturday at Lake Sumter Landing Market Square. It is part of the Invictas' first appearance in the Sunshine State in more than 40 years.

“It's a very special time,” Gross said.

“They're very popular in Rochester,” said Barbara Vesco, director of Villages

Entertainment and Special Events.

“They're high-energy, a lot of audience interaction. It should be a fun evening.”

The band features Gross on lead vocals and guitar; Dave Profeta on lead guitars; Sam Gruttadauria on keyboards; Jim Kohler on bass; and Dave Hickey on drums. Kohler, Hickey and Gross are original members.

They're even bringing up their famous hearse.

During a phone interview from Tarpon Springs, Gross was at an auto-parts store getting a new battery for that hearse.

“I've never driven it on a trip this long,” Gross said. “It's got no air conditioning.”

This appearance is part of what Gross calls the Rock Till Ya Drop tour.

“It's my philosophy of life,” Gross said. “I inspire others to follow their passions and do it, because life is short. Get out there and enjoy yourself.”

Gross first picked up the guitar while he was a junior or senior in high school. He remembers some of his friends sitting outside a building listening to a bunch of bands play.

The Invictas came together while the members were attending the Rochester Institute of Technology in upstate New York. Gross was a freshman at the time.

“It was the need to chase women, play

rock-and-roll, and have some fun,” Gross said. “I'm not sure if he had aspirations to make it big. Once we started to play and the records started getting (airplay), then we were getting delusions of grandeur.”

“We thought we could be rock stars, but eventually that came down to earth. Our chances were infinitesimal.”

The Invictas were named after a car that Buick came out with during the '60s; they were originally called the Furies, but attorneys told them to change the name.

“We came up with a better name,” Gross said.

When the group's song “The Hump” reached the airwaves, some radio stations didn't want to play the song.

“It was pretty racy for the mid-1960s,” Gross said. “(But) so many people were inundating radio stations with phone-calls, they had to put it on the air.”

Soon the single reached No. 1 in Buffalo, N.Y., and headed up the charts all the way south to Miami.

“We were all sitting on cloud nine,” Gross said.

During one concert at a packed hall, the police told Gross that the band couldn't play “The Hump.”

“I told the audience we can't play it, and they were ready to riot,” Gross said. “The cops came back and said, ‘Play the song.’”