

Officer writes a memorial

Detective sergeant composes musical tribute to honor dead

Naomi Davis
Staff Reporter

A Kirksville resident and familiar face on campus is getting play time on local radio stations with a self-written single, "Peacekeepers."

Leon Shears, detective sergeant for the Department of Public Safety, said he wrote the country music song as a tribute to police officers, firefighters and soldiers who have died since Sept. 11.

"The theme 'peacekeepers' is based on a Bible verse," Shears said. "It says all the peacekeepers are blessed and go to heaven. Police officers and soldiers try to keep peace in the world."

Shears said he was inspired to write the song after the death of his friend, Adam Thomas of LaPlata, Mo., who was killed in Afghanistan in August 2003.

"He was in the army in Afghanistan as a sniper and got

into a gunfight with the enemy and was shot and killed," Shears said. "He was from LaPlata, where I was the police chief, and when I got done with the funeral, I went home and thought about him and thought about police officers and kind of sat down and wrote the song."

Shears' wife, Brenda Shears, said she helped with the recording process and distribution of the song.

"He wrote the song when Adam passed away, but now we decided to go ahead with it," she said.

Leon Shears said he first recorded the song in September with McCready Recording Studio in Seneca, Mo.

Terry Nahirny, manager of McCready Recording Studio, said he assists in the engineering, producing and graphics of albums ranging from hip hop and rock to country and gospel. Nahirny, together with members of Shears' family, convinced Leon Shears to bring the song to a professional level.

"We talked about [the song] on the phone and figured out what he wanted and what I thought would be good," Nahirny said. "We hired in musicians, but Leon did the acoustic guitar and lead vocals on the track."

"It's a local person who [wrote the song] in memory of a local person. That's why it's such a hit."

Helen Adams
KTUF Radio Personality



Detective Sergeant for Department of Public Safety Leon Shears stands outside of the DPS building Monday afternoon. Shears wrote a song inspired by the death of friend Adam Thomas, who was killed serving in the army in Afghanistan in August 2003.

Lisa Margetis/Index

Nahirny said the goal was to produce something that was radio-playable, and he thinks the record was well-produced. He said the actual recording was done quickly, and he would have liked to spend more time producing it.

"If it continues to do well, I'd love to put more effort into it," he said.

Leon Shears took the finished product and distributed it to local radio stations. KTUF, KHGN KLTI in Macon, as well as stations in Joplin, Mo., and Neosho, Mo., are playing the song.

KTUF radio personality Helen Adams said she has played Leon Shears' song in recent weeks and has received a very positive response from the public.

"The response has just been awesome," Adams said. "I've received so many e-mails and calls requesting it and people talking about it. It's a local person who did it, in memory of a local person. That's why it's such a hit."

Leon Shears said he is also pleased with the way the song was received in the public.

"After a couple of stations started playing it, people started calling in and wanting to hear it," he said.

LaPlata resident Tabitha Sawyer, Thomas' aunt, is one of these callers. Sawyer said she first heard the song at a picnic on the one-year anniversary of Thomas' death and was struck by the song's meaning and reflection on

what she had experienced.

"There's just something about that song," Sawyer said. "The lyrics are so true. People put their lives on the line for us at a moment's notice. It's true whether you're a volunteer fireman or fighting for your country, you're sacrificing something. Not everyone has what it takes to do that."

Sawyer said the lyrics of the song have special meaning to LaPlata residents and to Thomas' family but should ring true for others as well.

"That song has a meaning that everyone has to deal with in life," she said. "Everyone knows someone who has served others."

Susan Hamilton, a periodicals assistant at Pickler Memo-

rial Library, also has placed calls to local radio stations requesting the song.

"I love the song because it talks about the veterans as heroes," Hamilton said. "Everyone is a hero in this song, and this remembers them. We should say 'Thank you' to them more often."

Shears said he has written many songs in the past, but this is the first he has ever professionally recorded. He is selling CDs of the single for \$6 each, and he said he sold 200 copies in a week's time.

In the near future, he said he plans to take his song to Nashville music distributors in hopes of spreading to radio stations around the country.

Alumna soprano sings classics in St. Louis

Soprano reflects how attending Truman led her to the symphony

Alicia Collins
Staff Reporter

She never believed she had a good voice, and now she is part of one of the nation's premier orchestral choruses.

Holly Chase graduated from Truman in 1998 with a bachelor's degree in music and then received her master's degree in education in 2000, planning to be a high school band director. She now is a stay-at-home mother and a soprano for the St. Louis Symphony Chorus.

"I was already a flute major my freshman year and a member of the University chorus, but I didn't feel that I sang particularly well, so I added voice lessons and sort of double-majored," she said.

Prior to college, Chase said she took private flute lessons but had no vocal training until her sophomore year at the University.

"I do not sing professionally, but I wanted to sing in a chorus that challenged me musically and kept me vocally active," she said.

Chase said the majority of the singers in the chorus already have full-time jobs because the Symphony is not a full-time position, and they are not professionals so most members are not paid.

"I'm not singing as a career," she said. "The St. Louis Symphony choir only rehearses weekly, but I intend to stay with them for the foreseeable future."

Rehearsals for the choir are Tuesday nights unless there is a performance that week, in which case additional rehearsals are Wednesday and Thursday with performances on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, Chase said.

"The music usually requires more practice, so I practice the Symphony music a few hours a week outside of rehearsal times," she said.

The choir typically sings classical, baroque or renaissance pieces by composers such as Bach, Brahms and Mozart.

"My favorite music to sing is renaissance madrigals and motets, and Mozart is pretty great to sing to," she said.

Aside from the choir, Chase has been married to Marcellus Chase since 2001, and they now are raising their daughters Julianna and Delia. She also teaches flute lessons.

"I feel pretty strongly about music education, especially in early childhood," she said. "By exposing children to all kinds of music early in life, I believe they will be more intuitive, more confident and simply well-rounded individuals."

Chase said a select number of University professors truly influenced her, including Ju-



Alumna Holly Chase stands with fellow members of the graduate conducting class of 1999. As a Truman student, Chase said she earned a bachelor's degree in music and a master's degree in education. Chase now is a soprano for the St. Louis Symphony Chorus.

photo submitted by Dan Peterson

lianna Moore, Chase's flute teacher and academic adviser.

"She is the epitome of grace and professionalism," she said. "In fact, my daughter is named after her."

Moore teaches numerous classes in the fine arts department and said she remembers Chase well.

"I think that the types of things that we do in the music department, in terms of the applied learning, the one-on-one time, ... I got a chance to really get to know her," she said.

Moore said it is hard to forget

any of her students but especially students like Chase.

"Her enthusiasm ... she was always very happy," she said. "I remember her coming in as a freshman very eager to learn, and she never lost that."

A large number of freshmen and even sophomores are undeclared in their majors, but Chase was sure from the beginning about her collegiate plans, Moore said.

"She came in, and she was very clear with what she wanted to do, and she worked very hard to make that happen," she said.

Moore said that if a student ends up not following through with an original career plan, it is OK because there are many career options within the music major.

"Pursue what you love, do the best you can, and give everything you have," she said. "... Many doors will open because of that."

Dan Peterson is another professor who influenced Chase. She said she owes him everything she knows about teaching, conducting and managing an ensemble, and he taught her the importance of being herself on the podium.

Symphony Chorus Information

Rehearsals:
Tuesday nights

Auditions:
Periodically occur throughout the year

To receive an audition packet, contact Richard Ashburner, chorus manager, at 314-286-4130 or richarda@slo.org.

"The conducting classes are relatively small, so we get to know each other fairly well," he said. "Holly was very conscientious and very enthusiastic. ... She always had a smile on her face."

Peterson said that while Chase did have a strong sense of academics, it was not the only key to her success at the University or her position.

"She was always intrigued by what she didn't know ... wanting to know how to do something or what else is there to this," he said. "... She had a very strong questioning attitude."

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