

The Gazette

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S-q-u-e-e-z-i-n-g the blues

Man, his accordion have entertained
at Rock Haven for more than 30 years



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JANESVILLE

Terry Penniston has been squeezing music from his accordion to entertain residents at Rock Haven Nursing Home for more than 30 years.

"I began playing here when my wife, Marilyn, was admitted in 1980," Penniston said.

She died in 2008, but Penniston, 74, continues to play for Rock Haven residents, performing twice a month at the county long-term care facility on County F north of Janesville.

He spends about three hours a month entertaining residents of area nursing homes, group homes and senior living facilities.

"I love to do it and thank God I've got the ability to make people happy," he said.

Left: Terry Penniston of Janesville belts out a song and accompanies himself on the accordion during his monthly performance at Rock Haven on Tuesday. Penniston, a volunteer, plays accordion classics and has special songs for many residents of the facility.

Above: Rock Haven resident Beulah Rudolph applauds the play of Penniston during his performance.

Photos by
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I love to do it and thank God I've got the ability to make people happy.

Terry Penniston

He opened Tuesday's program at Rock Haven with an audience favorite, "The Beer Barrel Polka."

"It's the first one they want to hear," he said.

More than two dozen residents sang and clapped as Penniston, a retired civil engineer, squeezed out song after song while sitting on

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a stool at the front of the room.

Activity aide Tiffany Schoville said the residents enjoy anything that has to do with music.

"They get excited when things like this happen, and it's important for them to socialize with everybody else from different floors of the facility. It helps brighten their spirits, especially on rainy days like this," she said.

Residents Tom Hahn and Beulah Rudolph provided proof of that.

"I come every time Terry plays because I like the old songs from way back when he plays," Hahn said.

He then quickly joined others in singing "Down in the Valley" as Penniston played his rendition of the American folk song.

Penniston next played "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," Rudolph's favorite.

"Whenever he's here, I'm here," the 82-year-old woman said.

"I love music. I love to sing," Rudolph said, as she tapped her toes to her next request, "In a Shanty In Old Shanty Town."

Penniston doesn't spend time rehearsing for his 45-



Volunteer Terry Penniston plays the accordion for residents of Rock Haven. Penniston has played an instrument since he was 8 years old. He started on the accordion at 11.

minute programs. He shows up and performs.

"I never practice. I just go play songs that pop into my mind," he said.

Penniston began playing music when he was 8. He played the piano three years before moving onto the accordion, something his father got

him interested in. He also played the trumpet years ago.

Both of his parents were vocalists, and he has sung in his church choir since 1970. He also

sings with the Warblers, a group at Cedar Crest. He does

a musical program at Cedar Crest once a month with his best friend Carolyn Schultz,

who is an organist/pianist, and at St. Elizabeth Nursing Home.

Penniston can't imagine life without music.

"It's the ultimate," he said.