

SATURDAY PEOPLE

A look at someone making
a mark in our community



PHOTO PROVIDED BY PETER OPRISKO

Whiting native Peter Oprisko averages more than 300 shows per year as a Sinatra-era singer.

Crooning for a living

*Whiting native
makes music on
and off the air*

BY TIM SHELLBERG
Times Correspondent

For years, Peter Oprisko considered leaving his job as a standards radio show host in Chicago to follow his burgeoning career on stage crooning the standards he spun for music fans around the Region.

But by a twist of fate, his choice would be made for him in 2000.

"The station I was at was changing their format to an all-talk format and eliminated the music," he said. "And it was becoming obvious to me that getting work singing was going to be far more than landing another radio gig. At the time, there was such a huge demand for me to sing that it became obvious what I should do."

Reared in Whiting and a 1986 graduate of Whiting High School, Oprisko, 36, was active in his high school's choir and theater. Yet he also set his sights on his father's record collection, which was heavy on Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett and Mario Lanza.

While hosting an oldies program at Chicago's WAIT, Oprisko was making music in his own right. When off the air, he lent his voice to everything from corporate functions to weddings and anniversaries to area clubs and restaurants.

But what originally started as a side job eventually took on a bigger life of its own. When WAIT changed formats, Oprisko had enough work singing standards that he was able to make that his full-time job.

"If you would've told me 10 years ago that I would be making a comfortable living just singing, I would've told you that you've got to be smoking something," he said. "A lot of people have tried and have failed at it and it's a very difficult business. I've just been fortunate enough and very blessed that I've been able to make a living at this."

Although Oprisko's vocal stylings have been compared to those of the Chairman of the Board's, he confesses to never taking a professional voice lesson and he cannot read music.

"I like to say that my voice teacher has been Frank Sinatra," he said. "I try not to sound like him, but I guess I've been able to utilize and incorporate a lot of the techniques that he used, that Tony Bennett uses, and a lot of the great vocalists used. I'm not trying to sound like Sinatra, but it comes out that way a lot."

His audience size, he said, ranges from less than a dozen fans in a senior citizen's home to tens of thousands at a Chicago White Sox game. Earlier this year, he sang the national anthem at U.S. Cellular Field.

Oprisko has found time to record a trio of albums. A pair of discs, "The Things that Count" and "An Affair to Remember," were released last year. For more information on Oprisko, call (877) 4SINATRA or go to www.peteroprisko.com.