

Meet Chuck Thiel and His Jolly Ramblers

With a combined total of more than 200 years in the music and dance band industry, Chuck Thiel and his Jolly Ramblers of Lester Prairie, Mn., will please you with their genuine style of danceable music that is pleasing to all old-time and modern dancers and listeners alike. A steady beat and beautiful instrumental and vocal blends make this band very popular throughout the upper-Midwest.

The composition of the group allows many interesting instrumental and vocal combinations. Solid bass keyboard and percussion along with some very nice concertina fills and solos complete a really enjoyable sound.

Chuck Thiel, the concertina player, lead vocalist, and leader, is the son of the band's originator Albert Thiel, who passed away May 12, 1994. Chuck has been a Jolly Rambler since 1962. Father of Jason, Jeremy (died of cancer at age 34), and Jamison, he makes his home in Lester Prairie. After teaching high school English for 25 years, Chuck plays music and organizes and directs tours.

Ken Schmidt has been a Jolly Rambler since 1971. He plays trumpet, saxophone, and valve trombone and does many of the vocals. He also arranges much of the band's music. Ken and his wife Cathy live in LeCenter where Ken recently retired as a high school science teacher. They have two grown sons.

Jason Thiel is a third generation Jolly Rambler who became a full-time member in January 1995. Jason most often plays keyboard and does vocals, but occasionally will be found behind the drums and even playing trumpet. A graduate of St. Cloud State University, he now works for WCCO-TV and Fox Sports in Minneapolis and lives in Bloomington with his wife Mary and sons Jacob, Noah and Benjamin.

Leon Haefner, a retired band director at Northfield High School, became a regular with the Jolly Ramblers in 2008. Leon plays saxophone and clarinet and also works with many other bands.

Jim Bartusek is the newest band member having joined full-time in January 2015. Jim played drums for Ivan Kahle for a number of years and most recently was the regular drummer for the Wee Willie Band.

Jacob Thiel, the son of Jason and Mary, was born in 2008 and made his public debut with the band on his great-grandpa's drum set in 2013. He's a fourth generation Jolly Rambler, and you'll find him onstage with the band quite often... especially when Chuck, Jason and Jacob go out as generations 2-3-4. A fifth grader, he's now taking trumpet lessons.

Other musicians you may see with the Jolly Ramblers:

Myron Muehlbauer has been a musician for nearly 40 years. He plays trumpet, saxophone, and clarinet. He plays about 20 dates with the Jolly Ramblers each year and works with many Minnesota and Wisconsin bands.

Gary Baggenstoss, a longtime musician who worked with the Deutschmeisters for many years and now works with Dale Dahmen, has played tuba for the band since July 2003.

The Jolly Ramblers feature a wide variety of musical styles from German/Czech old-time to modern and swing to 50's, country, and country-rock. In 1991 they added the "polka mass/service" to their library and have since released five Christian CD's/cassettes. Christian ministry through music has become a major part of their annual schedule. "Beautiful, My Savior Be" and "Good Old Polka Rhythm" are their latest releases (February 2012). The Jolly Ramblers have recorded 19 albums/cassettes/CDs.