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Funnyman Bucky Lewis gives back through the gift of laughter

Humor with a heart

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By Laurie Ferris

Special to The Mountain Ear

Bucky Lewis is well-known throughout New England for his zany, off the wall, versatile and over the top musical comedy shows. But behind all of the laughter, Bucky Lewis is a man on a serious mission to raise money and awareness for charitable organizations throughout New England.

Bucky was born Arthur Lewis III in LA - this is what he affectionately calls Laconia. Lewis has taken the road less traveled throughout his career and has earned money as a writer, actor, television host, lead singer and guitar player in a rock band, motivational speaker and now currently as a one man musical comedy show.

Bucky's maternal grandfather, Arthur Sewell, was a well-known businessman in Laconia who owned a popular appliance and television store. His grandmother Kilda was the organist for silent movies at O'Shea's movie theatre in Laconia, back in the 1940's.

Bucky's father, Arthur Jr., was born on a 250-acre farm in the small town of Sandwich. When Bucky's father was 13 years old, he was walking through the woods on a hunting expedition with a friend when the friend's 22 rifle went off and hit him in the leg. Arthur Jr. lost his leg from the accident and the family had to move to Laconia from their farm. Bucky's father spent a year in the Laconia hospital, where he taught himself how to play guitar and enjoyed entertaining the nurses with his music. Due to extensive medical bills, the Lewis's eventually lost the family farm.

When Bucky was a young child, his father taught him and his two younger brothers, Tim and John, how to play stringed instruments, including the ukulele, mandolin and guitar. The three brothers then formed the Cousins band with the members of two other families from his father's side and started to appear – and win – on talent shows such as the Talent Spotlight on Channel 8 in Poland Springs, Maine, Community Auditions in Boston and the Ted Mack Amateur Hour.

Known for their impeccable harmonies and squeaky clean images, the Cousins band was signed by a talent agency out of Boston. Soon they were working with people like Frankie Fontaine of the Jackie Gleason Show, a popular singer and comedian. Modeled after groups such as the Osmonds and the Cowsills, the band started to travel throughout New England, playing at classic hotel resorts such as the Balsams, Sunset Hill



Bucky Lewis has made a living as an actor, television host, lead singer and guitar player in a rock band, motivational speaker, author and now currently as a one man musical comedy show. Over a 30 year career, Lewis has combined humor and music into a very unique and versatile show that to this day still defies description. (Photos courtesy Bucky Lewis) (click for larger version)

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"I learned a lot about the dynamics of entertainment through working as a young boy with all of these vaudeville people. We were young, clean-cut kids playing songs for the older generation, old Americana songs. We were popular at Masonic Temples, conferences and at one point we even played for President Ronald Reagan at the Manchester Armory," recalled Lewis.

When Bucky was 14 years old, he and his family's lives would change again forever. Bucky remembers awaking one night to find his mother Grace had been stricken with a monumental initial episode of Multiple Sclerosis. It was a very serious medical situation in which his mother had to be hospitalized. Grace's multiple sclerosis got progressively worse over the years, eventually causing his father to quit his job to take care of her.

"My father was really dedicated to my mother and took care of her for years," said Lewis.

"Both of my parents used self-deprecating humor and laughter to cope with life's challenges. I was particularly struck by how my mother deflected her pain and discomfort using her humor and wit to put others at ease and to make them laugh and feel good around her."

After high school, The Cousins split up and Bucky went on to attend Berklee College of Music in Boston. He then formed and had regional success with The Lewis Brothers Showband with Tim and John, and played with that band well into the mid-'80s. Much of Bucky's backwoods humor was developed during those years as the band played in small rural towns and venues throughout northern Maine.

In 1972, Bucky moved to Waterville Valley and worked on the Ski Patrol for three years.

Most people are unaware that Lewis also was a professional freestyle skier, who went on the Pro Freestyle Tour with Wayne Wong and Suzie Chaffee in 1974. Over the next 10 years, Bucky continued to perform with the Lewis Brothers Showband throughout New England.

Bucky started a solo career and was living on the Cape when he met his first wife and had a son, Brandon. The couple later divorced. Today, Brandon is 17 years old and a talented drummer whose band, Art Decade, opened for the Dave Matthews Band at the Tweeter Center this summer and has recently recorded at Matthews' studio in Virginia.

Bucky's first love had always been music, and for years he toured New England as a solo performer. Lewis began utilizing comedy naturally in the '80s while working on the Cape during Happy Hours. He discovered that audience members responded with laughter every time he would launch into accents and characters from rural New Hampshire. Soon he discovered a special niche that combined music and comedy.

"I quickly realized that the dynamics created by combining music and comedy were both unique and powerful. I'm still learning each day to harness the power of laughter," said Lewis.



A camera caught Lewis at age 2 in 1955 singing and playing the ukelele. This photo was used as a family Christmas postcard that year. Being the third Arthur in his family, all of the Arthur nicknames had already been used and somehow he ended up with the nickname Bucky.



Known for their impeccable harmonies and squeaky clean images, The Cousins band was signed by a Boston talent agency Adams and Soper. The band was comprised of Lewis brothers John, Tim and Bucky (back row) and cousins Michael and Mary. The photo was taken in Guilford in 1968. [\(click for larger version\)](#)

Unfortunately, tragedy would soon again strike the Lewis family. While the '80s had brought trauma to the family when Tim was in a serious car accident, leaving him in a coma for several weeks, the '90s were even worse. Bucky's youngest brother, John, was in a car accident, leaving him in a coma for 18 months. John eventually succumbed from his injuries.

In February of 2004, Bucky shattered his femur in 12 places while skiing in Vermont. It was a life-threatening injury that was so severe the doctors had to put him in an induced coma for two days to stabilize him. After finally leaving the hospital, Lewis recovered in a convalescent home for 30 days.

"The day-to-day recovery of my soul along with my physical recovery occurred while I was sitting in a wheelchair in the convalescent home. When you are forced to re-calibrate your life, you take stock of your assets and what God has given you. I realized that I had been given a talent, this was my true wealth, and I wanted to share the gift of laughter with other people," finished Lewis.

Since his life-changing accident, Bucky has been focusing his career on fundraising events and corporate motivational presentations.

Benefits for organizations such as the Special Olympics, American Heart Association, Firefighter and Police Associations and Children's Hospitals are just a sample of the kinds of shows that Lewis has been playing in recent years. Last spring, Lewis performed at two comedy benefit shows in Jackson for guests of the Jackson Village Multiple Sclerosis Week. Both shows sold out and were a highlight of the weeklong event for participants.

"I have never laughed harder," said Kathy C. of Somerville, Mass.

Another fundraiser headlined by Bucky Lewis is coming up in the Mt. Washington Valley on April 25 and 26. The 3rd Annual Yuks in the Muk Comedy Relief weekend features two comedy shows and the Mud, Muck Trail Run on Sunday. The event was originally developed by prominent Valley business people and Bucky as a way to raise money for charitable organizations in the Valley while increasing business during a slow period.

Taking the stage at this year's shows are Bucky Lewis, along with two other comedians, Carolyn Plummer and Jim Lauletta. Plummer works at many comedy clubs and colleges throughout the Northeast and puts a nail through the hearts of whiners, self-loathers and the self-sorry of the world. Due to popular demand, Lauletta will be returning for his hilarious off-the-wall, self-deprecating material. A regular performer in Las Vegas and Atlantic City, Lauletta's credits also include appearances on HBO's US Comedy Arts Festival, Best of the E and much more.

Friday's show will be held at Cranmore Mountain Resort in North Conway as part of their Cranmore Comedy Night Series. Doors open at 7 p.m., and the show starts at 8 p.m.

Saturday night show is a dinner comedy show and will be held at the Red Fox Bar and Grille in Jackson. Doors open for dinner at 6:30 p.m., the show starts at 8 p.m. Special lodging packages are available in the North Conway and Jackson area for both shows. Proceeds from Yuks in the Muk will benefit the American Heart Association and the Lewis and White Music Scholarship Fund, in memory of two popular local musicians who died of cardiovascular events.

"Both Peter Lewis and Peter White believed in giving back to the community and the scholarship is a legacy to their memory and what they believed in. All of us who are deeply committed to the scholarship fund are so grateful that Bucky has chosen us as a recipient of this year's event," said Elizabeth Carleton, part of the scholarship team.

Tickets for the 3rd Annual Yuks in the Muk are available at the Jackson Area Chamber of Commerce, The Met in North Conway and the Mountain Ear in Conway. Tickets are \$20 each for the Friday comedy show and \$45 each for the



Tim, Bucky and John Lewis performed as the Lewis Brothers Showband throughout New England during the '80s. They survived the disco era by doing different show sets such as driving a motorcycle onto the stage as a part of their oldies show. ([click for larger version](#))

dinner/comedy show on Saturday night (includes tax and gratuity).

Bucky and his wife, Tyra Mastriani, met at a resort in Massachusetts where Bucky was playing at the time. She met him again a year later at the same resort. Tyra sent Lewis a joke to catch his attention, and as they say, the rest is history. After six years, the couple married in July 2007 in Jackson.

"Bucky definitely has a serious side. He is always studying people, places, situations and life experiences. People come up to me at every show, and remark how he must be a riot to live with at home," said Tyra. "I usually reply with laughter. I do laugh every weekend, it's absolutely true. However, Bucky is also very intense. He works on so many aspects of his performance, from the wacky characters and songs he creates, to the stand up banter with the audience. I am constantly amazed at his versatility and abilities."

Looking ahead to their future, Bucky and Tyra have recently purchased an organic farm in Antrim that they have aptly named "The Funny Farm."

For more information on Bucky Lewis and fundraising shows, call 603-588-4007 or go to www.need2laugh.com

Editor's note: Bucky Lewis will appear at The Whittier House in West Ossipee on Saturday, Feb. 16, at 8 p.m. Tickets are available at 539-4513.

Thanks for visiting The Mountain Ear

