

15 MINUTES

Yesterday a hero, today an organist

BY EVAN WILLIAMS
ewilliams@floridaweekly.com

Al Gervais went to work at the Edison Mall on Monday as usual, where he has played an organ to draw passers-by in to Fletcher Music Center on and off for 30 years.

But when his co-workers asked how his weekend was, he described how he climbed the fence of a house in Cape Coral, which was on fire, and dragged his neighbor out of the pool, where she had passed out.

"I was outside weeding," he said. "I had no shoes and socks and I saw smoke barreling out of my neighbor's house. So I went to the side of the house — they have a high, white fence. And here's my neighbor in the pool, unconscious. Her head was lying outside the pool.

"It was dramatic. After about 10 minutes, the firemen showed up."

That all happened on Sunday. It was probably the most dramatic story Gervais, 57, has ever told his co-workers. By Monday, he had also learned his neighbor had had an epileptic seizure and was in intensive care at the Cape Coral hospital. And by that time, for him, it was back to business as usual.

He plays old, nostalgic tunes that lend a carnival-like feeling to the mall's food court. "Somewhere My Love" drifted softly from the organ while people ate in the spangled late-afternoon light coming down from skylights.

"See how beautiful that is?" Gervais said. "It's a sweet sound."

The songs are directed at retired or older people who might be interested in learning how to play; but it was a slow day at the store Monday.

"As you can see, there are not a lot of them right now," Gervais said, adding that weekends are the busiest time. "That's our job, to play the songs that they can relate to, or associate with the past... Maybe it's (from) the first drive-in movie they went to — that sort of thing."

The hope is that they might enroll in the "Music Making and Wellness Program," which Gervais teaches. The older students meet every Thursday and Friday night at the store for organ practice. It's a casual program, a place to socialize and play the songs of yesterday.

"It's the hobby of music," Gervais said. "They're not going to Carnegie Hall, believe me..."

"They enjoy coming. If they miss a week, they miss us."



Gervais

EVAN WILLIAMS/FLORIDA WEEKLY

has been shown to lower stress and anxiety, boost the immune system and lower blood pressure.

"You'd be amazed at the results," he said. "It's just phenomenal."

It also may sell a few organs, of course. They range from \$1,100 to more than \$70,000 and are made in Le Grange, Ill., near Chicago.

"That's our main brand," Gervais said. "They're the only organ still made in the U.S."

To demonstrate one of the better organs, he went inside the store and took a seat at the Palladium, which is priced at \$69,995 pre-owned. He turned it on and the front panel lit up like the dashboard on an airplane. Even on low volume, the song "Flash Dance" came gushing from the instrument in powerful, dramatic strains, turning some heads in the food court.

"Sometimes he gets excited," Grantham said, and told Gervais not to make it too loud.

Gervais isn't always playing golden oldies at the mall or saving people from burning buildings. His favorite songs are from the big band era; and in the evenings, he and his wife sometimes play music at local nightclubs. She is the singer.

"That's my moonlighting job," he said. "I stay quite busy."

The couple often play at a club in Cape Coral called Sea Breeze, Gervais said.

He also has another business on the side, related to health and wellness.

Gervais moved to Florida in the summer of 1969 with his parents and has been playing the piano since he was 5 years old. ■

Super Specials Every Day!

800-743-1480
SunHarvestCitrus.com
 Mon-Sat 8-7 / Sun 10-6
 Six Mile Cypress at Metro,
 Fort Myers, Florida

FREE Tasters

SAVE

20% OFF

YOUR ENTIRE PURCHASE

Redeem this coupon and receive 20% OFF your entire purchase. Not valid on mail order purchases and can not be used in combination with any other discount card, coupon or promotion. Valid through September 30th, 2008 FW

Wet & Dry Boat Storage Specials

2 MONTHS FREE! *

Wet & dry boat storage just minutes from the gulf!

Voted SW FLORIDA'S Best Marina!

- 2 Months FREE with an Annual Contract*
- Just MINUTES to the Gulf
- New concrete floating docks.
- On-site restaurant - Parrot Key Caribbean Grill
- On-site Service Department

*Call for details

2500 Main St., Ft. Myers Beach

www.SaltySamsMarina.com • 239-463-7333 • Toll Free 888-796-6427

Full Service Marina • Boat Sales & Service • Waterfront Dining • Ferry to Key West • Ship Store