

Music of the Heart

August 28, 2010

After losing his Ashland home, his guitars and his musical recordings, the beat still goes on for Brian Patterson.

The 49-year-old musician took out his drum kit Thursday night in downtown Ashland and played with street musicians to help himself deal with the loss of 11 homes, including his own, in the Oak Knoll Drive fire Tuesday afternoon. Patterson planned to play again last night at the Plaza.

By playing with street musicians, Patterson wants to express solidarity with the homeless, even though 40-year-old transient John David Thiry has been accused by police of starting the fire. Thiry is in the Jackson County Jail on \$500,000 bail, charged with 14 counts of reckless burning and 10 counts of reckless endangerment.

"Just because he was involved, you shouldn't condemn the rest of them," Patterson said. "I've heard people say, 'damn transients,' and that's bothered me."

Patterson said he's seen Thiry over the years and has noticed he's gone downhill.

"I've watched him going to half his size in the last year and a half," he said. "They needed to take him in six months ago. There is a point that they are no longer transients -- they're just gone."

Patterson lost much of his own recorded music in the fire. He once owned a recording studio in Hollywood, where he tried to get a record deal.

He searched through the rubble of his house, which he rented from his father, Clarence Patterson, but there wasn't much left to find.

Many of the musical instruments he made, including guitars and speakers, were lost. He did find three pages that survived in a photo album, and he and his 10-year-old son, Vance, found their cat, Congo, who had been missing since the fire, wandering around the neighborhood Friday.

Despite his losses, Patterson's mind is bubbling over with ideas about bringing the community together with music. He wants to hold a benefit concert for the victims of the fire, and he hopes to create a CD with performances by local artists.

"I'm inviting a lot of the local heavyweights to join in," he said.

Bill Hahey, a professional musician who sings and plays keyboards, trombone and guitar, said he's willing to help.

"I would certainly lend whatever I can to the project," said Hahey, who is known locally as "Blind

Bill." "I would do something for them and help them get started."

Hahey has a 24-track recording studio and plays a lot of local gigs. He's also a member of DUDE, Disabled United in Direct Empowerment.

Even though he's willing to help, Hahey said he has his own financial limits. "I can't give it all away, because I can't afford it," he said.

Patterson said he will be lining up local musicians who want to create musical fire.

"Ultimately, I want to find a couple of street musicians who want to be part of it," he said.