

Frontmen of Country Music Will Perform at The Sharon

By **MICHAEL FORTUNA**
Daily Sun Staff Writer

THE VILLAGES

Larry Stewart remembers the first time he heard himself on the radio.

The lead singer for the country band Restless Heart was driving down Interstate 40 in Nashville, Tennessee.

For about 20 seconds, he thought he was listening to a cassette demo of one of the band's songs, "Let the Heartache Ride."

"I said, 'Whoa, that's on the radio,'" Stewart said. "I flipped out. I pulled over to the side and listened."

Stewart will join forces with two other country stars — Richie McDonald of Lonestar and Tim Rushlow, formerly of Little Texas — to create the Frontmen of Country Music, which will perform at 7 p.m. Wednesday at the Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center.

The trio, which has amassed about 30 No. 1 hits between the three of them in the past 30 years, will take turns singing their respective hits and provide a little of the back-story for each song.

"I'd love to sing some of their songs, but I don't think they'd let me," Stewart joked. "It's a more intimate, acoustic setting. It's been a lot of fun. We don't get to do (these concerts) very often."

The Frontmen came about five years ago when McDonald and Stewart were performing at a fundraiser in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.



Submitted photo

The Frontmen of Country Music will present an intimate concert of all of its hits Wednesday at the Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center. From left are Donnie Reis, Larry Stewart, Tim Rushlow, and Richie McDonald.

McDonald told Stewart about his idea for bringing together a trio of singer-songwriters.

"I went, 'Dang, I love that idea,'" Stewart said.

Originally, Randy Owen from Alabama rounded out the trio, but he ended up leaving. Stewart then turned to Reshlow to fill the spot.

Becoming a country music artist was not part of Stewart's plan. He grew up in a sports community and gravitated toward baseball. He ended up at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee, playing that sport.

In his junior year of college, Stewart got mononucleosis and hepatitis, putting him out of commission for a few months. He grew tired of baseball and wanted to find something else.

"Sometimes the good lord has to strike you down to send you in the right direction," Stewart said.

He had been singing for demos and radio jingles. He later worked odd jobs at the Country Music Hall of Fame and MCA Records, trying to

find his way around the music business.

After graduating from Belmont, Stewart was approached by the other members of Restless Heart to see about becoming the lead singer.

"I somehow said, 'Yes,'" Stewart said. "Thirty-three years later, it's still the original five guys. We're pretty blessed."

Those initial weeks were a bit nerve-racking for Stewart. In the first weekend of April 1984, the band recorded its self-titled debut album. The following weekend, he got married and went on a honeymoon.

By January the following year, the first single was released, and the band was rehearsing to play live.

"I had to figure out how to be a front man," Stewart said. "It's taken me 30 years to figure it out. I'd pray for rain for an outdoor show. It was really weird for me. I had on-the-job training."

During the group's career, Restless Heart won an Academy of Country Music Award for Top Vocal Group in 1989. The group performed "I'll Still Be Loving You" at the Grammy Awards.

"We were playing in front of the world with Michael Jackson and Paul McCartney staring at us (from the audience)," Stewart said. "That was kind of nerve-racking."