

Connor Shaw, 64, dies: professional drummer, *Leader* photog

By Patrick Martin
For the Leader

Connor Shaw was a man who kept the beat – and who beat the odds. Mr. Shaw, a professional drummer and photographer, died Saturday, Jan. 21, 2006, nearly eight years after he got a second chance at life from a liver transplant. He was 64 and lived in Festus.

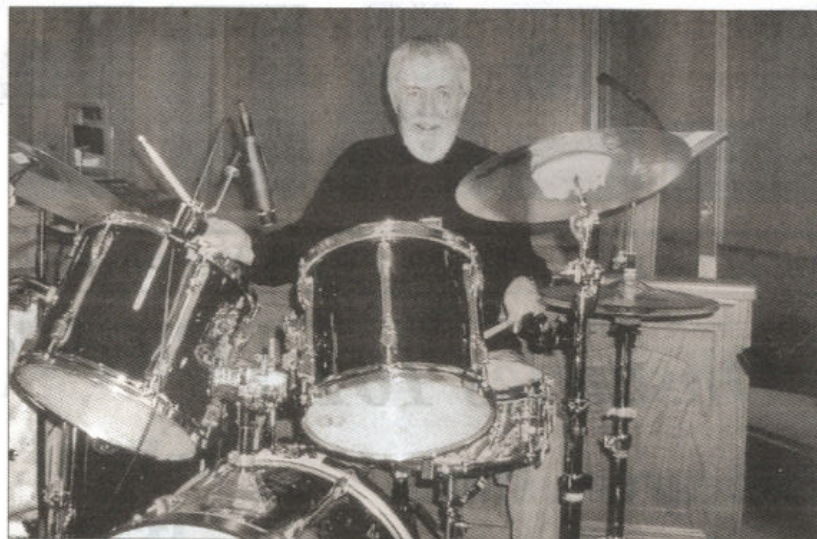
A Florida native, Mr. Shaw cut his musical teeth in his home state before migrating to New Orleans, where he absorbed that city's musical gumbo of jazz, blues, bebop, African and Caribbean rhythms.

Soon after marrying Crystal City native Rebecca Lotz Ragusa 15 years ago, Mr. Shaw moved to the Twin City area, where he taught drums and took up photography. He worked for several years as the *Leader's* main photographer until he underwent a liver transplant in February 1998.

After the transplant, complications necessitated several follow-up surgeries which left the 6-foot-1 Mr. Shaw at 113 pounds and in fragile health.

Over a two-year period and after numerous hospitalizations, however, he regained his strength and started getting back into music and beat-era literature, one of his favorite hobbies. He began giving drum lessons again in his Festus home. He also started participating in a music ministry at the First United Methodist Church in Festus.

"Connor is the first person from the congregation I remember seeing when I came here in 2000," said the Rev. Margie Woods, pastor. "The Field of Grace group was rehearsing and I saw this man in a brown sweater with a stripe across it and wearing a beanie cap. And I thought, 'It's Maynard G. Krebs.'"



Connor Shaw behind the drum set at First United Methodist Church in Festus, where he participated in the Field of Grace instrumental group.

Krebs was the beatnik character played by the late Bob Denver in the early 1960s television series, "The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis."

Mr. Shaw was also known for that beatnik-era clothing style, often featuring black shirts emblazoned with jazz icons or tropical themes and almost always topped by a beret.

After his transplant and recovery, Mr. Shaw played for several years at the Crystal Oaks Residential Care Center, where he involved Alzheimer's patients by playing drums with them.

"He brought lollipop drums and he made sure that every one of our ladies had one," said Anita Byers, activity designee for Crystal Oaks. "Some of them didn't like to do things but they would get right in there with him."

"He just brought these ladies to life every Tuesday at 2 o'clock – he was just wonderful," Byers said. "It was a bless-

ing to have him. It really brought these ladies out. They'd tap their feet or clap their hands."

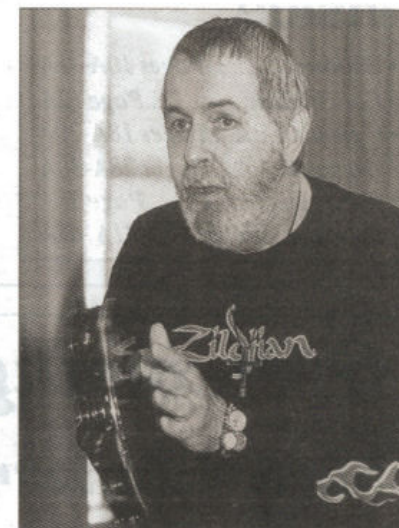
Other friends recalled Mr. Shaw as a generous, gentle soul whose soft Southern drawl and sly smile were natural magnets to friends and strangers.

"He and Michael O'Bryan and I played a few jobs together," guitarist Joe Polette said. "I guess you'd describe it as cool jazz, just two guitars and drums."

"He would regale us on his stories of performing in New Orleans. He had some very good stories. It was like sitting at the feet of the teacher."

Polette said sometimes Mr. Shaw would come by his home just to visit or jam.

"He was probably the best drummer I'd ever played with," Polette said. "He and my son, Zachary, got to be close friends. He was very influential on my son, very free with his knowledge and



Mr. Shaw playing the tambourine during one of his regular sessions with residents at Crystal Oaks Nursing Center.

his music. He thought music was something to be shared – and he did."

Ron Sikes, Jefferson R-7's director of bands, plays percussion in a St. Louis-area band named Gumbohead. The percussion and Cajun connection quickly glued his friendship with Mr. Shaw.

Sikes was teaching at a Festus music store where he had ordered a set of Gene Krupa replica drums. Mr. Shaw, a fan of Big Band Era star Krupa, heard about the purchase and had to come down to check out the new set of skins.

"Connor made a special trip to come down and see them and we kept in touch," Sikes said. "He had such a love of music and always had a wealth of percussion knowledge. He was a great guy."

A memorial service for Mr. Shaw will be held at 10 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 4, at the First United Methodist Church in Festus.



Sherree Faries photos

Residents at Crystal Oaks Special Care Unit in Crystal City, Gladys, left, and Olla, right, participate in a recent drum therapy session.

Feel the rhythm

Patients respond to drum therapy

By Peggy Scott
and Sherree Faries
For Grand Times

A drummer for almost a half century, Connor Shaw of Festus says a rhythm therapy project he started at Crystal Oaks Nursing Home is the most rewarding musical experience of his career.

Shaw, 61, of Festus is a volunteer in the nursing home's special care unit. Every Tuesday afternoon, Shaw does drum therapy with Alzheimer's patients and anyone else who wants to take part.

"I've played drums just about all my life," he said. "This is the most exciting and most rewarding thing I've ever done with the drums. I feel like I'm doing some good. I'm just so grateful they've given me a chance to do this."

The chance came about eight months ago when Shaw, a member of the First United Methodist Church of Festus-Crystal City, attended a worship service for Alzheimer's patients at Crystal Oaks. Outreach minister Nancy Henry invited Shaw to bring his percussion instruments with him.

"I had just been reading about research with

Alzheimer's patients and that they respond very well to rhythm. When I read about it, I thought, 'I wish I'd be able to do something like that.' Then I got the call from Nancy," he said.

Shaw put together a mixed bag of instruments — maracas, cow bells, wood blocks. "I was looking for things people could hit or shake," he said.

That first service went well, and Crystal Oaks employees invited Shaw to return.

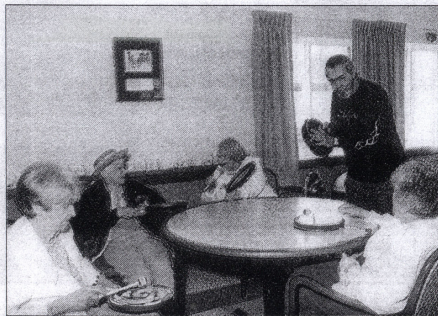
Inspired by what he saw in the drummers at Crystal Oak, Shaw continued to read about drum and rhythm therapy. A study through the University of Kansas showed patients respond best to paddle drums.

"It looks like a lollipop and it's very simple to use," Shaw said.

Members of Shaw's church donated drums for him to use with the patients. "We now have 13 of the paddle drums," he said.

The drums are brightly painted and look like old-fashioned swirled lollipops. Each drum is about 12 inches in diameter.

Participants respond to Shaw's drum therapy in different ways, but the encouraging thing is that they respond, said Michelle Rolfi, who works in the activities department at Crystal Oaks.

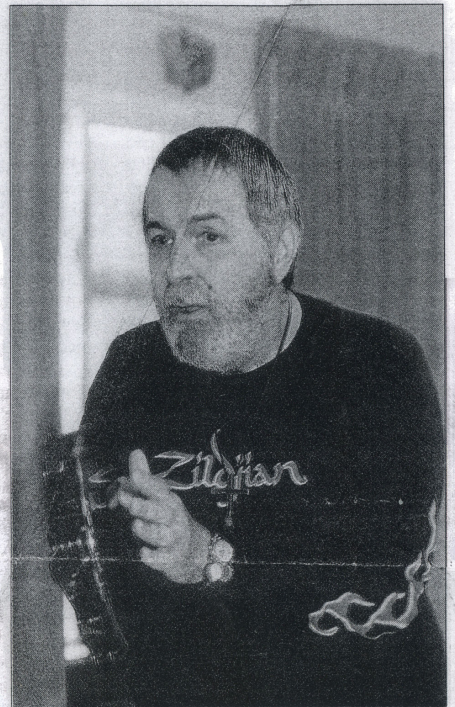


Sherree Faries photo

Connor Shaw leads a drum therapy session with, from left, Ruby, Gladys, Olla and Georgia.

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Connor Shaw
volunteer percussionist



Percussionist Connor Shaw of Festus leads the weekly drum therapy sessions.



Gladys keeps the beat.