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## Amateur band produces professional sound

**BY ROBERT HICKS  
SPECIAL TO THE DAILY RECORD**

Ken Fink is a former electrical engineer and project manager at Motorola and part-time saxophonist, bassoonist and bandleader with a fun-loving, business-like approach to maintaining his semi-professional Full Count Big Band in Westfield.

"We want to be the best amateur big band in New Jersey," he said. "We have an educational mission to bring jazz to everybody."



The Full Count Big Band is an amateur ensemble that plays jazz standards from the 1930s to the present, bossa nova, Broadway show tunes, classic R&B, Latin and rock.

**FULL COUNT BIG BAND**  
Aug. 26  
The Crossroads, 78 North Avenue, Garwood  
Call (908) 232-5666  
[www.xxroads.com](http://www.xxroads.com)

The 18-piece big band will perform two sets at The Crossroads in Garwood on Aug. 26.

Full Count's specialty is swing-era jazz, but the band also plays jazz standards from the 1930s to present, as well as bossa nova, Broadway show tunes, classic R&B, Latin and rock.

Fink, 53, is a Long Island, N.Y., native who moved to Westfield 26 years ago. He studied electrical engineering at New Jersey Institute of Technology in Newark and studied bassoon and saxophone privately before taking a music degree at Mannes College of Music in New York and a music education degree at Hiram College.

"I had a very eclectic background growing up. My parents were into show music. My father used to listen to classical music over WQXR all the time," he said. "I just love the feel of jazz and rock."

He founded Full Count Big Band (named after the Count Basie tune "Full Count") three years ago at the New Jersey Workshop for the Arts, a non-profit organization in Westfield. At the time, he performed in a father-son band at the facility to have fun. After the bandleader of that group left, NJWA was unable to support a professional band. Fink offered to direct a band that could function as a non-professional arm of NJWA and he recruited members of all ages to join his new Full Count Big Band.

"I slowly started building a band and building music and I started to take my business principles and use that," he said.

With goals of being a well-rehearsed band with its own unique sound, Fink arranged for rehearsal space at NJWA for sections of the band on Sundays. On Thursdays, the full band rehearses at Zion-Redeemer Lutheran church in Clark.

Fink and other band members create PDF files for the band's arrangements and charts, so band members can study the material and learn it at home without fear of losing it.

"That helps the learning curve in the band," he said.

One of the obstacles faced by big bands of this sort is finding musicians who are committed to playing on a regular basis. For example, it has taken Fink three years and numerous sit-in trumpet players before he finally found a regular lead trumpeter in Ron Scott of Edison.

Most of Full Count's members hold down regular, full-time day jobs. One is a recent college graduate. Others are semi-retired former professional jazz musicians.

"We have a wide range of ages, experience and energy," he said.

Full Count focused on learning repertoire from the swing era in the beginning.

"We started off with a narrow view of the music we wanted to play and developed that and we started growing," he said.

A year later, Full Count began playing street fairs, weddings, private parties, nursing homes and other local events while building an organizational body from its ranks, paying for its own ads and applying to play at events such as the Brick City Swing at New Jersey Performing Arts Center.

"Through those kinds of techniques and through focusing on the guys in the band, we've been able to grow," he said. "That's it in a nutshell."

Fink, bassist and Full Count president Mitch Kolesaire, trumpeter Al Leibowitz and saxophonist Tony Gambino recently began arranging charts and original music for the band and Fink has written original music, too.

Full Count performs once per month on a local television access cable show "Gotta Dance" in Union County. The band has plans to record a CD at baritone saxophonist Matt Polashek's 24-track home recording studio in the near future and to develop a Christmas show for 2007.