

LES PAUL

Musicians' role is instrumental

The turnabout culminated in last week's announcement that an exhibit, "Les Paul's House of Sound," would open this summer at Discovery World at Pier Wisconsin, a museum on Milwaukee's lakefront.

While proudly announcing the development, Discovery World President Joel Brennan applauded the behind-the-scenes efforts of Cook and his colleagues.

"It really started at the grass-roots level," Brennan said.

But the story of how this group of middle-aged rockers influenced what could become a major tourist attraction goes deeper than just musicians getting involved. The group formalized its alliance under the name Partnership for the Arts and Creative Excellence and approached Baker, who toiled for many years to bring such an exhibit to Waukesha before abruptly resigning in August from her position with the Waukesha County Historical Society & Museum.

Now working with the Wisconsin Historical Society, Baker told PACE that she was concerned about protecting the Waukesha museum's interests. Some of the artifacts now promised to Discovery World, she said, had been sought by the Waukesha group.

Still, she did not discourage Cook from pursuing a deal with the Milwaukee museum.

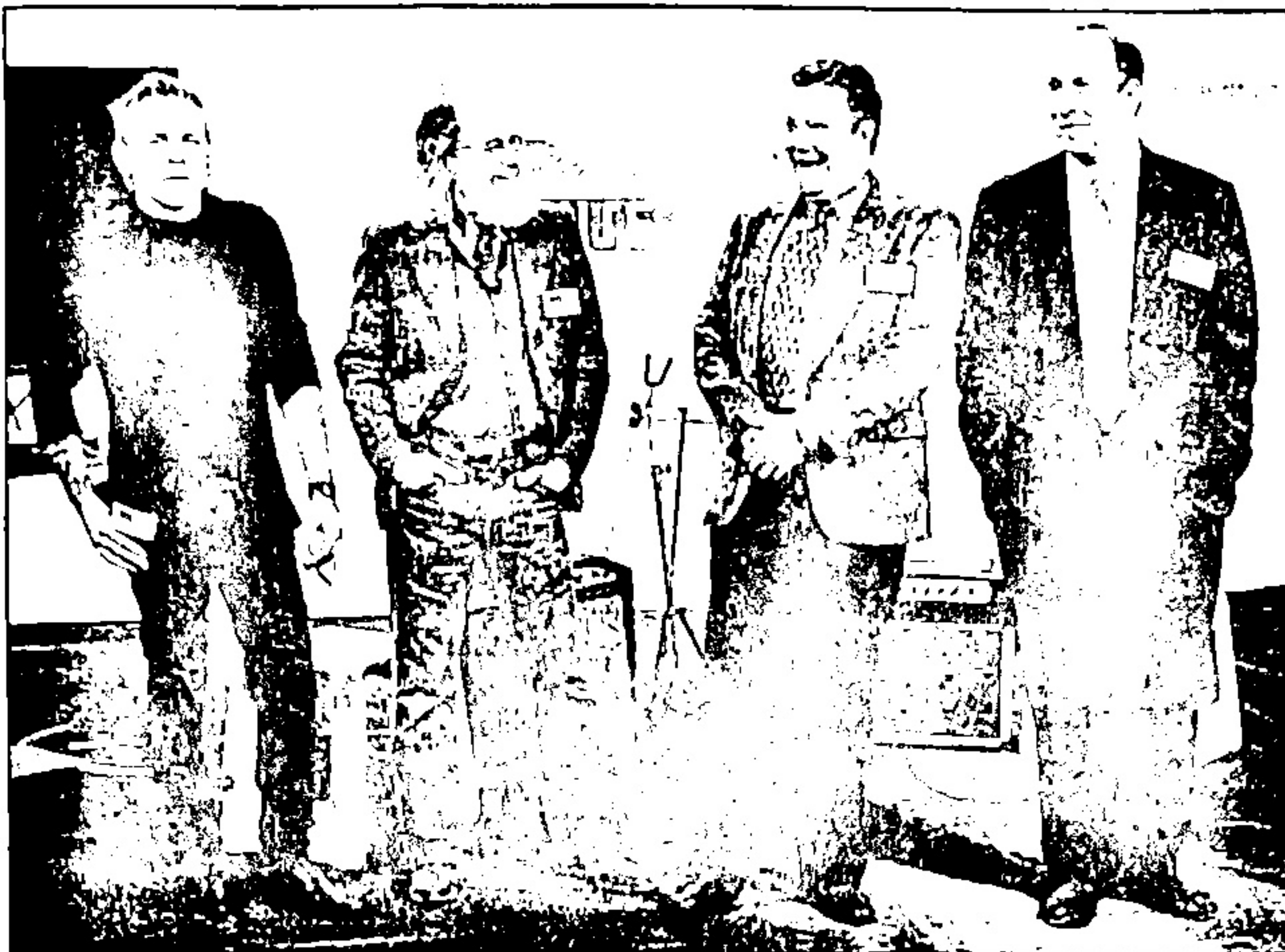
"I want to see an exhibit up for Les," she said. "I want to see it in Waukesha, but I don't have the ability to do anything about it. I'm out of the loop."

Leaders of the Waukesha historical society, who are expected to name Baker's replacement soon, have vowed to continue trying to build their own Paul exhibit.

Cook and his partners insist that they are not trying to quash the Waukesha plan. In fact, they hope to offer assistance to move that project forward, too. But Baker's departure from the historical society was seen as an ominous sign that Waukesha's exhibit was stalled and that another site was needed if one was going to open soon enough for Paul to enjoy it.

Now living in New Jersey, Paul is a historic figure in the music industry who has been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Known as a performer who recorded many hit songs in the '40s and '50s, he also was a pioneer in the early development of electric guitars and multitrack recording of music.

Cook, who played drums in Men About Town in the 1980s, later became a teacher who served as a Waukesha alderman from 1993 to 1998. During his days in politics, he traveled to New York City to hear Paul perform at a nightclub and introduced himself. The two men became friends, and



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Mike Hoffmann (from left), Martin Jack Rosenblum, Richard Cook and Lawrence Glusman talk about visiting the home of music legend Les Paul for a deal on a museum exhibit in Milwaukee.

Cook persuaded his fellow aldermen back in Waukesha to rename a local road Les Paul Parkway.

Coming together

Cook's collaborators in Men About Town embarked on different career paths, but many made connections that would help later with the museum exhibit effort.

Mike Hoffmann of Milwaukee, a guitarist who stayed in the music business, played in a band with Martin Jack Rosenblum, another guitarist whose many talents earned him a PhD and a position teaching music history at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Rosenblum also spent most of the 1990s at Harley-Davidson as an archivist assembling the motorcycle company's history for a museum opening this summer in Milwaukee.

At Hoffmann's request, Rosenblum agreed to bring his expertise to the Paul exhibit effort.

After consulting with Baker in Waukesha, the group set out to find a suitable location. Cook and Hoffmann visited Discovery World and realized that Milwaukee's interactive science museum overlooking Lake Michigan was perfect.

Robert Pachner, who played piano in Men About Town, put himself through medical school by performing at restaurants and elsewhere after the band broke up. At one performance in the late '80s, Pachner was approached by an appreciative fan: philanthropist Michael Cudahy.

Cudahy, who earned his fortune in the electronics business, talked with Pachner about the electronics of different musical instruments. A friendship blossomed.

Pachner, of Mequon, happily joined his ex-bandmates in the push for a Paul tribute. When the group set its sights on Discovery World — built largely through Cudahy's efforts and financial support —

Pachner offered to call his old friend.

"I said, 'Why don't I fly this past Michael?'" he recalled.

Cudahy made no commitment at the time, but Pachner said the philanthropist seemed intrigued by the idea of a Paul attraction.

The final piece of the puzzle was persuading Paul to sign on with Discovery World.

Museum president Brennan and other Discovery World officials approached the renowned entertainer and his management team to begin negotiating for an exhibit featuring artifacts from his private collection.

With talks nearing a deal, members of PACE were dispatched to New Jersey in late April. Making the trip were Cook, Hoffmann and Lawrence Glusman, an attorney and onetime drummer, who spent several hours in Paul's home mulling over the museum partnership with him.

During the crucial meeting, Paul insisted that a Discovery World exhibit would not mean the end to hopes for another attraction of some sort in his native Waukesha. He also sought assurances that Discovery World, which has been at Pier Wisconsin less than two years, is stable and facing a bright future.

Paul was energized about the project. An agreement was signed a few days later.

Cook and his partners believe they were able to connect with Paul partly because they are all musicians. They say they bonded with the performer over a shared love for the creative process and the challenges involved in bringing music to life and recording it for future generations.

"This is something we're doing for Les," Cook said of the museum exhibit. "We wouldn't be listening to music the way we do without Les. He's the source."