

Unconventional Band “Rocks” Company Culture



The Bone Tones: Chris, Todd, Joe, Bob & Steve

How many companies are there that have their own band? Presumably, not many. But most companies are not MTF Biologics and led by their President and Chief Executive Officer and founding band member, Joe Yaccarino, who treasures “employee engagement and celebrating who we are. It is an honor to take the leadership of such great people and an organization with a great mission.”

MTF Biologics has been saving and healing lives for more than thirty years by honoring donated gifts, serving patients, and advancing science. MTF Biologics is science-driven and patient-focused, saving and healing lives by accelerating innovation and being accountable to patients, donors, their families, and the clinicians who serve them.

Headquartered in Edison, New Jersey, the company now has approximately 1,400 employees and is celebrating its 35th Anniversary this year. When Joe started with MTF as a Process Engineer almost 25 years ago, there were only 50 employees at the company. The growth has been incredible in so many areas, but what has never changed is the spirit and energy of its workforce. “We have always been a fun bunch,” says Joe. In 1998, Joe’s first year with MTF, the company had a talent show. “There were only a few acts, including a tap dancer and a magician,” recalls Joe. Having played the piano as a young man and learning guitar after college, Joe asked his co-worker who played the bass guitar, Steve Smith, now the Associate Director of Business

Process Management, if he wanted to play a few songs in the talent show. And this, ladies, and gentleman, is how the band began.

Steve, who has also been with MTF for 25 years, refers to his fellow workers as “family” and acknowledges the special work environment that exists at MTF. “There is an altruistic component to MTF’s culture and being able to share music with co-workers is just another extension of that.” Steve describes playing in the band, that Joe fondly named the Bone Tones based on MTF’s early work with bone recovery and bone transplant, as a “celebration”. He adds, “Love of music is a common denominator for most people and remains a primary passion for me. I have always tried to spend my time in one of three areas, time spent with family, at work, and playing music. I am lucky to be able to bring so much of what I enjoy together by playing in the band.”



Steve & Joe in the early jazz days.



Formed as a duo jazz band, Joe and Steve played cocktail hours at their big company event, The Prom. Then several years later, the Bone Tones grew into a quartet and then a quintet (piano, bass, guitar, drums, & trumpet), as new employees at MTF became interested in playing. They even had a steady gig at a restaurant near the office where company colleagues would come to enjoy the music. The band also played at the wedding of a former MTF medical director. It has always been Joe and Steve and they have rotated in other band members, playing different instruments.

Approximately four or five years ago, the Bone Tones went the way of a rock/pop band. Joe reflects on how “A young employee, Todd Neilson, Director of Business Development, asked if the other band members would be interested in playing some rock & roll because if so, he would be interested in playing with them.” Adding lead guitar and contributing to vocals, Todd helped the Bone Tones morph into a new genre of music. At one of his first practices, Todd asked Joe how old he was. When

Joe told him, Todd said, “That’s how old my dad is.” Joe jokingly mentioned this would be the last day Todd played with the band.

Joining Joe, Steve, and Todd in the band is Bob Russo, Associate Director of Logistics. Joe raves about his co-worker’s musical talent. He has played the bass and guitar, and now plays the drums. Joe has been able to fill in anywhere because of his incredible versatility. And that leaves only the newest member of the Bone Tones, Chris Blake, Director of Project Management. Chris plays the guitar and sometimes the drums “when they let me!” Chris describes playing for the Bone Tones as “a life altering experience”. He explains how it has “become a way of life for me and I love the times we are together and playing whatever that may be. And I can’t thank my bandmates enough for supporting me and helping me grow.” Remembering his first event with the band in 2019, Chris reflects on the many celebration events, employee functions like picnics and appreciation days, and even performing for operations groups outside New Jersey where they started at 11:00pm for the night shift. “We have played with masks on, social

JUST FOR FUN



distanced, in the rain, in 100-degree heat, you name it!" adds Chris.

The band doesn't miss an opportunity to talk about organ donation at their various events. It is an easy entrée into the MTF mission when people ask at performances why the band is called the Bone Tones. Two of the transplant related events that they have performed at are the Gift of Life Donor Program's Family House in Pennsylvania and the 2020 Transplant Games in New Jersey. Joe emphasized the joy of meeting donor families at their performances and celebrating life and hope with them. This aligns closely with MTF's mission. Joe says "It is a blessing to do what I do as CEO and as part of the Bone Tones. I love the opportunity to have fun and share what makes us happy. We hope it makes other people happy too." Fun seems to be a theme for the Bone Tones. Chris says the most important part to him is, "making people smile, laugh, dance, and have some fun." Joe echoes this sentiment. He says his favorite part of performing is "when the crowd is clapping and moving."

When asked about the personality of the band, Joe points out, "We are all technical guys – we are just a group of "techno geeks" that have the ability to share



music and have fun." He admits that playing in the band lets him find a part of himself that wouldn't come out otherwise. Yes, Joe admits, "I'm shy and have stage fright." I guess you will just have to come see the Bone Tones and judge for yourself. **C**