

Heartland People

His style: Just smile

This Charlie spreads the good times by uplifting others' spirits



Young serviceman Charlie Barksdale worked on desalination aboard ship. His wife jokes he "made water" in the Navy.



RYAN PELHAM/STAFF

Barksdale, who will compete for senior Heartland Idol title, enjoys performing Frank Sinatra songs and often sings karaoke at the American Legion. Here he performs an Old Blue Eyes standard, "My Way."

BY PAMELA GLINSKI
For Highlands Today

SEBRING — Eighty-five-year-old Sebring Hills resident Charlie Barksdale is a retired Hillsborough County Water and Wastewater supervisor, a hospice volunteer and a Heartland Idol contestant.

He is one of 60 performers in three categories who will compete Saturday at the Highlands County Fair Convention Center with the hope of moving up to the semi-finals.

This is Barksdale's second time competing in the popular county event.

He decided to try again

after his third-place win in the VFW 4300 Karaoke contest.

With an optimistic attitude he proclaimed, "I think I can win it ... I'm 85, why not!"

This former commander of Avon Park's American Legion Post 69 loves to sing, is an avid gardener and a self-described "people person."

He and his wife of 24 years, Delores, known as "Midge," have traveled extensively, having taken several cruises and gone cross-country in their motorcoach.

Born in New Bedford, Mass., Barksdale was one of 13 children who grew up on a farm after their family lost

the three grocery stores they owned before the stock market collapse.

◆ ◆ ◆

Having known hardship, he learned the importance of "trying to lift other people up."

He sang bass in the church choir and, along with three of his siblings, formed a quartet. He has fond memories of singing solo at his minister's ordination when he was 13 and performing with his family at area churches.

At 16, he joined the Massachusetts State Guard. But when World War II broke out, he enlisted in the Navy.

For a brief time, he served in both branches of the military.

Holding a photo of himself as a smiling 19-year-old Navy ensign, Barksdale joked that when the dentist made his new dentures, they gave him "a woman's pair and he hasn't been able to shut up since."

◆ ◆ ◆

With an eighth-grade education, this self-taught man became a toolmaker for Woodruff and Stokes and owned his own construction company, C. Barksdale Co. Inc.

After moving to the Tampa area, he worked in the

PEOPLE, Page 4

People

From Page 1

the Tampa area, he worked for Hardaway Construction and later Hillsborough County Water and Wastewater. He retired in 1988, moving to Highlands County the following year.

Tragedy has also touched Barksdale's life: In 1956, when his first daughter, Judy, was almost 2, she died of pneumonia. For nearly 30 years Barksdale didn't sing very much.

The loss of "daddy's little girl" left him a man with a broken heart.

It is that understanding of loss and the recent death of his friend Tom McConnell that made him decide to sign up as a volunteer with Good Shepherd Hospice.

"I have offered to volunteer to go see some of the service people," he explained as he displayed his certificate of completion for the training.

"I feel I can be an asset ... I like to help people," he added.

◆ ◆ ◆

In his 37 years as a Legionnaire, he has worked with the group to provide holiday meals for families and help veterans in need.

After honing his talents by taking South Florida Community College's senior vaudeville adult education classes for five years, Barksdale performed in shows at the college.

He also sang Frank Sinatra ballads and did impressions of legends Bing Crosby and Al Jolson at nursing homes.

Barksdale plans to sing one of his favorite songs,



RYAN PELHAM/STAFF

In addition to his singing and his impressions of Bing Crosby and Al Jolson, the musically versatile Charlie Barksdale also plays the ukulele and keyboard

"I feel I can be an asset. ... I like to help people."

Charlie Barksdale
Hospice volunteer and
Heartland Idol contestant

"New York, New York," in the qualifying round.

If he becomes a finalist, he would compete for the adult prizes of \$1,000 for first place, \$500 for second and \$250 for third.

The junior (younger than 12) and teen (ages 13 to 17) categories will receive \$300 for first place, \$150 for second and \$75 for third.

◆ ◆ ◆

Since 2004, the annual Heartland Idol competition has been held on Sebring's downtown Circle. But because of schedul-



Barksdale jokes with volunteer coordinator Jan Sturgeon at Good Shepherd Hospice on Friday.

ing conflicts and the search for an indoor venue, the event this year is set at the Highlands County Fair Convention Center, 781 Magnolia Ave. Qualifying is Saturday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Semi-finals and finals will be held during the Highlands County Fair Feb. 12 from 1:30 to 9 p.m.

For more on the talent competition, go online to www.heartlandidol.com.