

When singing blues, Greenville's hopping

By SUE REID

For too many years to count, it's a favorite last stop in the Chagrin Valley.

The Greenville Inn, or the "Ville," as it's known by its loyal masses, has an undeniable appeal that has kept people from one generation to the next returning for more.

Whether it's the picnic tables or the time-worn bar stools, booking agent Jimi Kincaid said, "People like it the way it is." In fact, when the bar's exterior received a make-over about five years ago, he said, the inside remained virtually untouched.

"The outside drastically changed," Mr. Kincaid said. "But people said, 'You can't change the inside.'

"It has a certain history," he said. "It's an unwind spot with a saloon atmosphere."

Mr. Kincaid, an employee for nearly a decade, is responsible for another constant at the Ville — some of the best bands in town.

Names like Armstrong-Bearcat and the Backup Band are sure to draw a packed house on any given weekend night, he said. "They are our 'quote unquote' house bands. They've been playing here for almost 20 years.

"They are hard-driving blues."

They play the last Friday and Saturday of every month, Mr. Kincaid said. "Those are our big bands."

For dance lovers, the Greenville offers groups like the Jim Miller Band and the Water Band. "We have our certain bands that people do dance to," Mr. Kincaid said. About once a month they play the "Grateful Dead type of stuff," he added.

Whenever there's a good band, Mr. Kincaid noted, there are "loyal customers" who stay all night. Others bar-hop around the Chagrin and Bainbridge areas then end up at the Ville.

Owner David A. Benson, of Bainbridge, said the Greenville is practical-



Photo by Sue Reid

Booking agent Jimi Kincaid (from left) takes the-stage with Backup Band members Don Buchanan, "the Rev. Lawrence J," Joe Alessandro, Craig Clasen, Keith Chelm and Tommy Shaper at the Greenville Inn.

ly the "only saloon around." Everything else is upscale, he noted.

"We've always been the kind of place where the sons and daughters of guys in three-piece suits" will stop and get a beer for "a buck seventy-five."

He added, though, that the "bar business is getting tougher with laws, and the whole social attitude toward drinking has changed."

Mr. Benson has owned the Greenville for close to 30 years, he said. He purchased it from Julius Gajdos, who had been there almost 20 years. "The actual bar itself bounced around," he explained. "It's kind of legend."

The bar, which once was located in a house on Cedar Street, got its name

from the Treaty of Greenville, which formed the final boundaries of the State of Ohio.

The Greenville's current location on Arch Street in Bainbridge was built around 1947, Mr. Benson noted. "All of the old-timers have died off."

He added with a laugh that his days of being at the bar till the wee hours "have diminished."

There are those faithful customers who stop in every day after work, Mr. Kincaid said.

Bartender Amy Mahan said they are "kind of one big happy family."

"Everyone knows everybody," she added.

Ms. Mahan, of Chagrin Falls, also

cooks at the bar. "The lunches are good," she said, including the Greenville's famous burgers, as well as the usual bar fare like potato skins, chili and tacos and burritos.

The Greenville is open for food from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. weekdays, evenings from 6 to 8 Monday through Thursday and 6 to 9 Fridays. Saturday lunch is served from noon to 3 p.m., and Sunday includes tacos and burritos from 5 to 8 p.m.

"There are people who come in here, and they are like family," Mr. Kincaid said.

Added Mr. Benson, "It's been a loyal crew."