

# An Educator Turned Musician

By Nate Owen

**Jeff Pitchell had a decision to make: music or teaching.**

That was just over 20 years ago, and after performing around the country and the world with the likes of J. Geils, Phil Lesh, Rick Derringer, B.B. King, Clarence Clemons, and Dickey Betts, among others, it's clear the Wethersfield native made the right choice to go with music.

"Thinking back on it, it's just been kind of crazy all that's happened," he says. "I'm grateful for all the stuff that's happened, even though it's not always been easy."

Pitchell and his band, The Texas Flood and The Jeffettes, will perform July 18 at the Glastonbury Riverfront Music Festival. The band performed at the Glastonbury Apple Festival several years ago, leading to their booking for the Riverfront Festival.

"We're a high-energy show that features a lot of great musicians that live in New England," Pitchell says. "It's not just me playing guitar and singing."

Pitchell graduated from Central Connecticut State University and taught fourth grade at the Henry C. Dwight School in Hartford, as well as guitar at Manchester Community College. He coached basketball and taught many private students as well. "I was pretty active in teaching all kinds of stuff," he says.

Even with his busy schedule, Pitchell and his band, the Texas Flood, were still performing several nights a week. That's when he had to make a choice.

"I always wanted to be a dedicated musician, but if I continued to teach and try to do it, both were going to suffer," says Pitchell, who's been a professional musician since 1988.

His album *Heavy Hitter*, released in 2002, spent twelve weeks on the top-ten list of USA's Billboard Charts, reaching as high as No. 7. The album cover features a backdrop of Fenway Park, where Pitchell has sung "God Bless

"As a kid, you dream of playing baseball there but anyway to get there is pretty good," he says of singing at Fenway Park.

Pitchell, who currently resides in Rocky Hill, performs at many venues around the Northeast, estimating he has about 100 different rooms locally that he goes to every four or five months. But while he could hit the road more, he's faced with balancing the roles of musician and father to his three children, ages 13, 10 and nine. "I want to have some quality time with my kids while they still want to know me," he says.

His most recent album, *American Girl*, was released in May. It's a collaborative effort with Geils, along with Jeff Silbar and features songs for James Woods' upcoming movie, *An American Girl*. Pitchell says Woods gave him a script, and he and Silbar wrote songs for the movie.

For the Riverfront Festival, Pitchell and Texas Flood and The Jeffettes are coming off a successful tour in California where they played six shows in six days, including performances with Geils and Lesh, the founder of The Grateful Dead.

Originally known as the Texas Flood when they were playing mostly Texas blues, Pitchell says he added The Jeffettes to the title when they expanded, but kept the Texas Flood name because people had gotten to know them by that name.

The band consists of Pitchell, Marty Richards (drums), Jimmie Biggins (sax), Dave Natale (vocals, bass), Danny Fontanella (vocals, piano, B3), Linda Ransom (vocals), Theresa Wright (vocals), Diane Cooke (vocals) and Carolyn Hawkins (vocals).

As for the Riverfront festival, fans can expect a little bit of everything, Pitchell says, adding they'll perform songs from *American Girl*, rock and roll and funky blues. "There's something for everybody."





America” and “The Star Spangled Banner.”