

Meet ^{the} Band

our history



Blue Moon Big Band 2004 to Today

The reality of why our band's history is recorded in individual years from 1998 through 2003 and then suddenly becomes nothing more than a summarized overview from 2004 to the present is simple – as bandleader, chief marketing officer, gig finder, and accountant, Rob Leonard found his time suddenly focused on one very important thing since December 31, 2003... his daughter, Emma!

That said, documentation of each milestone and historical entry in the band's journal found itself overshadowed by the joy of fatherhood. And so, below is a bulleted summary of the history of Blue Moon Big Band from 2004 to the present:

2004

- CD sales soar for the December 2003 release of "Baby, it's Cold Outside."

2005

- After a two year stint with the band, bassist Roland Dorsey leaves the group to pursue his growing photography business.
- Kevin Shaner, who had been subbing in Dorsey's place periodically since the spring of 2004, joins the band as a full-time member.

2006

- Craig Fager, who had served as the band's lead trombonist since its inception in 1998, makes his last performance as a full-time member in September.
- Bernie Robier, who had subbed on bass trombone with the band from 2004 through 2005, joins the group as a full-time member as its second (tenor) trombonist in the fall of 2006, as Todd Clontz moves from second trombone to the lead chair.
- After playing with the group since 2004, trumpeter Mark Kelly moves to New Orleans to hit the jazz scene (he will return in 2007 to occasionally sit in with the band again).
- Trumpet player Leroy Bamberger joins the band.
- After 4 and a half years with the band, featured trumpet soloist Josh Hillard moves back to his hometown of Altoona, PA, thus leaving the band.
- Trumpet player Alex Drouin joins the band.
- Lead tenor saxophonist Steve Szyjka leaves the band to pursue his college education
- Andrew Mitroff, who joined the band as lead alto saxophonist shortly after its start-up in 1998, hangs up his horn "permanently" (he says) to focus on his life as a family man.

2007

- Alto saxophonist Eric Wetzel, who subbed with the band in 2005, joins the group full time – initially as lead tenor and then eventually moving over to lead alto.
- Joe Sullivan joins the band as a full-time member on lead tenor with the move of Eric Wetzel to alto.
- Mike Hirsh, who has been singing sporadically with the band since appearing with the band on its 2001 release of "Nice Work if You Can Get It" becomes an "official" permanent member of the group and records two of the 15 cuts on the band's fifth CD, "The Polar Bear's Pajamas."
- Following the completion of recording the band's fifth CD, trumpeter Dave Russell leaves the

band due to other work and family obligations.

- With a new, Grammy award winning engineer and producer (Luke Rohwer of Acacia Recording in Mt. Airy, MD), Blue Moon Big Band releases its fifth CD in 9 years, "The Polar Bear's Pajamas," which receives countrywide acclaim from radio stations and listeners.

2008

- Original band members Rob Leonard (bandleader), Teresa Leonard (vocalist), Scott Stansfield (trumpet), Chris Poole (tenor and baritone saxophones), Todd Clontz (trombone), and John Pritchett (alto saxophone) celebrate 10 years with Blue Moon Big Band.
- In April, the band answers a casting call posting for the filming of a new motion picture starring Renee Zellweger and Kevin Bacon, entitled *My One and Only*. The movie, being filmed in Baltimore and other cities, and scheduled for release in 2009, was to start filming in June 2008. In late May, bandleader Rob Leonard receives a call from the casting director's office informing him that the band has been selected for the film. Due to filming guidelines (no females on the bandstand in the 1950s, and so forth), the movie version of the band was trimmed to 12 members, which was fronted by Kevin Bacon as the bandleader. The band's filming sessions were held in late June and early July.
- In July, trumpet player Leroy Bamberger leaves the band and is replaced by Jeremy Meeks. Mark Kelly rejoins the band full-time.
- In July, the band records its 6th CD, "Blue Moon Big Band Caught in the Act: 10th Anniversary Celebration Live at Naylor Wine Cellars". That same month, as a "sign of the times," the band's recordings from its first 5 albums as well as the solo CD from vocalist Teresa Leonard are made available online for single MP3 purchases on iTunes, AmazonMP3, Napster, and Rhapsody.
- "Blue Moon Big Band Caught in the Act: 10th Anniversary Celebration Live at Naylor Wine Cellars" is released as a 2-CD set on November 21.
- In August, the band's featured vocalist, Teresa Leonard, records the single, "*Ordinary Miracle*," which is added to "Caught in the Act" as a bonus studio track.

2009

- The band gets a bit of a scare in late April when featured vocalist Teresa Leonard contracts laryngitis, which eventually becomes a throat infection that keeps her off the bandstand for nearly five months. Slow recovery began in August, but even by September 20 when the band performed at the annual Maryland Wine Festival, Teresa's voice was not 100%.
- In June, Blue Moon Big Band makes its first of two annual appearances at Naylor Wine Cellars in Stewartstown, PA, marking the eighth consecutive year of performances at the winery. In August, the band's engagement at Naylor was its 16th during that span.
- In July, as a sign of the times, the band joins the social networking website Facebook and creates the Blue Moon Big Band group. By August, membership tops the 100 plateau.
- Also in August, the band made its debut performance at Nissley Vineyards in Bainbridge, PA.
- Dave Witherspoon, pianist with Blue Moon Big Band from 1999 through 2001, passed away on August 8 due to heart complications. Dave was 66 years old.
- On August 21, the feature film *My One and Only* starring Kevin Bacon and Renee Zellweger, and introducing members of Blue Moon Big Band to the big screen, premieres in New York and Los Angeles. And so, the group was officially "one degree of separation from Kevin Bacon!"
- In September, Blue Moon Big Band and its Latin-infused quartet, Blue Caliente, return to the Maryland Wine Festival.
- The band wraps up its 11th year with an exhilarating New Year's Eve performance in snowy (and icy) Maryland!

2010

- In May, the band makes its debut appearance at the Rolling Rock Club, an exclusive private country club located in Ligonier, PA (about 50 miles outside of Pittsburgh).
- By mid-year, Blue Moon Big Band group membership tops 300 on Facebook.
- Blue Moon makes its second consecutive summer appearance at Nissley Vineyards in Bainbridge, PA, and plays its 17th and 18th shows (2 per year for 9 straight seasons) at Naylor

- Wine Cellars in Stewartstown, PA.
- In September, Blue Caliente and Blue Moon Big Band once again perform at the Maryland Wine Festival.

2011

- In March, trumpet soloist Mark Kelly leaves the band for a cruise ship gig!
- In May, pianist Eric Byrd adds to his already busy schedule when he accepts a music leadership position at a church. In addition to teaching at two schools and running his own trio, the added commitment compels him to leave Blue Moon. The band is fortunate to welcome the incredibly talented Jan Abbott as his replacement.
- Later that month, Blue Moon Big Band teams up again with partner group Big Band Caliente for a "Hot and Cool" big band concert at the Carroll Arts Center in Westminster, MD. This event also marks the final performance for long time Blue Moon trombonist Todd Clontz who leaves the band due to the demands of family commitments. He had been with the group since 1998.
- In June, audience favorite Katie Lowdowski decides to leave the band shortly after earning her pharmacy degree. The demands of a new job and plans to start a family drive her decision. Her final performance comes at the Spanish Ballroom in Glen Echo, MD on June 4. The band welcomes Dan Wallace as her replacement later in the month.
- Also in June, the band welcomes new Jorge Ayala (trumpet), who has been sitting in with the band on occasion throughout the past year, as a full-time member.
- On June 18, Blue Moon Big Band performs at Naylor Wine Cellars in Stewartstown, PA. It is the band's 19th engagement at the venue over a period of 10 consecutive years.
- In August, the band welcomes Charlie Doherty to the group as its new lead trombonist.
- In October, the band officially welcomes Mark Alves (who has been sitting in with the band since early in the year to the trombone section.

