

## Oregon Pianist Brings Smiles to Lonely Retirement Home Citizens with Big Band Tunes: 'Music Is the Medicine of Life'



David Cooley playing his 1000th show at a retirement home this summer  
*Photo courtesy Miri Stebivka*

By Rose Minutaglio

David Cooley has changed the lives of thousands of senior citizens with his music.

The self-taught pianist travels the west coast performing uplifting gigs at retirement homes – his goal is to lift the spirits of elders (many of whom rarely get visitors) by playing songs "that take them back to their youth."

After performing his set including Frank Sinatra, Hank Williams and Elvis, plus every imaginable genre of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century pop and Broadway show-tune covers – Cooley says he sits down with his audience and listens to them talk about stories from their past.

"The goal is to bring connectivity through songs that they understand, that they recognize, to bring up the sweetness that lies in their hearts," he says. "People tell me they were having a bad day and now they feel great!"

"When I see these elders sitting in the audience bobbing along, and others with their eyes closed and smiles on their faces, it's very rewarding," Cooley tells PEOPLE. "My goal is to bring people to a place of happiness."

This summer, Cooley played his 1000th senior show at Pacifica's Calaroga Terrace in Portland, Oregon. Bob Horton, a Calaroga resident, says Cooley's big band and pop music performances change the entire mood of the place.

"I did very little singing before, but David brought back the songs I remember and I like to sing along," Horton, 80, tells PEOPLE. "It lifts my spirit – makes me feel good."

Monika Trujillo, administrator at Calaroga Terrace, also recognizes the tremendous influence Cooley's performances have on her residents.

"Nothing compares to watching these seniors sing along – reminiscing about their youth, friends and loved ones," Trujillo tells PEOPLE. "Not all of those residing in retirement communities have regular visitors, so we are very grateful David takes the time to share his music with us."



Cooley will continue to play for senior citizens – performing over 200 shows a year from Seattle to San Francisco and across the country to Manhattan's upper east and west sides.

"The vocal sound-waves, the piano, the energy – moves people like prescription drugs," explains Cooley. "It changes the vibrations in the body to bring about health and happiness."

"After all," he adds, "Music *is* the medicine of life."