

Rock 'n' roll's 'first' drummer Wilson dies

By Doug Pullen

El Paso Times

EL PASO — A local rock 'n' roll pioneer has gone on to that big gig in the sky.

Billy Wilson — who drummed for the Rock Kings and backed greats such as Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard — died Monday morning in the living room of his East El Paso home, according to his wife, Alma Jean Wilson.

Wilson, 69, pounded the skins for the Kings in the 1950s and is considered one of the first rock drummers in El Paso.

"Billy was the first rock 'n' roll drummer I ever saw," said Dalton Powell, former drummer of the Bobby Fuller Four. "He was probably the first actually out there playing in El Paso."

Powell remembers seeing Wilson behind the drums at weekly teen dances the Kings played at Fort Bliss.

"He was one of my first inspirations to play," Powell said. "He was a great guy."

That's a sentiment expressed by other local music figures, including Tim Thompson, choral director at El Paso High School, who played with Wilson in the band City Limits in the 1980s.

"We immediately just became like brothers. He was an incredible guy. ... He'd just do anything for any-



Courtesy of www.elpasomusicians.blogspot.com

Billy Wilson, front row left, with his 1950s band the Rock Kings. Wilson died Monday. He was 69.

body. He was that kind of guy," Thompson said, adding "a lot of people are torn up about this."

Wilson's death came shortly after he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, his wife said.

A benefit concert announced last week to help defray Wilson's mounting medical bills will go on as planned, Thompson said.

It's at 3 p.m. Sunday at the American Legion Hall, 3730 Shell, just off Montana between McRae and Hawkins, and will include many of Wilson's friends and fellow

musicians.

Funeral arrangements are pending and are being handled by Mount Carmel Funeral Home.

Wilson, who served in Vietnam in the U.S. Army in the 1960s, probably will be buried at Fort Bliss National Cemetery, his widow said.

He is survived by son Rick Olds and daughters Kisha Woody and Crystal Dawn Wilson, and stepsons Charles Lonewolf Crews and Marvin Dale Crews.