

Yes, Virginia, Tom Petty was a local boy

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One of the Gainesville stories you'll hear most often, if you're a rock 'n' roll fan, is the one about Tom Petty — superstar singer, songwriter and Traveling Wilbury — and how he was born and raised right here in Hogtown.

Yeah, right.

Well, hold onto your Richenbacher guitars, boys and girls, because it's true. Thomas Earl Petty was born Oct. 20, 1950 in Alachua General Hospital, the first of Earl and Katherine Petty's two sons (Tom's brother Bruce came two years later). He went to Sidney Lanier Elementary School, Howard Bishop Junior High School (he was actually on the football team) and Gainesville High School, where he graduated with the class of 1968.

Tom's first band, formed with some pals from Howard Bishop, was called the Sundowners. They wore Beatle boots and snappy, matching jackets.

By the time he got into high school, the band had become the Epics, and they played fraternity

Petty left Gainesville for the Big Time in 1974.

parties, school dances and social events over at the Gainesville Moose Lodge.

The Epics' chief rival for top teen group was the Maundy Quintet. This was a band that featured a killer rock 'n' roll lead guitar player, and a second lead player who could double on — of all things — banjo. The Maundys were versatile, and it took the Epics a while to catch up.

(The lead guitarist was Don Felder, another native of Gainesville, who went on to fame and fortune as one of the Eagles, the L.A.-based band started — and later abandoned — by the Maundys' banjo man, Bernie Leadon.)

Tom briefly considered a career in architecture, but music's pull was too strong. Over the strenuous objections of his father, but encour-



RED SLATER

Mudcrutch in '73, just before the big move west: Clockwise from lower left Mike Campbell, Benmont Tench, Randall Marsh, Danny Roberts and Tom Petty.

aged by both his mother and her mother, he began to devote all his time to the Epics.

Not long after Tom graduated from GHS, the band's name was changed to Mudcrutch, which had a "trippy" ring to it. Otherwise, the name didn't mean anything. It just sounded cool.

In 1970, Mudcrutch added a sec-

ond lead guitarist, Mike Campbell, who'd moved to the area from Jacksonville and had been playing in a blues/rock trio.

The group changed personnel a couple of times, and by 1973 the lineup included Petty on bass and lead vocals, Campbell on lead guitar, Benmont Tench (son of a local circuit judge) on piano and organ, plus

guitarist Danny Roberts and drummer Randall Marsh.

Mudcrutch landed a record deal with Shelter Records, and began recording their first album in Tulsa and Los Angeles in the spring of '74. But things didn't work out, and the band split up, the album unfinished.

Shelter retained Petty as a song-
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writer and solo recording artist, and during the sessions for his first album, he decided to put a band together instead.

Campbell and Tench came in from the ashes of Mudcrutch, and two other Gainesville musicians — drummer Stan Lynch and bassist Ron Blair — were plucked from the ranks of the L.A. bar-band impoverished.

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers recorded their eponymous first album in 1976, with production by Denny Cordell (Procol Harum's "A Whiter Shade of Pale," Joe Cocker's "With a Little Help From My Friends").

It would be three years before a Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers album ("Damn the Torpedoes," their third release) made a dent in the charts. But when it happened, it happened in a big way.

And the rest is . . . well, you know the rest. Tom's second album sans Heartbreakers, "Wildflowers," will be released Oct. 11.



Tom Petty, GHS class of '68

So the next time somebody says to you, "Did you know that Tom Petty came from Gainesville?" — tell 'em this story.