**The Casuals** (Figure 17), Decatur. 1961-1966. Rock and Rhythm & Blues

Linda Burke-Grammer – Vocals (63-65)

Ted Dorman – Drums, Trumpet and Vocals (61-66)

Mike Ritchie – Guitar (61-62)

Dave Scherer – Rhythm Guitar and Vocals (61-62)

Bob Stokes – Bass (61-62)

Mike Fox – Baritone Sax (63-66)

Phil Hazenfield – Bass (62-66)

Larry Josserand – Tenor Sax

Lonnie Sayles – Tenor Sax (61-66)

Jerry Tertocha – Guitar (62-64)

Rick Towson – Vocals (62-64)

Danny Maxedon – Guitar and Vocals (64-66)

Sam Baum – Vocals (64-66)

Jerry Shaw – Trumpet and Vocals (64-66)

Jane Purlee – Vocals and Electric Piano (65)

Marsha Martin – Vocals (65-66)

Al Strahan – Guitar (66)

The Casuals formed in 1961 with five band members, playing mostly three-chord rock and roll songs from the late 50’s through 1961. In 1962, Mike Ritchie, Dave Scherer and Bob Stokes left the group to be replaced by Jerry Tertocha, Rick Towson and Phil Hazenfield. A second tenor sax, Larry Josserand, also joined the band. In 1963, the band grew to eight members through the addition of 15-year-old dynamo female vocalist Linda Burke and Mike Fox on baritone sax.

After school was out in 1962, the line-up practiced four or five hours every week day all summer. On weekends, the band went as a group to see, and study, other bands for ideas to improve cover song choices and stage presence. When fall came, members of the band wrote letters and made calls looking for work. A few jobs trickled in: Mt. Pulaski’s homecoming dance, two Fun Club jobs (Decatur YMCA basement), St. Barbara’s Catholic Picnic, Batchtown and the American Legion, Cerro Gordo.

In 1963, the buzz about the band spread by word-of-mouth and the phone rang with booking offers at regional Illinois venues including: Town & Country Tavern & Christian County Fairgrounds Tuesday night teen dances, Taylorville; Bunny Hutch, Savoy; University of Illinois fraternity parties, Champaign-Urbana; the Burgess-Osborne Memorial Auditorium, Mattoon; American Legion Thursday night teen dances at Wyman Park in Sullivan; Marty’s Dance Party at the Wick (Civic Center), Tuscola; Marty’s Dance Party, Illinois State Fairgrounds, Springfield; the Pana Community Building; the Blackhawk Village complex, Jacksonville; and The Roller Rink in Danville.

1963 was a landmark year for The Casuals from various perspectives. In August, the band were support musicians for Bobby Vinton at the Savoy Bunny Hutch. Vocalist Linda Burke was thrilled to sing *Blue Velvet* with Vinton. Later during her tenure with The Casuals, Linda sang backup for a recording by legendary R&B artist Otis Redding. Sax player Lonnie Sayles for The Casuals and other Decatur-based bands with Grammer, said, “…she easily could have become a recognized star performer if she had received the right break at the right time.” “I love her singing. I can't get enough of her singing," Sayles said. “The audiences love her singing. She's the star of the show. She is always the star of the show. The rest of us are just her backup band. She's got that blues feeling like Aretha Franklin. What impresses me is the way she can belt out a song and sing the blues."[[1]](#footnote-1)

In December of 1963, the band recorded two songs written by drummer Ted Dorman, *My Darlin’* and *It’s Going to Work Out Right,* at Starday Studios in Nashville, Tennessee. On New Year’s Eve a few days later, the band played for nearly a 1,000 people in Macoupin County at the Coliseum Ballroom in Benld. The Coliseum Ballroom had a storied past. First opening in 1924, the ballroom was a rural playground for Al Capone and other Chicago and St. Louis gangsters. Artists who performed at the ballroom included; Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, Ray Charles, Sam the Sham & the Pharaohs, Johnny Rivers, The Ike & Tina Turner Revue, Bob Seger, Foghat, the Ozark Mountain Daredevils and Heart. The ballroom was still operational in 2011 when it was destroyed by an electrical fire.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In 1964, The Casuals picked up bookings at new venues in Illinois including; the Lake Mattoon Beach Pavilion near Neoga, the Airman’s Open Mess at Chanute Air Force Base outside Rantoul, the Eastern Illinois University Student Union in Charleston and The Reservation Club in Pontiac. The band even played on a Bunny Hutch Club sponsored float during a parade in downtown Champaign.

In August of 1964, the band won the Governor Otto Kerner Trophy for “Best Dance Combo” in the first contest held on top of the Illinois building at the Illinois State Fairgrounds in Springfield. Judges were nationally known vocalist Wayne Cochran, guitar virtuosoLonnie Mack and St. Louis guitarist Jules Blattner. Winning the contest included $300 prize and a recording contract at Wayne Cochran’s studio in Macon, Georgia. In November the band did a 19 hour drive to Macon to collect on the recording contract. Turns out Wayne Cochran and crew were only interested in recording songs with Linda Burke. After Cochran recorded Linda’s songs with Macon studio musicians the disappointed group packed up and returned to Decatur. The group soon got back into the groove and was selected by Dave and Sandy Lampert to play for the 1964 New Year’s Eve grand opening of the Bunny Hutch in Mattoon.

In May of 1965, Linda Burke graduated from high school and left the band to pursue a career on the road and in the studio. The band eventually asked Marsha Martin to come on as Linda’s replacement.

In early August of 1966, Mike Ritchie from The Chessmen called bassist Phil Hazenfield and said their band had just broken up. Ritchie asked if Hazenfield, Ted Dorman and Marsha Martin would join four of the remaining Chessmen to form another band. Ritchie would be run the rehearsals and Hazenfield would become the business manager. The three players from the Casuals discussed the proposal and agreed it was time for a change. The three informed the rest of the group they were moving on to another band which would be known as The Reel Blues. On 13 August 1966, the Casuals played their last gig together at the Pego-a-Go-Go, a teen disco in Charleston.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Original Recordings:

My Darlin’

It’s Going to Work Out Right

Lemonade Soda

Watch Where You’re Going

Cover Songs:

Little Eva – Locomotion

Rufus Thomas – Walking the Dog

Mitch Ryder & the Detroit Wheels – Devil With a Blue Dress On

The Outsiders – Time Won’t Let Me

Martha & the Vandellas – Dancing In the Street, Nowhere to Run and Heat Wave

Lesley Gore – You Don’t Own Me and It’s My Party

Sam Cooke – Chain Gang, Twisting the Night Away and Shake

Del Shannon – Runaway

The Supremes – Hurry Love, Where Did Our Love Go, Baby Love and Stop! In the Name of Love

Nancy Sinatra – These Boots Are Made for Walkin’

Ray Charles – What’d I Say and Busted

Isley Brothers – Twist and Shout

Shirley Ellis – Name Game

The Kinks – All the Day and All the Night, Tired of Waiting for You and You Really Got Me

Sam the Sham & the Pharaohs – Wooly Bully and Little Red Riding Hood

Ad Libs – Boy From New York City

The Contours – Do You Love Me

Shirelles – Soldier Boy and Dedicated to the One I Love

Freddie & the Dreamers – I’m Telling You Now

Temptations – My Girl

The Animals – We Gotta Get Out of This Place and House of the Rising Sun

The Capitals – Cool Jerk

Young Rascals – Good Lovin’

Ronettes – Be My Baby[[4]](#footnote-4)

1. Huey Freeman, “A Sweet Voice: Linda Grammer Was Discovered as a Child and She’s Been Singing Ever Since,” *Decatur Herald* *& Review*, 10 Feb 2009, <https://herald-review.com/lifestyles/a-sweet-voice-linda-grammer-was-discovered-as-a-child/article_9dc08af5-b827-5c0d-999c-aedcb41c45b6.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tim Barker, “Fire Guts Route 66 Landmark in Benld,” St. Louis Post Dispatch, 01 August 2011, <http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/fire-guts-route-landmark-in-benld/article_c8031440-bbc9-11e0-8eb1-001a4bcf6878.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Phil Hazenfield, *The Casuals*, 07 March 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Phil Hazenfield, *The Casuals Cover Songs*, 07 March 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)