



Theresa DiMeola enjoys an anniversary waltz in the arms of her son, Al.

An orchestrated surprise

By Bill Glovin
Staff Writer

When guitarist Al DiMeola was a teenager in Bergenfield, his parents had to put up with as many as 17 young musicians wailing away in their son's packed room.

"My parents were always wonderful to me," says DiMeola, 28. "I would visit Mom when she worked in a store on Washington Avenue, and she would always give me money for records. My father would always go out to buy me a new instrument or a needed piece of equipment whether we could afford it or not."

Saturday evening, DiMeola — who has played with musicians ranging from Chick Corea to Les Paul — and his sister, Claire, showed their appreciation with a surprise Mother's Day/40th anniversary party for their parents at the guitarist's Spanish-style home in Old Tappan.

He and his sister told their parents, Charles and Theresa DiMeola, that they would meet for dinner. At the last minute, Al called to say his car wouldn't start and he needed a ride. When his parents arrived, about 100 relatives and friends were waiting.

"It's usually pretty hard to fool us," says Charles. "But Al's been on tour for several months and his car hasn't gotten much use."

The DiMeolas' favorite dishes, including chicken provencal, seafood fettuccine, and spinach ricotta, were served.

Guests joined hands under a yellow chandelier and danced to folk tunes. A trio played requests. A poster made from a photograph of the DiMeolas when they were first married hung in the foyer.

The guests were mainly friends from the DiMeolas' days in Jersey City and from the 33 years they have lived at 295 Phelps Road in Bergenfield.

The DiMeolas met through a mutual friend. "My wife comes from a family of butchers, and I knew if I got close, I would always eat good," says Charles.

The DiMeolas have grown to enjoy their son's music, while his style developed partly out of deference to their peace and quiet. Because he didn't want to be too noisy, Al would mute the strings, and play fast instead of loud.

"One time I stayed home from my weekly card game because I knew there was going to be a big jam session," recalls Theresa. "Somebody needed to be home in case it got too loud and his father got angry."

"I'm a little hard of hearing and sometimes too much noise hurts my ears," adds Charles. "But I realized it was Al's passion, so I had a room built onto the house where he could play what he pleased."

Guests at the party offered vignettes about Al's early career, including Joe Chiarrell, who remembered how his Uncle Charles once forced young Al to carry out the garbage despite his son's protests that a musician's hands shouldn't be misused.