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## Obituaries

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### Obituary: Holzhaus renowned for his old-school blues talents

Web Posted: 07/12/2008 11:06 PM CDT

**By Amber Whittaker**  
[iwhittaker@express-news.net](mailto:iwhittaker@express-news.net)

Hailed as one of the last old-school blues guitarists in San Antonio, Chris Holzhaus was a self-assured band leader who could forgo his natural independence to play sideman for better-known musicians.

While friends such as Stevie Ray Vaughan and Delbert McClinton gained national recognition, Holzhaus was often overlooked. But fellow musicians recall his versatility, professionalism and encyclopedic knowledge of old-school rarities that made him stand out among Texas musicians.

"A lot of the blues guys out there now are copying Chris' licks and they don't even know it," Dale Rankin, a friend of more than 20 years, said.

Diagnosed with colon cancer in July 2007, Holzhaus died Friday in Mico. He was 58.

Born in San Antonio, he was the son of two musicians. His father was a trumpet player for Tommy Dorsey, and his mother was a quirky jazz singer. Holzhaus

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taught himself Jimmy Reed licks at age 13.

"He picked up the guitar and didn't put it down. That was his calling and he knew it," said Suzanne Holzhaus, his wife of 20 years.

Among other projects, he played throughout South and Central Texas with the Texas Tornados and opened for Vaughan at the Majestic Theatre. He felt at home playing Austin landmarks such as the Continental Club and Antone's, and loved to play bars on St. Mary's Street in San Antonio.

Suzanne Holzhaus remembers the moment she first saw him one summer afternoon at the old Cactus Beer Garden on St. Mary's. "He walked in, and I looked at him and I knew. He was the love my life," she said.

Friends said Holzhaus was a perfectionist.

"I've seen him fire a bass player in the middle of a song. He'd say, 'Here's \$100, go get a job,'" Rankin said.

But Holzhaus' loyalty encouraged others to return the favor.

"He told me, 'If I have a choice, you're the one I want,'" Tommy Taylor, a drummer for guitarist Eric Johnson, said. Taylor said that while many gigs paid higher, he would drive halfway across the state to play with Holzhaus, even for free.

"He was probably one of the greatest musicians I have heard play," Taylor said.

Among countless bootlegs, Holzhaus has two official albums: "Live at Doctor Rockets" and "Welcome to Bluzhill, Texas."

As Holzhaus' health began to deteriorate and medical bills mounted last fall, his former bandleader, McClinton, organized a benefit for the ailing musician at Sam's Burger Joint. The event raised \$10,000.

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