

CONCERT REVIEW

Roomful of Blues, band full of talent

By Rob Cline
Freelance writer

CEDAR RAPIDS — Roomful of Blues can take you on a tuneful trip around the country, but the band, which closed the 13th edition of Bluesmore on a gorgeous Saturday night, isn't in a hurry to get you there.

Happy to settle into a groove, the band avoided musical pyrotechnics in favor of impressive versatility. The large crowd on the Bruce-more lawn was clearly pleased to go along for the ride.

The latest incarnation of Roomful of Blues — a band that released its first recording in the late 1970s — is a tight musical unit featuring a three-piece horn section (two saxes and a trumpet), bass, drums, keys, guitar and the unique, resonant vocals of Mark DuFresne.

DuFresne took the stage for the band's third number, after the instrumentalists had nailed both a hard-driving opener and a slow, simmering number. The vocalist's big voice, which is reputed to cover 3 1/2 octaves, is smooth, lacking even a trace of the gravelly sound often associated with blues singers.

Throughout the band's set, DuFresne often seemed to caress phrases, infusing notes with a vibrato not commonly heard in this style. Any deficiency in his harmonica playing (which happily didn't come into play often) is more than made up for by his signature vocal sound.

To suggest that the band's success resides solely in DuFresne's vocal chords would do the group a disservice. Equally comfortable whether they were playing blues styles from Kansas City, Chicago, New Orleans, St. Louis, Memphis or beyond, the members of Roomful of Blues impressed both singly and as a unit.

Guitarist Chris Vachon was featured several times, and each solo reaffirmed his ability to create melodic lines that managed to maintain a laid-back feel while propelling a number forward.

The horn section — Bob Enos on trumpet, Mark Earley on baritone and tenor sax, and Rich Lataille on tenor and alto sax — could hammer down a unison section and then tear off free-wheeling solos.

Travis Colby, whose keyboard emulated both a piano and a B3 organ, was particularly strong on boogie-woogie numbers, while the drums of Ephraim Lowell and the bass of Dima Gorodetsky laid down a solid, but never flashy, rhythmic line.

As the performance came to a close, the band knocked out two great numbers: "Jona Lee," from the band's latest disc "Standing Room Only," and the classic "New Orleans."

C.R. brothers fight war in Iraq together

By Dick Hogan
The Gazette

CEDAR RAPIDS — The call up of thousands of National Guard troops for duty in Iraq and Afghanistan has put many relatives, brothers, or fathers and sons, or nieces and aunts, into harm's way.

Among them are Pfc. Ryan Gericke, 25, and his brother Spc. 4 Chris Gericke, 22, both of Cedar Rapids. Ryan was recently home for a two-week furlough and is now back in Iraq with his unit.

The Gericke brothers are in Iraq as members of the 1-133rd Infantry Iowa National Guard out of Dubuque. Both live in Cedar Rapids but grew up in Strawberry Point.

"I wanted to be in the more up-front action. Something that would be different from everyday life. I like the excitement of it. The thrill of being outside the wire... the adrenaline rush," Ryan said.

"It's something I believe in.

"It's nice to have family there. It makes it more like home."

Pfc. Ryan Gericke
Iowa National Guard



Pfc. Ryan Gericke
Serving in Iraq

I believe we're over there to help the Iraqis get back on their feet. Some of them want us there."

Ryan has been in the Guard for a year. Chris has six years' duty and is on his second deployment since joining the Guard.

Ryan believes it's hard for Westerners to understand Iraqi culture.

"It seems like in their culture it's OK to take someone's life if they believe differently. They are very sensitive. You must be very careful how you handle (Iraqis). You do not want to dishonor them in front of their family because the only way for them to regain their honor is to physically injure you," he said.

Ryan said when he first arrived in Iraq four months ago, "I thought that everyone was the same — that all were

the enemy. I now understand the differences. A very small part of the Iraqi people are the enemy. Most are just trying to make a living and take care of their families just like we are.

"More people support us over there than don't. You hear about the bad. I think they are tired of us being over there, but they need to understand they have to step it up and tell their enemies (insurgents) to leave the country."

Gericke said the toughest thing for American soldiers in Iraq is keeping yourself mentally sharp and not get into an emotional rut. He advises keeping busy, reasoning that it brings you down if you sit too long and think about home. He spends a couple hours in the gym each day and says it helps.

Living quarters for Ryan and his buddies at Al Asad Air Base are large air-conditioned tents, housing up to eight people. His brother lives next door. Both are gunners on convoys, manning 50 caliber guns on Humvees to protect supply shipments.

A typical day for the Gericke is eight to 12 hours on



Ryan Gericke

Iowa National Guard members Pfc. Ryan Gericke, 25, (left) and his brother Spc. 4 Chris Gericke, 22, both of Cedar Rapids, are serving together in Iraq. They are stationed at Al Asad Air Base.

the road guarding convoys to Jordan and back. They go to bed at 7 p.m. and get up at 2:30 a.m. Vehicles are checked constantly for booby traps. They usually get back to base at about 12:30 a.m.

Chris Gericke outranks Ryan even though he is three years younger, but that's no problem.

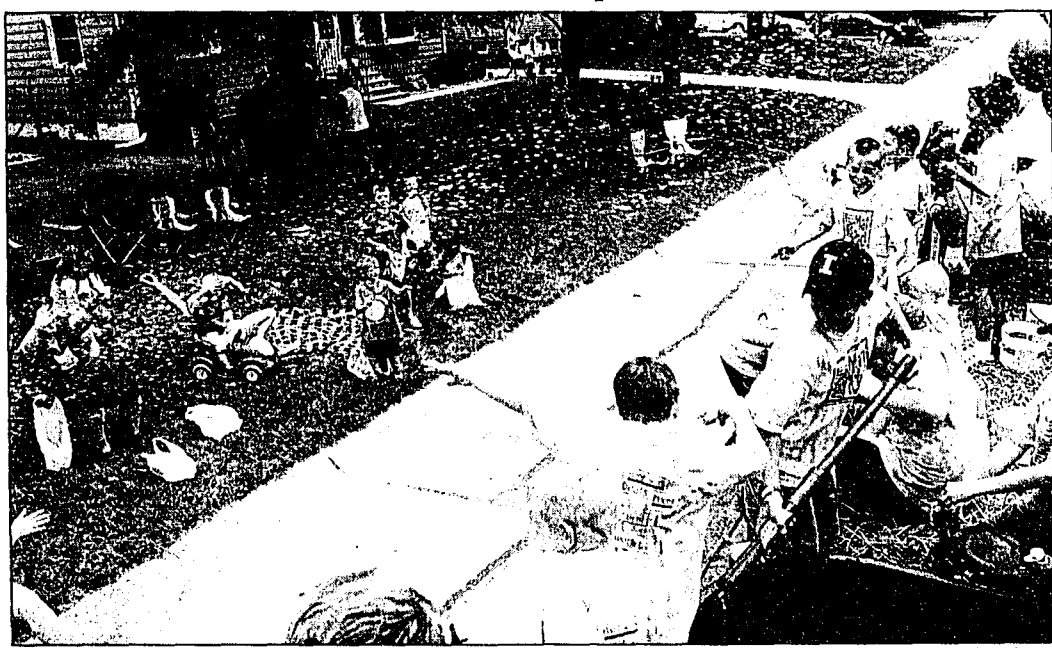
"We were best friends before we left. We rely on each other to keep our spirits up if one of us gets down. It's nice

to have family there. It makes it more like home."

Ryan said he planned to join the Guard earlier but "got talked out of it by people in my life then. It's our generation's war. When my kids ask, 'Dad, what did you do?' I wanna say I was over there and did something," Gericke said.

Contact the writer: (319) 398-8255 or dick.hogan@gazettecommunications.com

Float-soaked spectators



Stephen Mally/Freelance

Kids aboard the Alburnett Mat Pack Wrestling Group float spray people with water Saturday at the Alburnett Children's Benefit Day parade in Alburnett. Other activities at the event included rock-climbing, water balloon wars, a dunk tank and a kiddie train ride.

Free smoke detectors for fire-prone neighborhoods

By Rick Smith
The Gazette

CEDAR RAPIDS — Fire officials are buying 6,000 smoke detectors equipped with 10-year lithium batteries to place in neighborhoods most at risk of fire as part of a campaign to keep fire deaths of children at zero.

The plan is to install the detectors free in 150 to 200 residences in each of 12 areas served by 12 of the Cedar Rapids school district's 24 elementary schools.

The Fire Department picked the 12 schools after determining that the areas served by the schools had 74 percent of the city's fires in the last three years, but had only 47 percent of the city's population.

The 12 schools also serve the city's most economically needy families, which means that the families may be living in older housing and may not be able to afford installing or maintaining smoke detectors, said Greg Buelow, the Fire Department's public education specialist.

Studies nationwide show a correlation between economic need and number of fires, he said.

Buelow said Cedar Rapids school officials will help sign up families with younger children to get the free smoke detectors.

"There's no doubt in my mind that somebody's life will be saved due to the pro-

Eligible families

The detectors are going to families whose children attend the following elementary schools: Van Buren, Wright, Cleveland, Grant, Grant Wood, Harrison, Monroe, Garfield, Polk, Taylor, Johnson and Wilson.

gram," he told the City Council at its meeting Wednesday.

The detectors and batteries, which will cost \$51,300, are part of a federal grant the Fire Department secured to use in at-risk neighborhoods. The grant also will cover the cost to provide fire safety information to those receiving the detectors and to create a local fire safety marketing campaign.

The city hasn't had a fire death since December 2004 and hasn't had the death of a child in a fire since 6-year-old Jaymie Grahman died in April 2003 in a fire at 3755 H Ave. NE.

Volunteers from more than 20 local businesses will help install the smoke detectors on Saturdays between Aug. 26 and Nov. 18.

Contact the writer: (319) 398-8312 or rick.smith@gazettecommunications.com

Successful women to share stories at program

CEDAR RAPIDS — Iowa's first female Senate majority leader, Mary Lundby, R-Marion, will host a community networking reception and program Thursday to demonstrate how women are successful in the civic, economic and political landscapes of Cedar Rapids.

The events begin at 5 p.m. at the ARA Gallery, 4850 Armar Drive SE. Tickets are \$25 and will be available for at the door.



Sen. Mary Lundby
R-Marion

RSVPs may be sent to est@lawyer@aol.com.

The program features three speakers.

Lee Clancey, president and CEO of the Cedar Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce, will discuss how women have been successful in the Cedar Rapids community.

Monica Vernon, owner of Vernon Research, will share her insights on female-owned businesses in the area.

Lundby will conclude the program with an update on upcoming bills in the Iowa Legislature important to women.

"Women obviously play very important leadership roles in communities all



Lee Clancey

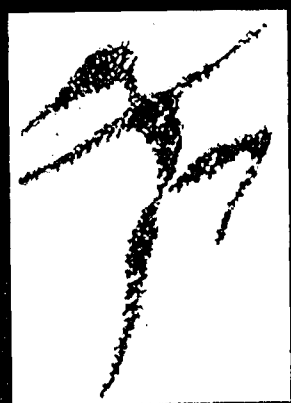


Monica Vernon

Guest speakers

across this country," Lundby said. "Cedar Rapids is no exception. I believe it is important to not only celebrate those achievements, but recognize them in such a way that may offer up new ideas for other women."

Fall Registration



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