

# Grafton taps into its music roots

■ History-conscious groups organize fall blues festival, displays, programs saluting community's rich heritage

By STEVE OSTERMANN

Ozaukee Press staff

When blues musician and educator Michael "Hawkeye" Herman came to Grafton last fall to perform at schools and in concert, he spoke to local residents about their community as "a sleeping giant."

Grafton, Herman told his audiences, has a chance to acknowledge its place in American music history and let the rest of the world know about a rich legacy that has been overlooked by the general public for decades.

Herman's words — which echoed the sentiments of area educators who invited him to appear locally — have not fallen on deaf ears. Since his September visit, a growing number of residents have embraced the mission of publicizing Grafton's musical heritage.

The result of their efforts is the formation of groups that are organizing a summer blues festival, park history displays, educational programs and a variety of other activities they hope will teach, enlighten and entertain. The collective goal, volunteers said, is to pay tribute to the Paramount blues artists and other musicians who recorded for the former Wisconsin Chair Co.'s music division, including at its Grafton factory studio in the 1920s and early '30s.

The first Paramount Blues Festival, to be held Saturday, Sept. 23, at Lime Kiln Park in Grafton, will be presented by the newly formed Grafton Blues Association in cooperation with the Grafton Area Jaycees.

Headlining the festival, which runs from 11:30 a.m. to 11 p.m., will be nationally known artists Albert Cummings and Nora Jean Bruso. The event will also feature popular local blues musicians, lectures and workshops, historical exhibits, food and beverage stands and other attractions.

"We wanted to have something that is both educational and entertaining," said Kris Marshall, Grafton Blues Association president. "We kept an open mind to a lot of different ideas, but we knew we wanted to have some big names as well as local talent, and acknowledge the history we have here."

"Everyone should be able to find something they enjoy."



POSING WITH A DISPLAY of Paramount music memorabilia at Ozaukee Bank in Grafton were members of the Grafton Blues Association, which will present the first Paramount Blues Festival on Saturday, Sept. 23, at Lime Kiln Park. From left, are association treasurer Peter Raymond, vice president Ellen Zacharias and president Kris Marshall.

Photo by Sam Arendt

In addition to traditional blues performers whose music echoes the Southern sounds of artists such as Charley Patton, Son House, Skip James and Blind Blake —

all of whom recorded in Grafton — the festival will feature rock-oriented music that reflects blues roots.

Cummings, who will take the stage as



Albert Cummings



Nora Jean Bruso

the festival's final act at 8:30 p.m., is an acclaimed guitarist from Massachusetts whose style has been likened to the late Stevie Ray Vaughan. On Cummings' first album, he was backed by Vaughan's original Double Trouble band.

Bruso, who will perform at 6 p.m., is an award-winning vocalist who began her musical career in Chicago and has appeared throughout the United States and abroad. Her debut CD "Nora Jean Sings the Blues" remained on the Living Blues Radio Charts for six months.

Opening the festival stage acts at 11:30 a.m. will be David Evans with Joe Filisko, a duo who perform Delta blues.

Herman, who will serve as the festival's master of ceremonies, will perform at 12:45 p.m., followed by the Steve Cohen Blues Band with Greg Koch at 2:15 p.m. and Reverend Raven and the Chain Smoking Altar Boys at 4:15 p.m.

Presenting educational programs will be Filisko, Evans and fellow Paramount historian Gayle Dean Wardlow.

Wardlow, a Florida resident, will present a lecture on Paramount history from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., followed by a harmonica workshop by Filisko at 2:15 p.m. and a 3:45 p.m. workshop by Evans, a Memphis University professor, on "The Guitar in the Blues of the Deep South."

Wardlow and Evans have both written books on Paramount artists who recorded in Grafton as well as articles on pre-World War II blues artists.

Alex van der Tuuk, a music historian and writer from the Netherlands, will also be at the festival to sign copies of his award-winning book "Paramount's Rise and Fall — A History of the Wisconsin Chair Company and its Recording Activities."

The musical entertainment and educational programs will be presented in separate tents on the park grounds. "The times will overlap with one another, but the tents will be separated enough to have their own space," Marshall said.

Advance tickets are \$30 for reserved seating. However, concert seats are not assigned and will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis.

General admission is \$20 in advance and \$25 at the gate. Children ages 10 and younger will be admitted free when accompanied by a paying adult.

Tickets can be purchased at local Ozaukee Bank offices, from Grafton Blues Association members and on line at [www.grafton-blues.org](http://www.grafton-blues.org).

The festival will be held rain or shine. Gates will open at 10:30 a.m. See Legacy on page 8B

## Passenger cited after late-night traffic stop

Pancake breakfast