

MUSIC



Mary Clark and Candy Foster at Candy's

News-Gazette photo by Robert K. O'Donnell

No blues about neighborhood's future

By J. Philip Bloomer

Champaign got defined by their staying power. It was the only town where blues music was born. First Street in Champaign was the birthplace of the blues. Candy Foster and Mary Clark are doing what they do best — entertaining.

Candy's Lounge opened its doors last Friday, packing people in with word-of-mouth the night's advertising. He's planning a grand opening for Labor Day weekend.

From there, Foster hopes the lounge will be another factor in preserving a North First Street revival. A return to the way it used to be — a place for folks to gather, see familiar faces, do their business and have a good time.

"When I came here 30 years ago, First Street was the place to be," recalls the 52-year-old Foster. "I started at a place up here called the Rainbow Tavern. Some the blues for \$7 a night."

"They had a bar, but it was a market. I know what First Street means to people around here, and it can be that way again," Foster said.

Foster came to Champaign from Danville when he was 18 years old, got involved in

the music business and has sung, for and managed bands such as the Soul Brothers, Lakes and Candy and the Ten Band.

He said he always wanted his own place, but for six years ago got discouraged about the tough character of the North First Street neighborhood. But there are indications that is changing, and that feeling of identity returning.

A couple of blocks north, Poplar Street, once legendary for its crime, is quiet, and the new Martin Luther King subdivision is rising in its place.

Foster credits people like local DJ Pete Bridgewater, and places like Buddha's Bar, 170 N. First St., and Jackson's Restaurant, 116 N. First St., with setting a positive tone.

The growing Champaign-Urbana Ethnic Day at Langley Park on Aug. 11, the new black-owned radio station WBCP, and now Candy's Lounge are also encouraging signs.

The city of Champaign could be making a difference too. The city this year set aside \$130,000 seed money to assist with

commercial development on North First Street if a private developer can launch a plan.

"The last two years or so, people have really been trying to get that family feeling back," Foster said. "I hope I can help. People have wanted a comfortable, laid-back place, somewhere they can bring their wives, and that's something we haven't had in a long time."

One reason there hasn't been a place like that is that the liquor license wasn't available. With Champaign's lottery system of awarding licenses, applicants wanting a license for the Campustown area submitted applications under multiple names to improve their chances of getting drawn.

But that changed when the council reserved one license for the area north of Springfield Avenue and east of the Illinois Central tracks. In March Foster got his license, and work began on the little club.

Candy's Lounge is small by local club standards. With about 20 tables, it has a capacity of around 65. Friends, fellow musicians, and relatives helped remodel the interior of the one-story, concrete block building.

Eventually he hopes to have soloists or trios play on occasion. And he said he might have a "Donville night" for all his old friends.

One old friend, a musical protégé of Foster's, manages the bar.

Mary Clark is perhaps best known local

ly for stuns singing with Wild Wind, W.F. Blues Band, Blues Benders and Fresh Air. She's now with Straight From The Street, a new rhythm and blues band that, while it's been around the Midwest in various forms since 1981, is fast gaining popularity with some new sounds and faces.

Clark's been singing blues since she was a teen-ager. She remembers being inspired the first time she got to see Candy Foster and his band perform.

"I was 16 and I snuck in the old Blue Island to see the Soul Brothers," she recalls. After moving to Champaign in 1968, Clark bounced around the country a bit, singing and bartending, but now appears to be comfortable at Candy's and playing gigs with Straight From The Street.

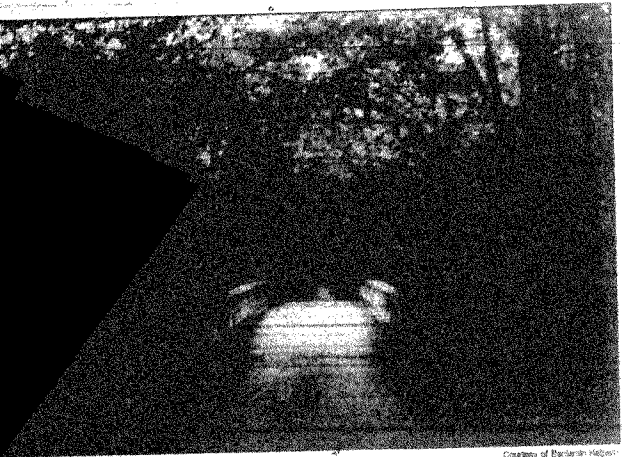
One local critic said she possesses "one of the richest, fullest, and most soulful voices around... you can't help but love this woman for what she can do with a song."

Or with a drink. She's been bartending for 17 years, starting at Langley Air Force Base in Hampton, Va. But she's moved on to bigger and better things in the meantime, like Nature's Table Saturday, or most other evenings at Candy's Lounge.

"She's great," says Foster. "Mary doesn't meet any strangers."

Like a classic, this place is likely going to be around for a while.

The News-Gazette



Courtesy of Benjamin Halpern

Postcard message . . .

They were just people someone tended to them in an attempt to be a...

Birth of the in the 1950s, in the glossy

times to enter and cards have

of popularity covered more of postcards.

the back of and it might You could postal service that the form of

reproduction of says "To: Margelye tout

calculation, the tielly respon ricks are more I just like nner says. "Take this postcard at the location, Kau You see that town today and it's not going to be hot sex and bugles.

16, 1909. The front of the card featured University Hall and the Library Tower at the UI. It was mailed to Mrs. Robert Schwartz in Desatur, Ind.

"Hello Grandma, how are you? Uncle Frank and Robert are taking dinner and supper with us."

Postcards were also the personal side of their day between young men and women, who were almost always introduced to each other through family and friends. The messages are sweet and subtle.

"Dear Miss Wheeler

"Tell me all about yourself and your plans for the summer

"I have such an interesting program here. Field trips twice a week, that are my delight. Don't forget our plans for next year."

Ecologically young, Wheeler

It was addressed to Miss Amy Wheeler of Parkia, Ill. (south of Vandalia). On the front of the card, postmarked 1912, is University Hall and the Sun Dial.

"It's hard to be selective collecting postcards," Keller says. "You find a lot of interesting cards. There's a lot of people today like me, who like to see how things used to be," Keller says. "Take this postcard at the location, Kau You see that town today and it's not going to be hot sex and bugles."

This is right out of the days of Matt Dillon. You run into all sorts of interesting things. And there are some real interesting messages. It's hard not to be fascinated by all the things you find on a postcard."

No longer are postcards a cheap form of communication. Most sell for 50 cents and it costs 15 cents postage to mail. Old, collectible postcards have gotten more expensive, too. Some can still be found for less than \$1, but most range from \$1 up to \$20 for rare postcards.

"I would say the biggest change over the last five to 10 years is that postcards have gotten so expensive. Most are 50 to 60 cents. They are not as popular as they used to be. A lot of people go ahead and buy postcards and an envelope for a little more money," says Merrill Eskew, owner of the Little Professor Book Center, 505 E. Green St., C.

Between, the photographer, grew up to update New York and his parents owned a general store in a small town. He remembers they kept a huge stack of postcards for the tourists.

"When I was little, every town had its own postcard. Every important building was documented with a postcard — the post office, the school — everything," he says. "You had come outwards — cards for holidays — what I call 'any American' was no near. You don't see much of that any more."

The News-Gazette