

Accent • December 15, 2004

Paint the holidays with Shades of Blue

Accent f'ē' chər

By TROY MICHAEL

A few years back, on a warm summer day, I was having lunch outside at a small park in downtown Danville. Downtown Danville, Inc. had started a sweet little adventure that they called the Lunchbox Concert Series. Local business people would come down, along with other people from Danville, to have lunch in their small park that actually used to be a store. The draw was there was live entertainment for an hour and a half during the luncheon times.

I went, at the strong urging from my friend and fellow music lover, Pete Blackman. Pete told me I had to come check out this band, that they were amazing. So I did, and I was introduced to the sweet blues'n soul sounds of Candy Foster and the Shades of Blue.

While I ate my lunch, I sat there watching this man singing his heart out to the small crowd. A few songs into his set, he came off stage and sang to the crowd - like right in front of them. They would sing and dance with him while the band churned out classic blues numbers like "Sweet Home Chicago" and "The Thrill is Gone." They would also play popular R'n'B numbers like "Knock on Wood" and "Mustang Sally."

Candy and his boys also knew the soul jams, much to the pleasure of the crowd, as they wheeled through "Take Me to the River," and "Last Two Dollars."

Candy kept working the crowd until they were in a frenzy. He had senior citizens tapping their toes, up and dancing, and clapping along in time. I thought this guy was like James Brown and Robert Johnson morphed into one soul. It was just amazing to see this display of pure showmanship in the middle of the afternoon on what otherwise would have been just another sunny summer day.

After that, my first Candy Foster experience, I came to find out that Candy Foster and Shades of Blue are a local legend to Central Illinois.

Candy has been performing classic blues throughout the Midwest for over 40 years, longer than a lot of you reading this are old. He calls Champaign-Urbana home and has worked continuously playing gigs and venues all over the region. The reason for his longevity is his energetic fun-loving performances. Plus he is a master at his craft with his down home sweet Chicago-type vocals.

You can catch Candy Foster and Shades of Blue twice before the year is over. They will be at the Iron Post in Urbana on December 18 and will be bringing in the New Year on December 31 at the Cowboy Monkey in Champaign.



Jeff Cunningham photo

CANDY FOSTER has been performing classic rhythm and blues throughout the Midwest for 40 years. Based in Champaign-Urbana, Candy is well known as one of the hardest working blues singers in the area. His strong vocals and high energy style always draws interactive enthusiasm from the audiences. His early influences include his mother (a locally prominent jazz singer) and jazz and blues recordings, and touring rhythm and blues artists of the 1950s.

Over the years, Candy has appeared with such blues greats as Lonnie Brooks, Etta James, Big Daddy Kinsey, KoKo Taylor, Junior Wells, Gatemouth Brown, Little Milton, Eddie Shaw, Son Seals, Bobby Blue Bland, and Bobby Rush. While Candy has led his own band for many years, the core of his current Shades of Blue band have been together since early 1996. Collectively, the Shades of Blue musicians have performed with such major acts as Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin, The Temptations, Natalie Cole, The Four Tops, The Marvellettes, Del Shannon, and Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels.

Backed by seasoned professionals and performing the tight arrangements of the Shades of Blue, Candy provides audiences with "pure" rhythm and blues grooves that first originated from Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, and Memphis (Delta) areas.

Information from <http://free.prohosting.com/cfoster/>



Fall Winterfest Nights



▲ The Blind Boys of Alabama

In December 2003, the Blind Boys of Alabama, along with ace keyboard player John Medeski, went to New York City to perform a special holiday concert.

A testament to the group's 60-year legacy of foot-stomping gospel, **Blind Boys of Alabama—Go Tell It On The Mountain** airs at 8 pm Monday, December 6, and 11 pm Thursday, December 9.

The program features "Down By The Riverside" and "Amazing Grace." Mavis Staples joins the Boys on "Born in Bethlehem," a song she learned as a child;

Christie Hynde performs "In the Bleak Midwinter," a traditional English Christmas song; and Aaron Neville sings "Joy to the World."

Candy Foster and the Shades of Blue Headline Music of Winterfest



If R & B music hasn't gotten the attention it deserves in central Illinois, it's not because Candy Foster hasn't been trying to give rhythm and blues a boost.

He's singing every weekend at clubs, drawing big crowds of fans that just have to get their "Candy fix." Yet, he said, somehow the Motown sound gets drowned out by jazz when it comes to the public eye. "Around here, the jazz thing has been pretty big, especially with the university," said Foster. "R & B has always been popular, it hasn't been promoted much."

Now the spotlight will shine clearly on R & B as Foster and his band The Shades of Blue appear in their first televised special during WILL-TV's Winterfest, **Candy Foster Live at The Iron Post**, airing at 8:30 pm Wednesday, Dec. 8.

"Candy is the hardest-working rhythm and blues entertainer between Chicago and St. Louis," said Terry Des Jardins, the band's rhythm guitar player. "I think he is truly a treasure that we have locally. He has the ability to make every person who comes in feel like he sees them. He has a natural ability to connect with an audience."

In the local production taped by WILL-TV last spring at the Urbana club, Foster and the band perform "Take Me to the River," "Licking Stick," "Here I Am," "Let's Stay Together," "Sweet Home Chicago," "Brick House" and "Last Two Dollars."



WILL-TV's Tim Hartin, who produced the program, said Foster's personality isn't lost on tape. "We think he connects with the TV audience just as he does in person," said Tim. "He appeals to all age groups, from college kids to retirees."

Foster, who as a young man (pictured left) traveled the country performing at Air Force bases, started out singing jazz because his mother was a jazz singer. But he moved to R & B because it gave him more of an opportunity to express himself through the music. "I thought entertaining was my strong point," he said.

Other members of the band include Ernie Thompson, guitar; Kevin Flowers, bass; Nate Hatcher, trumpet; Peter Roubal, tenor sax; Jeff Helgesen, trumpet; and Danny Phillips, drums.

Two venues offer a musical respite from the weather

The weather outside is frightful, but inside the sights, sounds and smells will be absolutely delightful Thursday night with a pair of delectable musical enterprises.

Jackson's Ribs 'N' Tips, 116 N. First St., C, serves up soul food and rhythm and blues with Murali Coryell, while the Iron Post, 130 S. Race St., downtown Urbana, has rollicking Creole, Cajun and zydeco with a side of Paul Wirth's famous red beans and rice.

The father and son team of Morris and Dexter Ardoin make their home in Louisiana, but criss-cross the country and span the globe performing with the Creole Kumblerz. Morris is best known as a member, with his brothers, of the influential Ardoin Family Band.

Morris' father, Alphonse "Bois Sec" Ardoin and his father's cousin, Anede Ardoin, are considered to be the primary architects of modern French Creole and zydeco music; son and grandson proudly carry on the family traditions and tunes.

The duo is joined by Illinois-native and fiddler Dennis Stroughmatt, who plays periodically in Champaign-Urbana. While a student at Southwest Missouri State, Stroughmatt happened upon the small town of Old Mines, Mo., and began attending weekly "bouillions" (house parties), playing fiddle and learning to speak French Creole on the weekends.

He went on to continue his study of the culture in Louisiana before returning to Southern Illinois University, where he completed his masters in French Creole History. Stroughmatt tours with a number of Cajun/Creole bands including Creole Stomp (with whom he will perform a free noon concert at the Kraemer Center for Performing Arts on Feb. 2). Go to www.creolestomp.com for more info.

Unlike the Ardoins, Coryell's connection with his famous jazz-fusion pioneer father, Larry, is only in the talent department as Murali's passion is soulful and rocking rhythm and blues.

The 34-year-old guitarist/vocalist long ago broke with family tradition (his brother, Julien, is also a prodigious jazz artist) by immersing himself in the sounds of Memphis and the Stax-Volt Studio roster of artists (Booker T., the Mace-Kays, Otis Redding, Sam and Dave).



Murali Coryell serves up his rhythm and blues Thursday night at Jackson's Ribs 'N' Tips.



Accordionist Dexter Ardoin



Fiddler Dennis Stroughmatt



'Candy Foster Live at the Iron Post' on Tuesday night will be part of the WILL-TV fund-raising campaign.

With a pair of albums—"Eyes Wide Open" and "2120" (Murali's Music)—under his belt and a boatload of press likening his vocals to Sam Cooke and his passion to Al Green, an evening with Coryell and his combo paired with Jackson's famous recipe BBQ is guaranteed to be a hot night, indeed.

Other stuff:

- For those of you on a diet or just fans of great punky, power-pop guitar bands the Courtyard Cafe has **Green Light Go!** scheduled to appear tonight. Also on the bill **Eleanor's Fault**, **Call the Medic**, **Gas Can Pickap** and **One Trick**.

- Like a Phoenix rising from the ashes, the mighty **Delta Kings** return Friday night to the stage at the Phoenix, 215 S. Neil St., downtown Champaign. OK, that may be a little dramatic, but heck, the guys are practically a local treasure and this summer had fans missing their solid brand of blues, rockabilly and full-on roadhouse rock.

For newcomers to the area (or those who do not get out much), the Kings lay **in** on the line for three sets mixing in blues and rock covers with a heavy dose of their own solid tunes. Check 'em out on the Web at www.deltakings.com and then check 'em out live for yourself.

- Also on Friday night, the **Cowboy Monkey**, 6 Taylor St., downtown Champaign, has a solid evening of rock as well, as one of my all-time favorite local singer-songwriters lined up in Cameron McGill. Also on the bill are **The Idle Hours**, **The Situation**, **Jigsaw** and **Shipwreck** are slated to hit the stage beginning at 9 p.m.

The event is a fund-raiser for the Illinois Disciples Foundation's anti-war effort.

- On Saturday night, one of the major stars of this year's Great Cover-Up, **The Goldfrogs**, bust out the "old-school" beats and rhymes at **Nargite**, 207 W. Clark St., C, as the **lookalike** burgh club celebrates its first anniversary. The GF's performed an amazing and hilarious set as the **Sugar Hill Gang/Bla Marlie** at the Cover-Up and if the party is half as fun as that it will be more worth the price of admission.

- Local psychedelic alt-country faves, the **Tractor Kings**, are on tap Saturday night at Mike's 'N' Molly's, 145 N. Market St., downtown Champaign, with **Drawl** and **Shipwreck**.

- All-metal headbangers **Shinedown**, along with **Future Leaders of the World**, will crank up the volume Saturday night at the **Clancy Club**, 705 S. Goodwin, Urbana.

- Meanwhile, the **Iron Post** at 8 p.m. Tuesday lends a hand to the WILL-TV fund drive with a preview party for the "Candy Foster Live at the Iron Post" special that airs at 8 p.m. Wednesday on WILL-TV, channel 12. The special, incidentally, was taped earlier this year at the Iron Post.

- Friends of Skaven Morrison on Dec. 9 host a benefit concert to raise money for an education fund in the slain U.S. soldier's (and friend and co-worshiper to many downtown Champaign regulars) name. Three of the biggest rock acts on the scene, **The Blackouts**, **The Beauty Shop** and **Headlights** are set to perform. ■

DON GERARD

—THE MUSIC SCENE

plays periodically in Champaign-Urbana. While a student at Southwest Missouri State, Stroughmatt happened upon the small town of Old Mines, Mo., and began attending weekly "bouillions" (house parties), playing fiddle and learning to speak French Creole on the weekends.

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BY CAROLYN HAYES

CANDY Foster is an entertainer. The son of a jazz singer and former member of area singing groups The Five Shades and The Soul Brothers, Foster knows music, but first and foremost, he's an entertainer.

"No matter what goes on with a band, people come out to be entertained," Foster says. "They like the music and all that, but if you can be entertained with it, they'll come back. My thing is that a lot of times entertainers and musicians are not on the same wavelength. Some musicians feel like if they're the baddest cat on the block, and they can play their horn and play their guitar and say what everyone else wants to say, but don't know how to do it, that's all that's necessary. But that's not true. It's more than music, than someone being the best player. Everybody can't be the best player. I don't have to think that I'm the best singer in town or around here. It's not important. It's important that I entertain people and make them happy enough that they want to come back."

Foster, a Danville native, came to Champaign-Urbana when he was 18 and began to perform in town and in association with Chanute Air Force Base, now defunct, which drew entertainers from town for its exclusive clubs. Foster remembers playing several times a month at different clubs on the base with The Soul Brothers, while gaining steam at the black clubs in town. Several years down the line, Foster put together what would become his current band, Shades of Blue, in the early '90s, eventually curing a misappropriated focus by rhapsody: by throwing back to his R&B roots.

"[At first] it wasn't very good," Foster says. "It wasn't nothing wrong with the musicians. It was just that we weren't all compatible. Some fit, and some didn't. One of the reasons why was that we didn't have direction. We had the idea that we were supposed to have a blues band. I decided I was going to try to go toward my strength, which is R&B. The old R&B from the '60s and '70s. I needed to be capitalizing on the stuff that I already know, and have done, and have been through. I'd been through that. I was doing a disservice to myself by ignoring that and just dealing with the blues."

Naming acts such as James Brown,



Photo by Michael Thomas and Tom Harris

Willie Pickett, Sam & Dave and The Temptations, it's clear where Foster's influences come from. But to Foster, it was more than simply influence that tied him to this brand of R&B.

"Most of those guys are around the same age," he says. "Some of them might be a little older than me. James Brown probably is. But I'm just saying I came up when they came up, within that frame."

Foster, thrown into a nostalgic flashback, tells the story of how James Brown made it at the Apollo after being "booted and hooked off stage." Brown's wild stage antics clearly played influence to Foster's appreciation for the entertainment side of the R&B performance. No longer was it just singing—it was dancing, falling, frantic movement.

On December 8 at 8:30 p.m., WLL-TV (cable channel 13) will air Candy Foster *live at The Iron Post*. The special will cover a live Shades of Blue set from last spring exemplary of the entertainment Foster is known for.

The special features the current Shades of Blue lineup, which includes Kevin Flowers (bass), Ernie Thompson (guitar), Terry Des Jardins (guitar/key-board), Nate Hatcher (trumpet) and Danny Phillips (drums). Joining them for this special performance are local horn heroes Peter Reubal (saxophone) and Jeff Helgesen (trumpet), the latter of whom Foster prides for his help in Shades of Blue's formative years.

Foster claims he has put together, as is apparent in the film, a "package" to which elements of many age groups will

That's Entertainment

THE (RHYTHM AND) BLUES ACCORDING TO CANDY FOSTER

by Zack Adcock

respond. His easy-going personality, often found at the establishments that hire him ("It's a two-way fight," he says), has brought plentiful compliments, and Foster attributes that as a keystone in his local longevity.

People say, 'I know Candy! I like him!'" Foster says. "These are the things I've found out, in the last five to six years, have been very important in my success here. And I think that's what they were trying to capture [on the TV special]. And also the different personalities of what Champaign-Urbana is all about."

Although Foster, with whatever project you might pinpoint, has been a local entertainer, there is one story he is hesitant to tell about a "golden opportunity" to perform with The Platters, one of the famous singing groups, known for its renditions of songs such as "Only You" and "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes." But as he would find himself weighing his options, all gold has a price. He would have to leave his six children behind.

"One part of me really wanted to do it," Foster says. "I knew their stuff. I was always a big fan of theirs, and like I said, I'd cut my teeth into the singing groups a long time ago, and I really knew that kind of stuff back then. I don't tell that story too often, because people say, 'Man that was a golden opportunity!' Which it was, if I wanted to see other parts of the world, but it was also a time I couldn't have replaced with my kids."

Foster goes on to explain how his mother, also an entertainer, was faced with the same decision.

"I look back on it, and my mother went through the same thing with me," he says. "She had opportunities to go and sing with big bands, but I came along. She probably could have left me with my grandmother and all that."

Though Foster has been down on

the promotion of R&B in Champaign-Urbana, he draws a steady crowd and encourages the support of local entertainers.

"As long as I've been in this business, especially in this area, live entertainment is like a yo-yo," Foster says. "It goes up and down. The most remarkable thing for me about this whole thing is my longevity in this area. I'm surprised and impressed with people sticking to their guns and coming to hear me over and over again. I love it. I think it's such a great thing. It's not to put myself on the back. It's about the business. If they do it for me, they'll do it for somebody else. That's the kind of thing that will keep good entertainment in the area. And we have got some of the good entertainment. I can't blame the clubs for getting a little tough on them. You can't go on having bands and not making any money. But we all should try to make sure we keep some of these really good bands from leaving or breaking up, because they can't get enough work around here. Because that happens more than you realize."

"But on the other hand, it's been a good ride around here for a lot of us," Foster says with a smile. "I don't know how to begin to express the gratitude I've had for the fans of Champaign-Urbana and the surrounding areas. They've supported me, and it's one of the things that has kept me energized to do better. Otherwise, I think I'd get tired. I mean, I get tired! But I get motivated every time I come out, and I can see it in people's face that they enjoy what I do. And that's enough right there to keep me going."

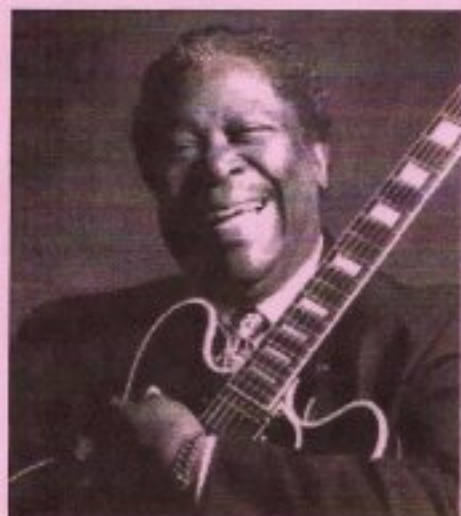
The Candy Foster and Shades of Blue television special airs on WLL-TV channel 13 on December 8 at 8:30 p.m. Foster & Co. are slated for a New Year's Eve blowout at Cowboy Monkey, and the band plays almost every weekend in the area. Stay tuned to The Hub's listings for further information about these and other shows. **HUB**



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Blues band redefines music



JAMEY FENSKE The Daily Illini
Eric Thompson plays lead guitar for Candy Foster and the Shades of Blue on Saturday night at Cowboy Monkey located at 6 Taylor Street in Champaign. Thompson has been entertaining audiences with his guitar for 25 years.



Shades of Blue play hearts out, provide lively alternative to norm

BY CHRISTINA PELUSO
STAFF WRITER

My friends are always skeptical of my random and obscure tastes in entertainment. Movies, music, my tastes are a bit off the beaten path. So when I first saw an ad for Candy Foster and the Shades of Blue, my friends scoffed at my enthusiasm. No one really cared to see a blues singer as much as I did and my friend Jake was the only one who cared that Foster had sang with Etta James and other blues greats.

Luckily, I have good friends and despite their better instincts they agreed to attend a show at Cowboy Monkey. They accompanied me begrudgingly, not quite knowing what to expect. Would this show be a waste of our time and money? Would we be the only people in the bar without senior citizen status? What was I dragging them to? All were complaints I received.

We soon learned my instincts were correct. Candy Foster and the Shades of Blue were one of the best live sets we'd ever seen. The night flew by and at the end of it we were begging for more.

Since that first show we've become obsessed, fanatical, crazed. We've started a cult following. We never miss a show.

Every time Foster and his band are at Cowboy Monkey, we can be found. We're usually

right in front of the stage dancing, singing and yellin' out to Candy. We don't sit down, we never leave early and this only time we leave the dance floor is to re-hydrate in order to continue the dance party.

What is it about Foster and the Shades of Blue that makes for such a great night? According to the bio on the Cowboy Monkey Web site, Foster is "one of the hardest-working blues singers in Champaign-Urbana." Not only is this true, but it doesn't even begin to describe the Candy Foster experience.

Foster and the Shades of Blue are quite possibly the best live show I've ever been to. And bring the concert junkie I am, that's saying a lot. I don't care who you are, how old you are or what your tastes in music are, this man puts on a show.

Their set list runs from one genre to the next. They play funk, R&B, soul and everything in between. They cover Prince, James Brown and Marvin Gaye, just to name a few. Some of my personal favorites are "Lick'n Stick," "Mustang Sally" and "Sex Machine."

The latest Foster show I attended Saturday night at Cowboy Monkey. Foster and the band were at their best. Nothing could've put us all in a good mood after such a devastating Illini loss. Even my good friend, who's a manager for the basketball team, couldn't help but have fun.

I guess I can't really gush about the band much more. All I have to say is seeing this band is something nobody should miss. It should be put in the I-book's list of things to do before you graduate. Foster and the Shades of Blue are playing sets all month long at various bars around town.

The most notable show is coming up at the end of the month. The band will be breaking from their normal routine and making an appearance on campus for Fat Tuesday. The band will be playing at Kam's, yes you read right, Kam's. So now you don't have an excuse, go check them out. You can send me an email later thanking me for such a great night.

For more information, check out www.listen.to/candyfoster.



JAMEY FENSKE The Daily Illini
Sandy Phillips sings with the Candy Foster band on Saturday evening at Cowboy Monkey. Candy Foster has been performing classic rhythm blues throughout the midwest since the early 60's.



JAMEY FENSKE The Daily Illini
Sandy Phillips sings with the Candy Foster band on Saturday at Cowboy Monkey. Sandy has worked with artists and bands in the Champaign/Urbana area since the early 60's.

Sangamon River Music Festival



Journal Staff/Photo: Oliver
CANDY FOSTER was one of the featured musicians for the festival, singing with her band, the Candy Foster Band, at 12 p.m., following the street parade through Mahomet.

When the streets come alive with music and fun

Journal Staff/Photo: Oliver
THE PUEDIN HILLBILLYS played to a packed crowd Friday night on the streets of the beginning of the festival with lively music and good fun.



Downtown Mahomet was packed with people from within and outside of the community this past weekend as they all came to enjoy the music and booths at the 12th-annual Sangamon River Music Festival.

The festival, which has grown over the past several years, showed several new features this year, including the Raminator monster truck, which provided rides, a tractor show, new food vendors and even a classic car show.

The car show, which was expected to bring in at least 30 vehicles from throughout the area, ended up being a bit by bringing in over 60 participants to have their rides judged for a potential Best In Show award at the end of the day.

As has been over the last several years, the bands

were the primary focus of both days, which saw performances from the Puddin Hillbillys, Tons of Fun, Candy Foster, Maybe Later, Poprocks and Captain Rat and the Blind Rivets.

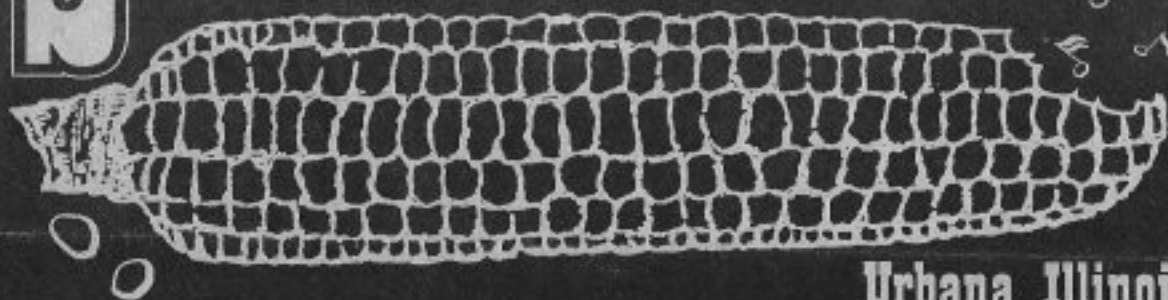
New this year was a longer playing schedule that allowed bands to play later to the crowds that grew as the days progressed.

Also new this year was the request for donations for next year's festivities.

According to festival chair David Parsons, the need for donations comes from a growing festival.

"Every year it always seems to come down to this. It's the end, we're scrambling for funds [and] we usually end up getting it. This year's been a little bit harder; everybody's giving, they're just not giving as much."

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BROADWAY STAGE: Crossfire • Prairie Players Theatre Academy • Dennis Stroughmatt's Creole Workshop and the Urbana High School Steel Drums



MUSIC

Show, open jam to benefit bassist

By The News-Gazette

URBANA — Blues musician Candy Foster will put on a benefit show and open jam at 8 p.m. Saturday at the Independent Media Center, 202 S. Broadway Ave., as a benefit for his former bass player, Kevin Flowers.

Several local bands and musicians are scheduled to attend. Foster will supply the back line and public-address system.

Musicians are invited to bring their instruments and their entire bands.

Food will be donated by the Esquire Lounge in Champaign, and the space for the show is being donated by the Independent Media Center. Donations will be accepted for Flowers, who has cancer. Performers are asked to contact Foster (info@candyfoster.com) for details.

Foster said Flowers played with Candy Foster and the Shades of Blues for 14 years. Flowers recently began to work for the University of Illinois but has out-of-pocket expenses he has to cover, Foster said.