

## At the movies

Now that the holiday season is near, the area movie houses are bulging at the seams with new cinematic releases. Our film critic Dan Greenberg reviews the latest releases, including "Scrooged" with Bill Murray, "Buster" with Phil Collins and "Docoon: The Return." So load up on popcorn, M and Ms and soda and see Page D2.

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## FAMOUS COACHMAN

He's the voice of Detroit blues

By Larry O'Connor  
staff writer

At midnight, the street off Cass Avenue in Detroit is deserted. A distant light reflects off the rain-soaked pavement.

It's not the yellow brick road, but it will do. As when Dorothy finally meets the Wizard of Oz, one expects the man behind the voice to be bigger than life.

A few minutes of pressing on the buzzer at the door of WDET-FM produces a small woman. She opens the door and leads the visitors to the studio where the man behind the voice sits.

His glasses are slipping down the bridge of his nose, headset sitting crooked on his head. He's looking through pile of records strewn in front of him.

"Hey Cacey," he calls out to his assistant in panic. "Where's that Albert King record?"

Hey, hey, the blues is all right. But they are even better when the Famous Coachman is playing them.

For nearly 13 years, his radio show has brought to life a genre of music that many left for dead in these parts. With his gravelled voice and unorthodox style of delivery not found this side of Specs Howard, Famous Coachman has made listening to the blues on radio an event.

He has what can be described as a loyal, if not cult following from midnight to 6 a.m. on Sundays (Saturday night) on WDET-FM 102.

"I LOVE messin' with people," said Famous Coachman, 64, of Detroit ("That's my real name. Ask WDET who they address the checks to.") "I really enjoy the music."

At midnight, Famous Coachman addresses the radio audience with his ever famous greeting "Hello Detroit and neighboring cities." From there, the stage is his.

Famous Coachman started playing the blues on radio in 1971 on WGPR-AM. The show used to be broadcast live from his record store on Charlevoix and Mount Elliot in Detroit.

People would call in their requests and he'd have one of his children grab the disc from the rack so he could play it. Neighbors and friends used to drop in, bringing food.

The record needle hits "Shake 'em On Down" by Bobo Jenkins and the subject turns to the late blues artist who died in 1984. Jenkins and Coachman were good friends.

Together, they provided the shot in the arm for the blues in Detroit. Jenkins organized blues festivals in the early 1970s and Famous Coachman was his emcee.

"I called him a man with a one track mind," Famous Coachman said. "Let's keep the blues alive."

That wasn't Coachman's original mission when he left his hometown of Pensacola, Fla., in 1947. Like many people from the south, he came to Detroit looking for work in the auto industry.

Coachman recalls listening to his first blues record at 4 on a Victrola his father had bought during the Depression. He used to crank up "Milkcow Blues" and "Jeep Blues" for dad after he returned from work at the rail yard. Coachman still has both original records.

THE REMINISCING stops as soon as the phone rings.

"Hello WDET," said the Coachman, writing down a request on the back of an envelope. "I don't know if I have that one (click)."

"Hello WDET. What... Man, I can't talk your eye. I'm on the radio."

"Hello WDET. Yeh. All right. Well keep on supporting me, man (click)."

"Hello WDET. Hello Longneck, what's happening man... Well send it to the office at WDET (click)."

WDET's pledge drive ended the previous week, but callers still wanted to contribute. Famous Coachman's show raised \$5,900 with 203 pledges, surpassing the station's goal of 120.

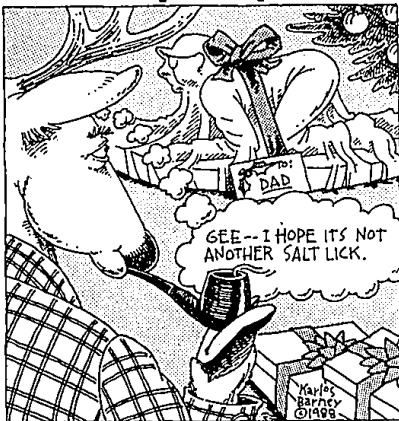
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Famous Coachman is heard on WDET-FM 102 from midnight to 6 a.m. Sundays.

BILL DRESLER/staff photographer

## Karlos Barney Holiday Gift Guide



What to get for the deer who has everything:  
A ceramic human for the front yard.

## Store at forefront of new ski fashions

What's fashionable in ski wear you ask? Well, no better person to make an inquiry to than Don Thomas, owner of Don Thomas Sporthaus in Bloomfield Hills.

Thomas has been answering that question for 35 years.

"We have fluorescent, we have jewel tones, we have brights," Thomas said. "It's definitely a fun, fun look."

Don Thomas Sporthaus, 6600 Telegraph, near Maple Road in the Bloomfield Plaza, recently marked its 35th year in business with a fashion show featuring the latest ski wear and gear. The fashions featured in the Nov. 31 issue of Street Scene were courtesy of Don Thomas Sporthaus.

Things have certainly changed in the area of ski wear and ski gear from when he opened for business in 1953. Since then, Don Thomas

Sporthaus has been at the forefront of the latest trends.

FOR ONE, bindings today are much safer. There are boots that grip the leg tightly, rather than being attached to the ski itself, thus allowing a quick release.

Also ski clothing is much more lightweight and breathable.

"It started with the Gore-Tex thing," Thomas said. "Now everyone makes fabrics like that."

Everyone is anxiously awaiting that first snow. But despite the greens outside, Thomas said business is booming inside his store. Those first few flurries at the beginning of the month had people scurrying to buy ski wear.

"It's really always been a fashionable thing," Thomas said. "When you talk about skiing, there's always been a fashionable image to the sport."



This skier is sporting a Neveca jacket (ranging from \$265-\$385) that is designed in England and is made of moisture proof, breathable fabric called Entrant. The Voki skis (ranging from \$350-\$450) are for the high-performance skier. These items are both available at Don Thomas Sporthaus, 6600 Telegraph, near Maple Road in the Bloomfield Plaza.