

Thursday, July 8, 2001

THE WEEKEND

FRIDAY



Alexander Pollock stars in the comedy "Cats & Dogs" opening today at metro Detroit movie theaters.

SATURDAY

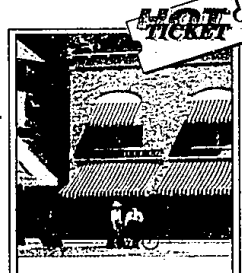


Laugh with Jim Hamm at the Ann Arbor Comedy Showcase, 8 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. Tickets \$8 in advance, \$10 at the door. Call (734) 996-9080 for information.

SUNDAY



Thick Knot Rhythm Ensemble presents Ron Allen's "Eye Mouth Graffiti Body Shop" 5 p.m. at the Metropolitan Center for Creative Arts, Detroit. Tickets \$15, call (313) 831-8976.



AMERICA'S HOMETOWN CELEBRATION

There's lots to do and see at Greenfield Village this summer during America's Hometown Celebration through Sunday, Aug. 19. The village is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. When: Monday, June 18 to Sunday, Aug. 19. Hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Call (313) 271-1620 or visit www.hfmgv.org for more information.



The King Reigns July 14-15

BY CARA FLOWMAN
STAFF WRITER
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Brank out the blue suede shoes, sequin white jump suits and 1950s memorabilia as ElvisFest invades Depot Town, near Ypsilanti, July 14-15, for a jam-packed weekend to honor the King, Elvis Presley.

Frog Island park in Depot Town will be transformed into a mini-Graceland. A full line-up of Elvis tribute bands will get all shook up as they cover some of Elvis' greatest hit songs.

Impersonator Irv Cass will be on hand as the master of ceremonies on the Frog Island stage. The festival will take guests back to the '50s with its hot rod cars and Elvis movies showing throughout the two-day adventure. Vendors and collectors will gather to show off their goods and add to their Elvis amassment.

Origin

This is the second year the event has been held in Michigan. Jerry French started the event last year with a business partner, and it was so successful that he started planning another one in January.

French currently chairs the oversight committee for the festival and is also the events' vendor coordinator. Ten people are organizing this year's event and there are 80 volunteers. Last year, the festival lasted only one day, but over 15,000 people came out to Depot Town.

French got the idea from a news story he saw about a similar festival in Montana. Even though he wasn't a big fan of Elvis, French saw how much fun people were having in Montana and decided to hold his own in Michigan.

Tribute artists

"We have tribute artists coming from all over North America," French said. "These guys are recognized in their field. They're all very good."

Shocked at the wide range of Elvis fans, French said he can't believe how popular the King is, even today.

"Everybody likes a little bit of Elvis. He still hasn't died in the public eye," French said. Tracy Briggs, director of the ElvisFest said people shouldn't worry that only real, hard-core King fans will be there.

"You're not going to be in the throng of wackos," said Briggs, who has been involved in the ElvisFest for two years. "You are going to run

into guys walking around in jump suits."

Portrait of a king

One of the tribute artists this year, Sherman Arnold, has been impersonating the King since 1956 when he was just 16 years old.

Arnold considers himself among the first people to ever impersonate the singer.

"Elvis was quite a phenomenon," said Arnold, whose tribute band, Interstate II, will play at the festival. Unable to decide, he said, "I have about 20 favorite (Elvis) songs."

Arnold's band plays about 140 shows a year, he said, and begins each show with about 45 minutes of Elvis tunes. The band also plays music by other artists and from other eras.

In a wispy Elvis-like voice, Arnold traced his Elvis-filled life back to his childhood and the first time he heard the music. Almost 35 years later, Arnold was inducted into the Elvis Presley International Impersonators Association Hall of Fame, in 1991, in Chicago, an honor any impersonator would love on his resume.

Arnold, who is from Taylor, is a spitting image of Elvis, even at the age of 61. His North Carolina upbringing gave him a slightly southern accent, and the pictures of him on his fan club Web site expose an uncanny resemblance to the rock 'n' roll pioneer. But Arnold insists, don't call him "Elvis" because there was only one King. "If you weren't born with the name it's not yours to use."

Briggs saw her first tribute band at last year's festival and was surprised. "I guess I was amazed that there are so many people who dedicate their lives to Elvis. These guys aren't trying to be Elvis, they're trying to pay tribute (to him)."

Something for everyone

Even if you're not a fan of Elvis, French assures that the event is for everyone.

Near the main stage, a children's

fair will be set up for parents and kids under 11. From 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. both days, the Children's Fantasy Fair will have mazes, magic shows, art and story telling just for kids.

For all ages, the festival will have amateur contests on a second stage for aspiring wannabes and Elvis-only karaoke. Prizes will be given out for the best Elvis look-a-like costume and the person with the best '50s-style costume.

"Last year was great," Arnold said of the 2000 ElvisFest which was also held in Depot Town. "It blew everybody's mind. It's just like a state fair but with Elvis."

French retained permission from Graceland estate to hold the event and use Elvis' image, which will add to the overall authenticity of the event.

A number of items will be raffled off, such as a trip for two to Graceland, a Corvette and a Harley Davidson motorcycle. All ticket sales and raffle profits will go to the Elvis Presley Foundation.

French added that he couldn't believe how excited the audience got during the shows at last year's ElvisFest. "The women from six to 60 were charging the stage," he said, adding that Arnold's band is not to be missed. "This is the most famous man in the world," French said.

Elvis Fest

When: From 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday, July 14 and 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sunday, July 15.
Where: Frog Island park in Ypsilanti's Depot Town off I-94 exit 183 on Cross Street at Huron.
Tickets: \$5 a day, that includes access to the Frog Island stage, the second stage and the children's fair. Admission to the car show is \$2, no charge for children under 10. Tickets will be available at the gate. Remember to sign up your '50s garb before you head out to the festival. Dressing up is encouraged. For more information call (734) 480-3974, or visit www.elvisfest.org.



Impersonator: Sherman Arnold and his band will be performing at ElvisFest.

BOOKS

Detroit native turns hobby into second career

BY STEVE KOWALSKI
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Author David Foremba wore a flashy tie featuring Detroit landmarks and hot spots during a launch party for his book, *Detroit: A Motor City History*, last week at the Detroit Public Library.

Pictured in multi-colors were the Hocktown Cafe, Fox Theatre and Renaissance Center, along with the Spirit of Detroit statue in front of the city council building.

"I'm known for ties," Foremba said. The Arcadia (Publishing) people saw it on me (at a reception) in Chicago and asked me for a repeat performance."

Nice fashion statement but anyone can buy a tie to fit the occasion.

It's his physical ties to the Motor City that make him the perfect person to pitch a book on Detroit's 300th anniversary. A lifelong Detroit-area resident, the 48-year-old Foremba saw the city through many eras, including the turbulent race riots of the 1960s. Foremba was raised in Detroit and graduated from Redford-Bishop Burgess. He's also lived in Redford and Dearborn and currently resides in Westland, his home for the last nine years, with wife Kathleen.

"It was a scary period (the 1960s),"

he remembers. "A decade for change. On the other hand sometimes you have to tear apart something so it can build itself correctly."

A U.S. Army veteran, he continued his foreign relations when he returned, working 11 years as a toll collector at the Ambassador Bridge, which connects Detroit and Windsor. The job involved a little psychology to go with a view of the skyscrapers on each side of the Detroit River.

"I pulled five (people) off the railings," he said, proudly remembering the suicide attempts he stopped.

Always a fan of literature, he gained an interest in writing over the last 12 years while working at the Detroit Public Library, where he currently manages the Burton Historical Collection.

The career move seemed appropriate, he said.

"I was a reader and possessor of books so I said, 'Why not work at the library?' said Foremba. "And it was always my goal to publish a book."

Goal accomplished, times seven. For someone with no formal writing background, unless you count the papers he typed in school, Foremba puts out books almost in assembly-line

fashion. In three years, he has authored seven books, all on Detroit history, including six through Arcadia, publishers of regional and local interest books.

His job lends him access, with a copyright fee, to published pictures of major events in Detroit history. Since pictures can say a thousand words, that's usually half the battle in book publishing, isn't it?

Foremba said he hasn't gotten rich from a second career. "They're steady sellers but I've still got my day job," Foremba said.

Foremba is a Detroit sports fan and it's evident in that three of his previous works published by Arcadia are sports related: *Baseball: The American League; Baseball in Detroit 1896-1968*; and *Detroit: City of Champions*.

Current Detroit sports fans, who labor through mediocre seasons in three of the four major sports, must think the latter book belongs on the fiction shelf.

Among his other works are *Detroit 1880-1890* and *Detroit 1930-1969*. His latest release, which has more



than 100 illustrations among 18 chapters and 160 pages, is his "most narrative," he said. "I knew Detroit was coming up on its 300th year and I knew where the photos were, so I presented the proposal and Arcadia gave me the green light," Foremba said. Foremba's book, *Detroit: A Motor City History*, is available at Borders, Barnes & Noble and Walden books stores for \$29.99.