

There's good rockin'

Senior Center show honors rockers Eddie Cochran and Buddy Holly

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Photo by Brie Cohen

Richie Lee sings Buddy Holly tunes and plays the guitar as Dave Cimino, background, plays the drums Tuesday at Skyline Plaza near the Senior Center during the Tribute to Eddie Cochran and Buddy Holly concert. The event was a fundraiser for the Senior Center.

A day after fans of rock 'n' roll paid tribute to Buddy Holly, J.P. "The Big Bopper" Richardson and Ritchie Valens at the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake, Iowa, a concert at Skyline Plaza in Albert Lea honored local son Eddie Cochran.

And 25 rock lovers from across the Atlantic Ocean were part of the 200 people who attended the show, headlined by Cochran tribute performer Alan Clark of West Covina, Calif.

Clark, 65, last performed in Albert Lea in the early 1990s for the first Eddie Cochran Days, which back then was organized by the Eddie Cochran Echo Club. Held the second weekend of June, it is now run by the Low Bucks Car Club.

The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the Surf began their celebration last Wednesday, and Clark was in Clear Lake as a participant and a performer.

"It was packed. You couldn't move," he said.

Clark played at the lounge of the Surf three days straight.



Photo by Brie Cohen

Alan Clark pays tribute to Eddie Cochran on stage in Skyline Plaza near the Senior Center on Tuesday.

In Albert Lea, his concert was a tribute and a fundraiser for the Albert Lea Senior Center. Clark sang Cochran tunes, with a few of the old folks boogieing to the songs. Also performing were Richie Lee of Des Moines, Iowa, who dressed like Holly and sang his songs, and Ira Pugh, who sang songs by women rockers of the 1950s.

Terry Cole, 68, a member of the Senior Center, organized the show. Cole retired in 1985 from Wilson & Co. and retired again last month as maintenance man at Albert Lea Medical Center. Cole knew Cochran starting back in the 1940s when Cole's father had a grocery store that employed members of Cochran's family.

“This is what I am trying to promote is Eddie Cochran and his life he had in Albert Lea,” Clark said. “He’s our favorite son.”

He attended the 50 Winters Later concert at the Surf last week and performers were asking him all about Cochran.

“Other musicians have great respect for Eddie,” he said.

British vacation company Dead Great Tours organized the trip to America, which came in various packages. Trip organizer Murray Rogers of Brighton, England, said the full package started three weeks ago with a flight to Cleveland to visit the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland. The tour headed to Memphis, Tenn., and Tupelo, Miss., to visit Elvis Presley sites.



Photo by Brie Cohen

Christian Amundson, right, dances with Barb Engebretson to Buddy Holly tunes just outside the Senior Center on Tuesday.

From there, they headed to Lubbock, Texas, which is where Holly was born, and to Clovis, N.M., home of the studio where Holly began recording. Then it was north to Iowa for the 50 Winters Later celebration at the Surf.

Rogers said Holly and Cochran were bigger in Great Britain than they were in the United States.

“For many, it was their introduction to rock ’n’ roll,” he said.

The concert Monday at the Surf was 50 years — to the day, Feb. 2, 1959, — after Holly, Richardson and Valens played their final performances. Their plane took off in the wee hours of Feb. 3 that year from Mason City and crashed north of Clear Lake in a blinding snowstorm.

It was cold and windy when members of the tour visited the crash site. Rogers said he understood the wind chill was at 21 below.

Overall, the 50 Winters Later concert was a celebration, Rogers said. The Surf was packed and still much like it was all those years ago.

“The visit to the crash site was extreme,” he said.



Photo by Brie Cohen

Richie Lee sings Buddy Holly songs on the stage in Skyline Plaza near the Senior Center on Tuesday. He was dressed in gold and black pants, jacket and bow tie. He said his mom cuts his hair and he styles it to look like Buddy Holly.

Three years ago was the last time Rogers had brought a tour to the Surf. Someone remarked on the ride north to the Twin Cities airport that Albert Lea was the hometown of Eddie Cochran. This time, he wanted to make sure Cochran’s hometown wasn’t missed.

The group dined Tuesday night at Crescendo and today flies back across the pond. Well, except for Rogers and his wife, Christine, who today head to Scottsdale, Ariz., to soak up some heat.

Not everyone on the British tour of America was British. 43-year-old Brigitte Kermarquer of Treguier, France, and 45-year-old Laurent Compas of Paris were part of it, too. They have been to America many times to visit famous sites of rock ’n’ roll but it was their first time to Cochran’s hometown and were thrilled to be at the show.

Brian Robson, 62, of Northampton, England, said.

Terri Booth, 68, had to be moved from coach to first class for the flight back to Britain. In Clear Lake, she slipped and fell on an icy sidewalk and was watching the Cochran tribute Monday from a wheelchair. Her

partner, Frank Massie, 66, said doctors in Mason City said she couldn't fly unless she upgraded her seat to accommodate foot space.

Performer Websites

Richie Lee:

www.richieleeproductions.com

Alan Clark:

www.aclarkarchives.com

Massie and Booth are from Aberdeen, Scotland. Massie said he saw Cochran on his final tour in Glasgow. Many Albert Leans know Cochran died at the age of 21 when a taxi he was in crashed into a lamp post in Chippenham, England, during that final tour.

A former insurance man and later a record store owner, Massie began collecting records in 1958.

"I just celebrated my 50th anniversary of being a rock 'n' roll fan, he said.

Before the concert, the British tour group visited the Cochran exhibit at the Freeborn County Historical Museum. Being rock aficionados, they already knew the facts of Cochran's life, Rogers said.

Lee, who performed Tuesday as Buddy Holly, is an 18-year-old from Des Moines, Iowa, who sports Buddy Holly hair. He said his mother cuts it and then he styles it.

His parents listen to 1950s music and he grew up listening to it. "I always favored him," he said.

Lee also has a band called Richie Lee and the Fabulous 50s. He graduated last year from North High School.

Albert Lea Senior Center Director Paula Buendorf said the impetus for the concert began with Cole asking about entertainment for the British tour "and it just mushroomed from there."

The Senior Center members sold meals and soft drinks, which served as the fundraising portion of the show. Buendorf said the funds will assist with a funding crunch the center faces because of a reduction in city assistance. The city is dealing with cuts in state assistance.

Comments:

I have been watching Richie Lee for about 4 years in Iowa and he was good when he was young and better now. Albert Lea was lucky to have him. Would have loved to be here and tell Terry Cole to keep up the good work. Things like this get Albert Lea in the public eye for good reasons and not something bad. The bad things are what we usually hear about. Thanks again Terry and the Senior Center. snowbird February 4, 2009

We were at the Kato Ballroom on January 25th and saw Richie Lee sing and play. He is a great performer and such poise for an 18 year old. Am looking forward to coming to Albert Lea February 20 to see him at the Marion Ross Center. michie62 February 4, 2009