

CLEAR LAKE Mirror Reporter

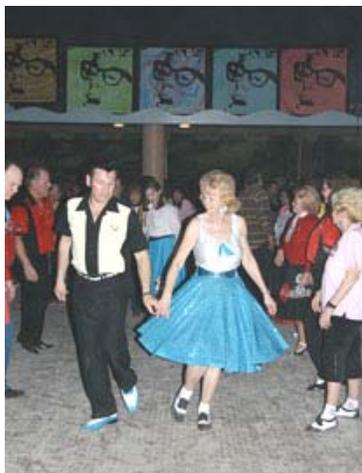
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Fifties in February fans, entertainers and the community

By clreporter_deb
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Rave on

To borrow a phrase from a Buddy Holly song, fans are raving on and on about the music and fun they had during this year's Fifties in February at the Surf Ballroom. "If I had to characterize it, I'd say 'there you go again, Clear Lake,'" said Jeff Nicholas, one of the



event co-chairmen this year for the Clear Lake Area Chamber of Commerce. "All the volunteers-- and the community as a whole-- did a fabulous job hosting the entertainers and fans joining us for the celebration this year."

Nicholas said he and others who worked on the event met Monday afternoon at the Surf to begin wrapping up the 2008 event and looking toward next year, when the Surf will mark 50 years since Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and J.P. "The Big Bopper" Richardson played their final concert at the Surf Ballroom.

"We sold a few more tickets this year, but the event wasn't quite a sell-out. But gift shop sales and all other areas were up in revenues," said Nicholas. "All in all, it was an amazing weekend."

Expect a 2009 sell-out Given the great time and great entertainment this year's crowd enjoyed-- combined with a 50 year commemorative event in 2009-- Nicholas said he expects a quick sell-out next year. He gave the weekend crowds notice to place next year's dates on their calendars. He also said mailings and emails to this year's ticket holders, as well as press releases, will give fans at least a week notice of 2009 ticket sales.

"If they have ever been a Johnny on the Spot, this

would be the time to do it," said Nicholas, saying he anticipates a quick sell-out. The Surf hopes to begin announcing details on next year's entertainment line-up and special plans by May or June, but the dates are certain. The event will run Wednesday through Monday, Jan. 28-Feb. 2, 2009. The expansion to Monday comes in keeping with the original Monday night concert the Winter Dance Party had at the Surf in 1959.



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Even the entertainers were wowed

Those buying tickets and enjoying the multitude of events associated with Fifties in February weren't the only ones who had a great time. The entertainers themselves could be found swaying along to the music of their peers, looking through memorabilia at shows, and catching up with old and new friends. "We told them we're coming back next year, even if we're not in the line-up," said Jay Reincke, of Jay and the Americans. The group, one of the top 50s groups in the country, first performed at the Surf last year with Reincke as their new lead singer. They were an immediate fan favorite.

"They seem to love Clear Lake as much as we all do," said Denni Sue Erickson, a volunteer for the Chamber. "They've made a lot of friends here and seem to have a ball all over town. They're so much fun." The Belmonts, who were making their first trip back to the Surf since performing during the same concert as

Holly, Valens and Richardson in 1959, said they were “overwhelmed with joy” to be asked to perform here again.

“I really didn’t have a lot of memories of the last time we were here, other than it was really cold. Buddy Holly actually backed us up on drums because our drummer got frost bite,” said Fred Milano, an original member of The Belmonts. “This time, we take away great memories of the Surf and Clear Lake.” Tommy and Jeff Vee, sons of Bobby Vee, said they enjoy coming to Clear Lake to “perform the music that we love with the people who love it in the place it was born.”

Members of Flash Cadillac returned to the Surf after an absence of more than 30 years. “The music has always been exciting for us, but playing it here gives it an extra boost,” said Warren Knight. He and group members delighted the audience with tunes like “At The Hop” and “Suzie Q” from the movies American Graffiti and Apocalypse Now, which they appeared in. And Earl “Speedo” Carroll says he now understands how the fans who enter the Surf Ballroom and hear the music feel like they step back in time. Speedo and the Cadillac members amazed the crowd with a performance filled with great sounds and moves on stage. Speedo said he was teased by his friends about his moves they hadn’t seen in years. “When you’re as old as I am, you save them for special occasions,” he said.

Whatever happened to Peggy Sue?

Peggy Sue Gerron was on hand throughout the weekend to autograph copies of her new book, “Whatever Happened to Peggy Sue?” a tell-all about the relationships and events that changed her life. Buddy Holly’s 1957 song immortalized her name. “For a lot of years I simply didn’t say anything,” said Gerron. “But at some point in your life you need to stand up and say ‘I’m Peggy Sue Gerron and this is who I was and what I did. And I did it well.’”

Taking it to the schools and seniors

The Fifties in February celebration spawned a number of out-reach events to share 50s music and culture with all ages. **Richie Lee**, a Des Moines high school senior, has been coming to Clear Lake for years for the February event. The 17-year-old is a Buddy Holly look-alike who sings his music with remarkable similarity. Lee joined friends to take the music to area schools, including Garner and Clear Lake Middle School, helping to raise awareness, as

well as support for the Winter Dance Party Musical Scholarships and Awards.

Lee said he spends almost every weekend performing throughout the Midwest with his group, **Richie Lee and the Fabulous Fifties**. “I plan to keep coming back every year,” said Lee, following a performance at the Clear Lake Senior Citizens Center Thursday. “It’s a dream of mine to some day be up on stage at the Surf.”

Surf owners join in the fun

Dean and Joanne Snyder, who bought the Surf in 1994 and restored it to its original splendor, were among the many who danced and reminisced during Fifties in February. The couple enjoyed a dance on stage Friday as Flash Cadillac performed. Dean also took time to stop at all the booths surrounding the dance floor to greet those attending the event.

The Snyder family was also recognized on stage for their efforts in revitalizing the Surf. “They’ve poured a huge amount of hard work and money into the Surf to preserve it for all of us,” Nicholas told an appreciative audience Saturday. The Clear Lake Evening Lions Club became among the first to support the new non-profit organization which is being established to lease the Surf and continue daily operations. The Evening Lions presented a \$1,000 check to Nicholas, who is a board member of the non-profit North Iowa Cultural Center and Museum Inc.

Nicholas also introduced Laurie Lietz as the new executive director of the North Iowa Cultural Center & Museum. Lietz will be responsible for overseeing the Surf Ballroom’s operations and finances, the development and implementation of a facility maintenance plan, facility tours and volunteer scheduling for the Surf Ballroom, as well as developing and managing all aspects of the concert venue’s marketing program.

“It’s been fantastic,” said Lietz in wrapping up the big weekend. “We had nothing but great comments from not only the fans, but the community and residents, as well.”

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