

Clemens a year later with a can't-miss theme. "Mt. Clemens was already established for fireworks on these Friday nights," Nieporte says. "So our main thing was patriotic. It's fireworks and flags and barbecue and everything that's summertime in Michigan."

Situated just 2 miles from Selfridge Air National Guard Base, Stars & Stripes attracts a significant military-family presence, bills its food-vendor array as "Taste of America" and features a "Democracy's Arsenal" mobile museum exhibit. But music is undoubtedly the draw for many.

"We're pulling acts that have traditionally played the big stage at DTE or Meadow Brook or Freedom Hill," says Cassidy. "We firmly believe this is the strongest musical lineup when it comes to free festivals. Sometimes I think festivals focus on a lot of things outside music. We have a core music focus that we work on throughout the year."

Nieporte estimates that about 40% of Stars & Stripes visitors come from outside Macomb County, and that portion could grow with no Cityfest drawing them to Detroit.

That's been a bonanza for Mt. Clemens, says Mayor Barb Dempsey.

"It absolutely does a lot for the economy and the businesses downtown," says Dempsey, who notes that most shops will expand hours for fest

patrons. "This was a weekend that used to be very quiet, and they breathed life into downtown for our merchants. I think it's the premier event for the east side, and a lot of people feel the same way. It's just snowballed and gotten better each year."

While the City of Mt. Clemens does not directly finance the event, it offers a hand by reducing fees for permits, water hookups and sheriff staffing.

The Mt. Clemens Downtown Development Association contributes \$30,000 annually. The fest budget is about \$500,000 this year, says Nieporte.

Stars & Stripes hit the scene during an especially difficult era for free festivals. Amid economic uncertainty, sponsorship dollars have been tougher to come by, particularly in Michigan.

But Nieporte and Cassidy, who have linked up with such big local players as Meijer and DTE Energy, are determined to keep the fest free.

Their work is paying off. In addition to Stars & Stripes and the St. Clair Riverfest (July 23-25 with Candlebox and Great White), Funfest has taken on two new events: the inaugural Uncle Sam Jam in Woodhaven (July 8-11) and Waterford's 10th annual Quake on the Lake (July 15-18).

Both take cues from Stars & Stripes, right down to the music: Eddie Money is among the acts at Uncle Sam Jam, with Mark Farner and Night



Ranger playing Quake on the Lake. "Joe and I have committed our careers to these events on a year-round basis," says Cassidy. "As soon as these events are over, we're planning 2011."

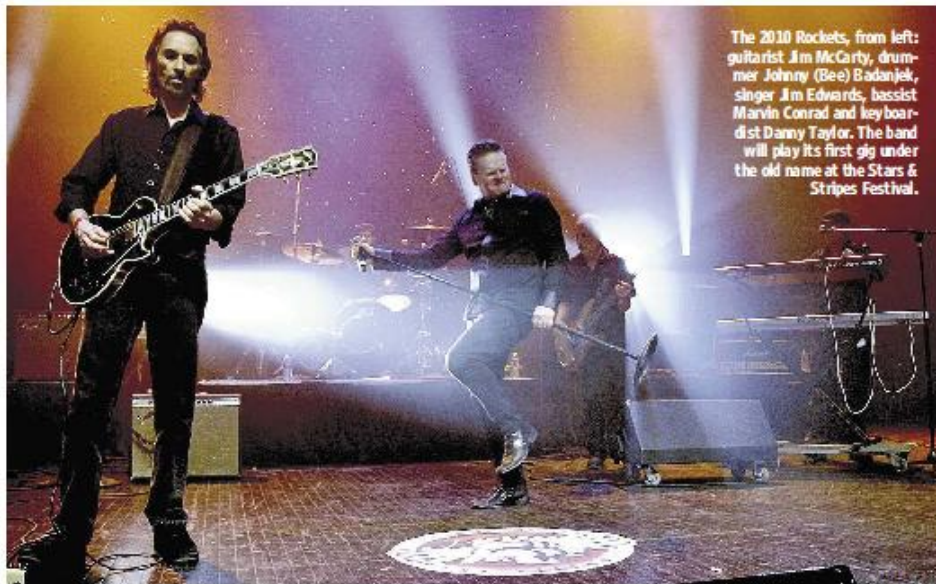
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Revamped Rockets ready to blast off again

BY BEN EDMONDS
FREE PRESS SPECIAL WRITER

For a performing artist, past accomplishments can be a mixed blessing. They create awareness, but they can also feel like haunting ghosts of a former self. That's pretty much the position Johnny (Bee) Badanjek and Jim McCarty have found themselves in, and the resurrection of their band the Rockets can be attributed to a ghost that wouldn't keep quiet and an audience that wouldn't let the group go.

Drummer Bee and guitarist McCarty have been on-and-off professional partners since they were teenagers. Their first group, the Rïvieras, became the foundation for Mitch Ryder & the Detroit Wheels. That band alone is a ticket to rock 'n' roll Valhalla, but for Bee and McCarty it was only their opening salvo. McCarty went on to launch the heavy rock battleship Cac-



The 2010 Rockets, from left: guitarist Jim McCarty, drummer Johnny (Bee) Badanjek, singer Jim Edwards, bassist Marvin Conrad and keyboardist Danny Taylor. The band will play its first gig under the old name at the Stars & Stripes Festival.

RICHARD BLOOM

tus, played with the Buddy Miles Express and Bob Seger, and jammed with Jimi Hendrix. McCarty's mastery of the blues is showcased in his group Mystery Train. He is considered a guitar-

ist's guitarist, and the long list of his admirers only begins with Eric Clapton.

Johnny Bee reteamed with Mitch Ryder to launch the band Detroit before joining Edgar Winter's White

Trash. He played with Seger, Alice Cooper, Dr. John, Nils Lofgren, the Romantics and too many others to list. These days he plays regularly with the Howling Diablos. McCarty and Bee are

STARS & STRIPES MUSIC SCHEDULE

• A-list musicians, but in their lengthy résumés there is a special place for the Rockets, the band they founded in 1972 and drove relentlessly until it imploded in 1988.

The road to the return of the Rockets started last year with a loose group in which Bee and McCarty embraced the full spectrum of their accomplishments and more. "We were calling it the Motor City Rock Revue, for lack of a better name," the drummer explains. "It was all Michigan tunes, that was the concept. All the things we'd been involved with, plus stuff that had inspired us coming up, from R&B to the Rationals and the Stooges. Friends like (the Romantics') Wally Palmar would sit in, and it was huge fun." It was fun that took a serious turn when people from the U.P. and Ohio began showing up for their Wednesday night residency at Mario's in Madison Heights.

Changing the name to the Hell Drivers, the band — with former See Dick Run singer Jim Edwards, bassist Marvin Conrad and Danny Taylor on keyboards — contemplated working new material into the set list. Things went well, but soon hit a wall.

"We'd taken it as far as it could go on the bar scene," Badanjek says. "It wasn't like the early Rockets days where we could play seven nights a week. Now there (are) thousands of bands so you can only play once every three months. People in the business — promoters, DJs, agents — were telling us we should resurrect the Rockets, that we could play bigger venues, maybe go out on tour. We weren't sure. We looked at the Hell Drivers as a way forward. We didn't necessarily want to take a step back."

This is where the band's audience made its desire known. The Hell Drivers had to admit that, even in the midst of their ecstatically received sets, the response to their Rockets material stood out. "You could feel the energy lift whenever we'd play a Rockets song," Badanjek admits. This reflects the quality of the band's music, but also the feeling of unfinished business among its fans. The group never quite broke all the way through.

"We became America's biggest opening act," Badanjek says. "We opened for everybody. Two Kiss tours. Bob Seger. ZZ Top. The Doobie Brothers. Lynyrd Skynyrd. We needed to make the leap to headliner, and we couldn't quite do it. It would have taken a Top 10 record. We came close. We had our headline markets — here, L.A., Florida — but we just couldn't get over

that last hump."

The band's version of Fleetwood Mac's "Oh Well" came closest, with originals "Turn Up the Radio," "Desire" and "Rollin' By the Record Machine" not far behind. But the Rockets were never able to expand on their Midwestern kingdom. Complicating things further, the early-'80s music scene was changing. In the wake of punk and synth-pop, meat-'n'-potatoes rock fell out of favor. Those already on top could weather the storm, but it was hard on anybody down the ladder.

When Badanjek, 62, and McCarty, 65, committed to rebuilding the Rockets brand, they were listening to the common sense of the industry and the passion of their fans. But they couldn't have done it if they didn't have the tools to honor their Rockets legacy. That meant filling the large shoes of the late

Dave Gilbert, who'd taken over lead vocals from Bee in 1976. A stunning rock 'n' roll front man in the classic mold, Gilbert also fell prey to all the classic excesses. This resulted in crash-and-burn stunts with the Amboy Dukes and New Order (formed in L.A. by the Stooges' Ron Asheton and the MC5's Dennis Thompson), and was one contributing

factor in the eventual demise of the Rockets. Gilbert's no-holds-barred assault on life finally caught up with him. He died of cirrhosis in 2001.

"The musicians we've got now are all up to the job," Badanjek says. "Jim Edwards is a phenomenal singer. He's really surprised a lot of people. Dave Gilbert was a great front man. Some nights you'd think he was the best you'd ever seen. Then the next night he could be the exact opposite. You never knew. Jim is a terrific singer, plus he's grounded. That helps a lot."

"This is basically an opportunity to broaden the horizons for the band's music," the drummer continues. "We're willing to give it a shot. People are talking record deals and tours and going to Europe. We'll see. Twenty-seven years is a long time to be away, and we have no illusions about any of it. I'll guarantee one thing, though. You can go to DTE and see all these old groups who've had bigger hit records than we had, but they play 'em like they're old men. The Rockets will give you much more than that."

"We're still playing like we're out of our minds. And maybe we are."

The Rockets perform at 10:30 p.m. Friday on the Budweiser National Stage at Stars & Stripes in Mt. Clemens.

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The Rockets were founded in 1972.

FRIDAY

BUDWEISER NATIONAL STAGE

4 p.m. Sand More Caps
5 Stellar Drive
6:30 Dirty Americans
7:45 Love & Theft
9 John Waite
10:30 The Rockets

FOUNDAIN STAGE

2 p.m. Box Theater Singers
4 Disney Character Hour
6 Presto to the Magician
8 Sally Aronondo
10 The Rocks

MADE IN DETROIT COUNTRY STAGE

5 p.m. Julame
6:15 Ashley Allyson
7:30 Stephen Clark
8:45 The Wenfields
10:30 David Shelby

REAL DETROIT ROCK STAGE

4:30 p.m. School of Rock
5:30 Shockwave
6:45 Grayling
8 Slight Return
9:15 Stiff Competition (Cheap Trick tribute)
10:30 War Machine (Kiss tribute)

SATURDAY

BUDWEISER NATIONAL STAGE

3:30 p.m. Artificial Agent
4:30 Heaven's Wish
5:45 Pistol Day Parade
7:15 Critical Bill
8:45 Fuel
10:30 Vince Neil

FOUNDAIN STAGE

Noon Harry Potter Magic Show
2 Cinderella & Friends Tea Party
4 Box Theater Singers
5 Character Hour

6:30 Presto to the Magician
8 Grove Council
10 Alyssa Simmons

MADE IN DETROIT COUNTRY STAGE

1 p.m. Chad Hoffman
2:30 Jessica Gordon
3:45 April Gibson
5 Mind & the Last Highway
7:45 Robin Moore
9 Austin Scott
10:30 Redhill

REAL DETROIT ROCK STAGE

12:30 p.m. School of Rock
2:45 Smokin' Ash
3 Lies Unknown
4:15 Wade Street
5:30 Black Irish
6:45 Seventh Sun
8 Bear Lake
9:15 Go to Zero
10:30 Hush

SUNDAY

BUDWEISER NATIONAL STAGE

3:15 p.m. The Muggs
4:30 PHX
5:45 Annabelle Road
7:15 JoCabe
8:45 John Michael Montgomery
10:30 Warrior

FOUNDAIN STAGE

Noon Harry Potter Magic Show
2 Cinderella & Friends Tea Party
4 Box Theater Singers
5 Character Hour
6:30 Presto to the Magician
8 Stephanie K
10 Larry Lee

MADE IN DETROIT COUNTRY STAGE

1 p.m. Laura Willie
2:30 Joey Vee
3:45 Yankeeville

5 Kean Newman
6:30 Angus & Stories
7:45 Cowboy Alan
9 Southern Heat
10:30 Longneck Strangler

REAL DETROIT ROCK STAGE

1:30 p.m. School of Rock
3 Us Minus Them
4:15 Ryan Horizon Band
5:30 Electric Playground
6:45 Cyberbyte
8 Avienne
9:15 Apache Stone
10:30 Fleetwood's Back (Fleetwood Mac tribute)

MONDAY

BUDWEISER NATIONAL STAGE

2 p.m. The Gelleads
3 Dave Hamilton
4:15 Class Three Overbite
5:30 VP
7 Jason Denilo

FOUNDAIN STAGE

Noon Harry Potter Magic Show
2 Cinderella & Friends Tea Party
4 Box Theater Singers
5 Character Hour
6:30 Presto to the Magician

MADE IN DETROIT COUNTRY STAGE

1 p.m. Gia Warner
2:30 JT Williams
3:45 John Mason
5 Billy Craig
6:30 Seven Bridges

REAL DETROIT ROCK STAGE

1:30 p.m. School of Rock
3 The Atomics
4:15 Five Second Fuse
5:30 Midnight Haze
6:45 Zoomba (DJ tribute)



The Stars & Stripes Festival will feature music all weekend on four stages.