



River at country bash

December 27, 2007

GRAHAM ROCKINGHAM

THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

(Dec 27, 2007)

Showtime

What: Country New Year's Eve bash, with Blind River, Golden Road (an evening of Keith Urban music) and a Tribute to Gretchen Wilson, featuring Mandi Lee. Hosted by Sam Cook of Country 95.3 FM

When: Monday (New Year's Eve), 8 p.m.

Where: Hamilton Convention Centre, Wentworth Room. Cash bar and food service available.

Tickets: \$25 at the door or through Ticketmaster, 905-527-7666 or online at ticketmaster.ca

Considering the number of A-list country musicians in and around this town, you'd think there would be more places for them to perform. But there hasn't been a real strong country club in Hamilton since bands such as Blue Rodeo would perform at the Dallas nightclub back in the '80s.

"It's a shame," says Kevin Bushey, guitarist and vocalist for the Hamilton-based country band Blind River. "A lot of people don't realize it, but we've got some of the top players living in this city."

Bushey ought to know. He's been around country music all of his life. He was born and raised in Hamilton, but his parents were originally from the Maritimes. He remembers his folks hosting East Coast-style kitchen parties in their east Mountain home.

He dabbled in local rock bands after high school and found a job at Dallas (it was located at Barton and Parkdale for those who can't

remember), eventually working his way up to manager. Since then, he has worked in most aspects of the business -- booking bands, playing in bands and managing bands.

Bushey is currently road manager for two of Canada's top country acts -- Doc Walker and Corb Lund. So he knows talent when he sees it.

And he doesn't have to look much further than his own band, Blind River. His guitarist, Steve Petrie has been a regular with Tommy Hunter for the past 12 years. He's also toured with Stompin' Tom Connors. Bassist Kurk Bernard and drummer Jay Riehl have recorded with Merle Haggard and will be travelling to Asia in the new year with Texas singer John Cody Carter. They also tour Europe with the Canadian band South Mountain.

Two years ago, during a lull in their busy schedules, they got together to create Blind River. It started out as a Top 40 country cover band. But the band is hoping to record their own album next year.

You may not have heard Blind River much in Hamilton because they're busy playing the country club circuit in places such as London, Brantford, Guelph and Kitchener.

Which makes their upcoming New Year's Eve gig at the Hamilton Convention Centre all the more exciting for the band. It's actually in Hamilton.

"We play every other city other than Hamilton," says Bushey. "So for us to play the Convention Centre is huge."

In a way, Blind River will actually be playing three shows in one. They'll start off by introducing Mandi Lee, a Cambridge-based singer who does a tribute to raunchy country star Gretchen Wilson. Bushey will then take over the band for a set of Keith Urban tunes. (If you squint your eyes and turn your head at just the right angle, Bushey looks a little like the country star.)

Blind River will perform its Top 40 set through the rest of the evening, counting down to the new year with champagne and party favours. Seems like a good deal for just \$25.

While Blind River is country rocking on the Convention Centre's main floor there'll be a more elegant (and expensive) New Year's Eve party upstairs in the Chedoke Room. The theme is Old Hollywood Glamour, and the party features an open bar, Hollywood-inspired food, cash prizes and a massive dance floor.

Tickets to the swanky event are \$100 and are available by calling 905-318-5994 or get them online at thevanguards.ca.

grockingham@thespec.com 905-526-3331