

Elvis: Promoter likes city's welcome

Continued from 1A

Cass. Several of the other tribute artists – complete with jet black hair, long sideburns and trademark tans – milled about the crowd. The audience sang and danced while Wright, Torres and Cass belted out some of Presley's most popular songs.

And there's more to come. Throughout the weekend, more than 30 Elvis Presley tribute artists will be performing at the Ritz Theatre, 1530 Newcastle St. in downtown Brunswick, and various pocket parks.

Both professional and non-professional performers will take to the stage at the Ritz Theatre to compete for a chance to compete in the Ultimate Elvis Tribute Artist Contest in August in Memphis, Tenn.

Standing in the crowd Thursday were a few of the judges who will be making that selection. Though they have a challenge ahead, Janette DiRenzo of New Jersey, Nereida How of New York and JoAnn Cruz of Tennessee were excited to get the ball rolling.

"We volunteer to do this. We fly across the country," Cruz said. "And we're really glad to be here. Every one has been so nice."

Jason Sherry, festival producer, agreed, saying, "We've never had a place that's given us the reception that we've gotten here. It's been great."

"I've already gotten the Ritz on hold, tentatively for March 2014, so we can come back and do it



Bobby Haven/The Brunswick News

Elvis tribute artist Cliff Wright performs Thursday at Mary Ross Waterfront Park for the opening ceremony of the Georgia Elvis Festival.

again."

The festival has been highly anticipated. Excited chatter and fliers announcing its arrival began circulating a few months ago.

The excitement grew when several of the performers made appearances at Topsy McSway's, 1414 Newcastle St., downtown Brunswick, in the days leading up to the festival, much to the delight of locals as much as those who traveled to attend the festival.

James Laurens was one of those who caught a sneak peak at the tribute artists.

"I'm not going to be able to go to a lot of it, but I'm excited about this very different event for the area," Laurens said.

As a casual Elvis fan, the St. Simons Island resident appreciates the music and is glad to see this type of event come to the area.

"I'm really excited that it's going to be a fun event here, and the potential other things that could come from it," he said.

• **Lifestyle Editor Lindsey Addison** writes about lifestyle topics. Contact her at ladkison@thebrunswicknews.com, on Facebook or at 265-8320, ext. 316.

The festival

The Georgia Elvis Festival includes:

• Today – Round 1 of the Ultimate Elvis Tribute Artist Contest from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Ritz Theatre, 1530 Newcastle St., downtown. Tickets \$20 to \$30. Free "Elvis in Old Town" performances from 4 to 7 p.m. in downtown squares. "Raised on Rock" concert at 8 p.m. at the Ritz Theatre with headliners Ted Torres, Cliff Wright, Irv Cass and the Change of Habit band. Tickets \$49 to \$89.

• Saturday – Elvis classic car parade at 9 a.m. begins at the Ritz Theatre. Round 2 of the contest from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tickets \$20 to \$30. Free "Elvis in Old Town" performances from 4 to 7 p.m. in downtown squares. "One Night ... Remembered," a celebration of the of the 45th anniversary of Elvis' 1968 comeback special, at 8 p.m. at the Ritz Theatre. Tickets \$49 to \$89.

• Sunday – Free Elvis gospel contest from 9 to 11 a.m. at Mary Ross Waterfront Park. Ultimate Elvis Tribute Artist Contest finals from 1 to 5 p.m. at the Ritz Theatre. Tickets from \$25 to \$35.

Tickets are available at 888-406-5885 or online at georgiaelvisfestival.com.

Airport: Tenants want seat on board

Continued from 1A

months' severance pay along with compensation for sick days and vacation leave he had accrued. He will also serve as a consultant to the airport on three projects, for fire suppression, fencing and a multimillion dollar runway repair.

The airport commission will form a committee to find a replacement for him.

Before allowing audience members to speak at the county commission meeting, Chairwoman Hunt emphasized the intent of the meeting was not to rehash the past but to look for ways to improve the relationship between tenants and airport management.

"I don't want to hear negative comments about the airport director or commission," Hunt said.

She suggested one way to help mend the sometimes contentious relationship would be to appoint tenants of airport facilities to the board as existing terms expire. That idea, however, was immediately opposed by the new chairman of the airport commission.

Hunt said she supports having airport tenants fill two positions on the airport board, but they would not be able to vote on lease renewals, which could be a

conflict of interest. Her concern was if an odd number of tenants was appointed to the nine-person board, it could lead to tie votes.

Commissioner Richard Strickland said he "somewhat" agreed with Hunt, but he was leaning toward just one tenant serving on the airport board. He later suggested it might also be a good idea to appoint a county commissioner to the airport commission in a non-voting capacity.

Commissioner Mike Browning said the county commission was reluctant to get involved in the dispute, but now it's time to find solutions.

"It's time to put some tenants on the airport commission," he said.

Bill Brunson, who became airport commission chairman with the unexpected resignation of McKinley, told commissioners he was opposed to tenants serving on the board because lease considerations and renewals make up the bulk of decisions by board members.

Renn Gruber, president of the Glynn County Airport Tenants Association and owner of Gruber Aviation, suggested appointing tenants from the Brunswick and St. Simons Island airports, as well as one from the tenants associa-

tion. He described tenants as "the lifeblood of a healthy airport."

While the county commission has ultimate authority on who serves on the airport commission – it typically accepts recommendations made to it by the Brunswick and Glynn County Development Authority – it has no control over airport operations.

County Commissioner Bob Coleman questioned Thursday the structure that gives the development authority a say in airport commission appointments. Coleman said the airport commission was originally created by the county commission, so it should have more control over the board.

"If you can't control it, you need to get rid of it," he said. "We need more control over the airport commission."

Development Authority Executive Director Nathan Sparks didn't disagree, saying his organization's mission is jobs creation and his board members don't have the expertise to manage airports. "There may be some reasons to separate the two," he said. "They have been great partners, for the record."

Scott McQuade, executive director of the Golden Isles Convention and Visitors Bureau, told

commissioners they should be aware of the importance of having stability in management of the airports. "We have grown concerned about the message sent to the public," he said.

Mike Pickett, a pilot and former airport commission chairman, suggested hiring separate managers at the two airports. "We've got a terrible public relations problem," he said. "With Mr. Brian's resignation, that problem will go away."

In addition to her resignation, McKinley left the airport commission suggestions for repairing the relationship with tenants.

The airport should reach out to the county and the development authority to assist Stambaugh Aviation with a planned expansion at the airport that it says has been thwarted by Brian, she said. Airport commissioners Bill Houseman and Michael Hannell would serve as liaisons between the airport and Stambaugh.

The process of revising regulations should be slowed down to allow time to review each concern brought by a tenant, McKinley wrote in her resignation letter, and a tenant should be allowed to serve on the board to "help the healing process that needs to take place."

TSA stands by plan to allow knives on planes

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The head of the Transportation Security Administration told lawmakers Thursday he stands by his plan to allow passengers to carry small knives onto planes despite a growing backlash against the proposal.

It's unlikely in these days of hardened cockpit doors and other preventative measures that the small folding knives could be used by terrorists to take over a plane, TSA Administrator John Pistole told a hearing of the House Homeland Security Committee.

On the other hand, searching for the knives on passengers

or in their carry-on bags is time consuming, Pistole said. TSA screeners confiscate about 2,000 such knives every day, with each incident chewing up about two to three minutes, he said.

"I think the decision is solid and it stands and we plan to move forward," Pistole said.

The policy, which goes into ef-

fect April 25, has sparked strong opposition from flight attendants, federal air marshals, some pilot unions, and even aviation insurers. In the hands of the wrong passengers, the knives can be used to harm flight attendants and other passengers, critics say.

Several airline CEOs have also expressed qualms.

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