

# The Call

## Church Hosts SonSplash 2007

Staff Writer

Perhaps you've seen one of the bright blue, yellow and red posters around town? They seem to be everywhere – stapled to telephone poles, taped to the window of your favorite restaurant, or just about anywhere else one would fit. Or maybe you've heard one of the many radio spots that are airing on the city's two radio stations and on WARV, the area's largest-reach Christian station?

The posters and radio commercials describe the 3rd Annual SonSplash Christian Arts and Music Festival that rolls into World War II Memorial State Park this coming Saturday, September 15<sup>th</sup> from 10:00 am to 7:00 p.m.

SonSplash is a different kind of festival for the city. First of all, everything is completely free of charge – music all day long, hot dogs and drinks, popcorn and cotton candy, face painting, a tremendous array of activities for children, an inflatable bouncer, and drawings for prizes.

Apparently, the message has resonated with the Greater Woonsocket community. The festival drew about 2,000 people for each of the first two years it ran, and festival coordinators expect SonSplash 2007 to reach an even larger audience.

Pastor Gene Giguere of North Main Street's Harvest Community Church, the festival's chief sponsor, sees it as an opportunity for our neighbors to come together for a day of wholesome fun, for seeing old friends and meeting new ones. "It has been amazing to see the churches throughout the city show up year after year and just have fun and serve together," Giguere said. "Jesus said that the world will know that we are His disciples when they see the love we have for one another. And at SonSplash we simply come together to serve the community and celebrate our faith."

The festival has plenty of moving parts. Diane Whatmough, SonSplash's head coordinator, tells a story of cooperation and co-laboring, of everyone doing his or her part to bless the people of our city. The main stage, which is the center of the day's activities, will be bustling with commotion. Seven premier Christian bands – some of which have spent time in the recording studio and produced their own CDs – are scheduled to appear.

“The music will cover a fairly large range of styles,” Giguere said, “We'll hear contemporary Christian music from the bands *Sheepfold* and *White Stone*, Christian rock from *4 A Cross*, Latin flavored music from Pastor Herson Gonzalez' *Calvary Worship Team*, folk/acoustic music from *Lisa Boisclair and the Trophies of Grace* and traditional gospel music from *Seasonings*.

And if that's not enough to satisfy you, there's *Bill Mallia and the Gulf Stream Band*, Christian music's answer to Jimmy Buffett. “No kidding – he plays barefoot and brings his own palm tree!” Giguere laughed. “That's a full day of music,” he said, “The stage hands are going to have quite a job getting one band off and the next one on and staying on schedule. And, by the way, there's no dead time on the stage. While the next band is setting up, festival goers will be treated to world-class puppetry and mime shows.”

All of the musicians will be performing at their own expense; none are paid to play at the event. They perform as a labor of love because they believe in the spirit of the festival. “It has truly been a blessing to see these bands come together to minister at SonSplash,” said Joy Lavallee, the festival's main stage coordinator, “Some travel from as far away as New Hampshire, Cape Cod, and South County Rhode Island while others are local artists. And they have all donated their time and talents for this event.”

Children's activities will also run throughout the day, and, with two SonSplash festivals under their belt, the children's staff has got it down to a science. A large array of games and art and craft projects will be available for the children and none of them will leave empty handed. “Thanks to our good friends at *Hollywood Video Park Square*, we have an abundance of theater-sized candy to keep the little ones smiling,” Giguere said.

Which brings up another unique point about SonSplash: the community's local merchants have helped to make the festival a success from the beginning. “Many local businesses have lent a hand to SonSplash,” Giguere

said, “And we are grateful for each and every one of them.” Donations have come in the form of food, water, building material, gift cards and items for the free multi-prize drawing that will take place at the end of the day.

Among the festival’s donors are Blockbuster Video at Cumberland Plaza, Kentucky Fried Chicken on Clinton Street, Wendy’s Restaurant and Stop and Shop at Park Square, Wal-Mart at Diamond Hill, and Calvin Presbyterian Church. “The folks at the Stadium Theater gave us 8 tickets for coming events and Greg’s Restaurant of Rhode Island donated 700 hot dogs and an assortment of other items, they’ve been just great,” Giguere said, “And as we have freely received, we will freely give. Everything at SonSplash is completely free of charge. This is our way of showing Woonsocket that the churches love them.”

Father Bob Perin of All Saints Parish on Rathburn Street is loaning the festival 200 chairs for the event. Giguere bewailed the news that Perin will be moving to a new parish in Pawtucket. “Father Bob has been a gift to this community and it’s been my pleasure to work closely with him on behalf of the poor for several years. He will leave a huge hole in the city when he leaves,” Giguere said.

A final important component to SonSplash is the information tables. “Serving the needy of our community is very important to the area’s churches,” said Giguere, whose Harvest Community Church runs the city’s only men’s shelter 7 nights a week throughout the winter months. “Many of our neighbors have needs but don’t know about valuable programs that are available to them.”

Social service organizations such as Family Resources Community Action and CareNet will be on hand to let folks know what programs are available to them. The Bloodmobile will also be on site for all who might like to help out with a donation.

With a beautiful day of free music, food and fun planned, SonSplash looks like a best bet for next Saturday. And, as Pastor Giguere said, “Don’t you at least want to see what a Christian Jimmy Buffett looks like?”