

104th
Annual

WEST END
FAIR 1920



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TheWestEndFair.com

WEST END FAIR SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Sunday, Aug. 23

Quarter Midget Racing, 11 a.m., Arena
PV Cubs Cheerleading, 3 p.m., Bandshell
Kids Pedal Pull, 3 p.m., Arena Hub
Opening Ceremony / Queen Coronation, 3 p.m., Main Stage
Vesper Service, 4 p.m., Main Stage
Mere Mortals, 5 p.m., The Pub
Chris Eckert, 7 and 9 p.m., Main Stage
Cartesion Dance Academy, 7 p.m., Bandshell
Fireworks, 9:30 p.m., Arena

Monday, Aug. 24

Rides: 2 wristbands for \$25, all day
Midnight Special, 3 and 4:15 p.m., Main Stage
Steel Creek Duo, 5 p.m., The Pub
PV Band, 5:30 p.m., Bandshell
KOI Drag Racing: Practice and registration at 5 p.m.; eliminations at 7 p.m.; Classes. Kids, Quads, Dirt bikes, Modified, Open, SXS; Diesel, Gas, 2 Wheel Drive, 4 Wheel Drive, Buggies, Semis, 6 p.m., Arena
Isaac Cole, 7 and 8:30 p.m., Main Stage

Tuesday, Aug. 25

Sensory Day, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
\$2.50 admission from 2-4 p.m.
Ride special: \$2.50 for tickets purchased between 2-6 p.m., tickets good all week
Harry Strunk, 3 and 4:15 p.m., Main Stage
Steve & Steve, 5 p.m., The Pub
East Stroudsburg South HS Band, 5:30 p.m., Bandshell
Demo Junk Car Race, 7 p.m., Arena
Cramer Bros. Band, 7 and 8:30 p.m., Main Stage

Wednesday, Aug. 26

Admission \$4 for military and veterans with ID
Antique Tractor Pull, 10 a.m., Arena
Livestock Judging, 11:30 a.m., Agricultural area.
Fusia Dance, 2 p.m., Bandshell
Swing Time Dolls, 2:30 and 6 p.m., Main Stage
Richie and the High Street Rockers, 4 and 8:15 p.m., Main Stage
Last One Standing Trio, 5 p.m., The Pub
Senior Program, 5:30 p.m., Main Stage
Demo Run What You Found, 7 p.m., Arena, with stock small car, small car/mid-size, stock '80s or newer

Thursday, Aug. 27

Kids' Day: \$4 admission with school



The Goat Island Petting Zoo is the world tallest traveling Petting Zoo and is open during the hours of the fair.



What's more fun than a barrel of monkeys? Capuchin monkeys riding dogs in the Banana Derby, of course. Check out the shows daily near the arena.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Throughout the week, Abe Lincoln and George Washington will be strolling the grounds. Portrayed by Eric Richardson, Honest Abe will also be stopping to present the Gettysburg address in the bandshell several times a day.

ID; parent of child 11 and under gets \$5 admission

Josh Squared Band, 3 and 5 p.m., Main Stage

Pocono Academy of Dance, 3 p.m., Bandshell

Dave & Brenda Rehrig, 5 p.m., The Pub

Kanin Wren's Taylor Swift Experience, 7 and 8:30 p.m., Main Stage

Demolition derby, 7 p.m., Arena, with power wheels, full size trucks, minivan/SUV/mini trucks and big cars

Friday, Aug. 28

Half price admission, 2-4 p.m.
Katz 22, 3 and 4:30 p.m., Main Stage
Ally Brown, 5:30 p.m., The Pub
Cartesion Dance Academy, 6 p.m., Bandshell
NPJ Truck and Tractor Pulls, 6 p.m.,

Arena

Mystery City, 7 and 8:30 p.m., Main Stage

Saturday, Aug. 29

Lorah's Garden Tractor Pulls, noon, Arena

4H Livestock Auction, noon, Agricultural Area

Vinyl Rush, 3 and 4:15 p.m., Main Stage

Wood Carving Auction, 5 p.m., Main Stage

Patrick Conklin, 5:30 p.m., The Pub

Fusia Dance Center, 6 p.m., Bandshell

Bullride Mania Rodeo, 6:30 p.m., Arena

Steel Creek, 7:30 and 9 p.m., Main Stage
Gates open at 2 p.m. daily. Admission is \$8 for everyone 11 or older.

Shooting Star Fireworks to open fair with a bang

BY JEFF MOELLER
TNEEDITOR@TNONLINE.COM

Whether you're a fireworks enthusiast or not, you may wonder how many fireworks comprise a usual 15- to 20-minute show at a local fair, carnival or ceremony.

According to Nicholas Kroboth of Shooting Star Fireworks, that number can range from anywhere from 600 to 800 in a single session.

Shooting Star Fireworks will be conducting the fireworks show on opening night of the West End Fair.

Eight years ago, Kroboth decided to dive into the business that fascinated him in his youth. His father and stepfather also found fireworks worthy of watching and also dabbling in the business.

Currently, Shooting Star Fireworks shoots over 50 shows a year, with the client base ranging from Lebanon County across to Berks and Schuylkill counties and up to Luzerne County and down into Bucks County.

It has included a wide scope of sites in the greater northeastern and eastern parts of the state. Kroboth's longest trip was to Ocean City, Maryland. The events typically run from May through October.

Kroboth said he has serviced events of all sizes, ranging from private and corporate celebrations, weddings and birthdays to the usual collection of fairs and festivals.

This year, there has been the added attraction of the country's 250th anniversary celebration, which has generated some added events from the norm.

Despite a steady schedule, Kroboth has enjoyed the moments.

"It has gotten interesting," noted Kroboth, who operates his business on a part-time basis. "Things have been a little bit more busy this year, but it keeps me going."

Kroboth said that an average show at a fair generally runs in the range of \$3,000 to \$4,000, and that would include the accessories of background music. Smaller events would involve a lesser and affordable fee.

Some larger shows can range beyond \$10,000. Disney reportedly spends \$10,000 on its nightly show, and it can spend more than \$50,000 for a special presentation.

In a typical show, aerial shells, multishot cakes and Roman candles are the staples along with some other types. Shells will provide bursts of colored stars and trails, while multishot cakes are also dazzling and tend to be used for finales.

Kroboth is certified by



Shooting Star Fireworks will conduct the show on opening night. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

the state and has a license to conduct his business. There also is the transportation aspect that often involves trailers and a box truck for events.

"People don't realize what goes into a show," emphasized Kroboth. "There is a lot of prepa-

ration, and we always ensure a safe environment. There are high insurance costs for the transportation and the show. Everything is certified."

As well as being prepared for the shows, Kroboth warns people to be

See **STAR** on Page 5



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Meet the Fair Queen, Junior Miss candidates

Here's a look at the candidates for Fair Queen and Junior Miss. Don't miss the opening ceremony and coronation at 3 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 23 on the main stage.

Queen candidates

• Falon Schaefer is the 18-year-old daughter of Farrah and Will Schaefer.

As a licensed cosmetologist, she is passionate about helping others feel confident and beautiful while pursuing her dream of one day owning her own salon.

Outside of the salon, Falon enjoys volunteering with VALOR, a local veterans organization, where she is honored to give back to the men and women who have served our country.

She is also a proud third generation tree farmer. Growing up on

her family's tree farm, her papa instilled in her the importance of hard work, dedication and perseverance — values that have shaped the person she is today.

• Julia Bulawa lives in Kunkletown, where her family owns and runs a small poultry farm, raising different flocks of birds.

Julia is a high-school homeschooled student going into senior year, but she is also a dual enrolled student at Northampton Community College, graduating with an associate degree in 2027.

Julia plans to attend Lehigh University after graduation to pursue a business degree.

In addition, she is an international competitive Irish dancer who holds multiple titles.

Between all the chaos,



Falon Schaefer

she enjoys hobbies such as reading, baking and going on side quests with friends. Julia had the privilege of being a part of the 2025 West End Fair Queen Court.

Junior Miss contest

Isabella Haley lives in Stroudsburg with her parents on their small family



Julia Bulawa

farm, where they breed and raise registered Simmental cattle, which she shows extensively in the northeast and beyond.

Isabella will be starting her junior year of high school this fall and hopes to, one day, become a large animal veterinarian.

See **QUEEN** on Page 5



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QUEEN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Isabella belongs to three 4-H clubs and plays the trumpet in the school band. When she's not busy with school, 4-H and showing her livestock, she enjoys spending time with her friends. Isabella is the current West End Fair Junior Miss Princess.

• Ella Rufo is 14 years old and lives in Saylorsburg with her parents and her younger sister and brother.

She will be starting her

freshman year at Pleasant Valley High School this fall, and after high school she plans to go to college to pursue a degree in business or sales.

She is the current vice president of National Junior Honor Society and is highly involved in student government.

Ella has been a Girl Scout for the past nine years and has earned her Bronze award and is currently working on her Silver award.

She was the captain of the girls soccer team and also enjoys wrestling and other sports.



Isabella Haley



Ella Rufo

STAR

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

careful when they purchase fireworks.

"I know too many people who get hurt trying to do their own shows," reminded Kroboth. "Leave those things to the pros. There are also too many

people shooting off fireworks late at night. No one wants to hear fireworks going off at 2 in the morning."

In today's ever-changing society, firework shows remain a summer

staple. And Kroboth has relished the ride.

"I still love it," gushed Kroboth. "I still plan on doing it for a while. Maybe when I reach 15 years doing it, I may stop."

"But it's still cool, and

I am really enthusiastic about it like many people. There's an audience for it, and it doesn't appear to be slowing down."

For more information, check out shootingstar-fireworks.com

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'Idol' finalist Isaac Cole to play Monday night

BY JIM RADENHAUSEN
TNEEDITOR@TNONLINE.COM

Isaac Cole, a season 15 "American Idol" finalist, will take the Main Stage at the West End Fair on Monday night,

The country singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist, age 15 when he was a top 51 finalist in the singing competition's final season on Fox in 2016, will perform at 7 and 8:30 p.m.

Cole's played this year at the Carbon County Fair, and has performed at fairs in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, New York and Tennessee. He and his band perform original music and covers from artists like Charlie Daniels, Cody Johnson, Chris Stapleton and Waylon Jennings.

Cole, homeschooled since first grade, performed his first solo number, Josh Turner's "Long Black Train," at age 4 in his hometown church. At age 6, he began to take guitar lessons, starting out in inspirational country music and producing his first album "Country Boy" at age 11.

From ages 10 to 12, Cole played in the band In-Transition with three adults, who taught him to sing harmony and how to play his first lead guitar solo. The performer wrote his first song at 12.

Cole, whose first favorite country song was Ronnie Milsap's "Smoky Mountain Rain," also played in the God's Country church

band from age 12 through 18.

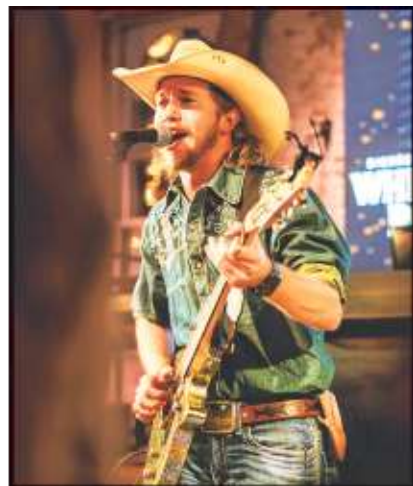
At age 10, Cole started doing full concerts at festivals and rodeos with his older sister. At 13, he did a 10-day tour of California churches with musician Dennis Agajanian, who later introduced him to Southern rock legend Daniels when he was 14. Daniels gave Cole a backstage fiddle lesson.

Shortly after appearing on "American Idol," an experience Cole called "amazing," the singer released the album "I'm Your Huckleberry." In late 2016, Cole was the second-youngest solo artist inducted into the country music show "Wheeling Jamboree USA." Only Brad Paisley was younger upon his induction.

While still in high school at 17, Cole auditioned at Dollywood theme park in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee.

"They called with a job offer right after Christmas 2018, shortly after I made the move to Nashville," he said. "I had only been working there a month when my band leader recommended me to play acoustic guitar for Dolly Parton at the grand opening of their new expansion Wildwood Grove for a press event."

In 2019, Cole spent the year as a full-time utility musician at Dollywood. He played acoustic and electric guitar, banjo, fiddle and harmonica in a band, later returning to Nashville when he turned 21 to



Isaac Cole will perform shows at 7 and 8:30 p.m. Monday on the Main Stage. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

make a name for himself as a performer and songwriter.

Following the 2019 holiday EP "Cole for Your Stocking," Cole released the 2021 album "The Fifth" and featured on Becca Bowen's 2022 single "How it All Went Down." His singles "Oh Deer" and "I'm Gonna Love You" followed in 2023 and 2025, respectively.

Cole, who had two radio singles crack the Music Row Chart's top 100, has opened for artists such as Drake White, Whey Jennings, Love and Theft, Emerson Drive, Craig Morgan and Randy Houser.

Sensory Day provides a quiet time at the fair

BY MARTA GOUGER
MGOUGER@TNONLINE.COM

For Julie Weiss, it's about the smiles as the children are leaving the West End Fair on Sensory Day.

"It's all about the people," Weiss said. "Our numbers grow every year."

This year Sensory Day will be held from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 25. For those two hours, there won't be loud noises, lights or anything that overstimulates people with sensory sensitivities.

Select areas of the fair will be open to create a calmer atmosphere, allowing guests to enjoy many of the fair's attractions in a

setting designed with comfort and accessibility in mind.

The event is for all ages and disabilities that keep people from enjoying the fair when it's crowded.

"Group homes come and have a blast," Weiss said. "They can go on a ride or two without lights and sounds. It truly makes that day special for them."

Select food and game vendors will be open. Some even offer giveaways.

This year, face painting is available for children who might want a heart or other decoration on their face, arms or hands.

Stickers will also be distributed.

The Farmer for a Day exhibit will be open, so participants can "learn where their food comes from."

Retired teachers, Boy Scouts and other volunteers will act as guides throughout the week while the participants "dig" for potatoes, "pick" apples and "milk" a goat.

In exchange for their help, the fair is making a donation to their organization. The volunteers can also distribute fliers about their organization in the farm area.

"It's good for the community and helps us to reach people," Weiss said.

Elephant Ears mark 45 years of sweetness

BY JILL WHALEN

JWHALEN@TNONLINE.COM

Glenn and Debbie Hinton have been making a sweet treat they call elephant ears since 1982.

The couple serves the fried dough from their Hinton Concession stand at fairs and festivals — and they'll be at West End Fair from Aug. 23-29.

"Ours are a homemade recipe — like a sticky bun dough," Glenn explained. "Most people will tell us, this is homemade, this is not from a box."

Their buttermilk sweet dough covers the circumference of a plate and has been enjoyed by generations of families and friends.

In the beginning, the toppings consisted of cinnamon and sugar, apple, blueberry and cherry.

Over the years, additional toppings have been added, including raspberry, pumpkin cream cheese and cannoli.



People line up to get this sweet treat known as elephant ears.

But it's not just sweet toppings — Glenn said a popular pick is cheesy garlic and marinara.

With the help and support of family and friends, the Hintons continue to offer their elephant ears at events and festivals.

Look for them at the Palmerton Community Festival from Sept. 11-13.



Glenn and Debbie Hinton, back right, have been serving sweet-dough elephant ears from their Hinton Concessions stand for 45 years. With them are their daughter, Erin Beers, left, and grandchildren, Austin, Cole and Emily Beers. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

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West End Food Pantry to serve up gyros, more

BY TERRY AHNER

TAHNER@TNONLINE.COM

The West End Food Pantry will once again be among those to lend their time and talents at the 104th annual West End Fair held Aug. 23-29 on Fairground Road in Gilbert.

Their menu will include the famous gyro, third-pound burgers, fried chicken sandwich (which mimics Chick-fil-A), choice of original fried chicken sandwich, or Kentucky Hot sandwich, 250th Celebration hot dog, corn dog nuggets, mac & cheese bites, fried pickle chips, Zimmerman's cartons, A-treat soda and water. New this year is the Lucas-approved snacks for kids (named after Lucas, the grandson of Karena Thek), which consists of cheese sticks, apple slices and juice box.

The mission of the West End Food Pantry in Kunkletown is to provide free food for neighbors in need, according to Karena Thek, director.

"Twice a month we hand out food that comes in; what comes in goes out," Thek said. "So we just continue to try to bless those that are struggling and take a little bit of stress off their plate so they can go to bed with some stuff in their refrigerator."

Thek underscored the significance of the West End Food Pantry's stand at the West End Fair.

"The West End Fair food stand is our main fundraiser that we really need to pay our rent, to pay our insurance, to keep our box truck on the road and to supplement with food purchases as we need," she said. "We pray for good weather, sunny skies, and lots of business."

Thek explained how people can help.

"Any sort of food collection/food drive done in the community are helpful in helping us get food," she said. "Donations certainly help us pay those expenses."



The gyro is a popular offering at the West End Food Pantry stand. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Volunteers are always welcomed.

"Come to the West End Fair and seek out our stand, which is in the middle of the fairgrounds by the bandstand," she said. "And have a good meal knowing that you're helping to provide food to those in need."

Thek said those who wish to volunteer may visit westendpantry.com, where there is a link for a form for volunteers to fill out.

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SteelCreek will be closing out the 2026 West End Fair. The six-member band based out of the Lehigh Valley plays modern country cover songs with some classics and rock 'n' roll mixed in. The band features Guy Reed on drums; Jeff Hittner on keyboard; Jeni Hackett on vocals, guitar and mandolin; John Barborek on vocals and percussion; Ken Duncan on bass; and Don Kneller on lead guitar and vocals. Show times are 7 and 9 p.m. Aug. 29. Don't miss the Steel Creek Duo on Monday from 5-9 p.m. in the pub. TIMES NEWS FILE PHOTO



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Taylor Swift tribute set to 'Shake' the fair

BY JIM RADENHAUSEN
TNEEDITOR@TNONLINE.COM

Kanin Wren's Taylor Swift Experience, which has played 15-plus states and Canada, seizes the West End Fair's Main Stage at 7 and 8:30 p.m. Aug. 27 on Fairgrounds Road, Gilbert.

The 20-year-old singer, making her West End Fair debut, started her Swift tribute in 2023. That same year, Wren released a cover of Swift's hit "Love Story." Two years later, debut album "Wren" arrived.

Swift's hits, in her 20 years as a country and pop force, also include "Teardrops on My Guitar," "You Belong with Me," "Shake it Off," "Anti-Hero" and "Toy Story 5" single "I Knew it, I Knew You."

Wren initially balked at the tribute idea, as "Taylor's shoes are big to fill. I felt that if I couldn't do it at a high level, it could hurt the career I hoped to build one day as an original artist."

Seeing venues' interest in booking a Swift tribute, however, "opened my eyes. I realized it could be an opportunity to grow as a performer, build a larger audience and continue writing my own music."

Wren, who describes her music

as "a little country, a lotta pop," also saw past the idea of "pretending to be Taylor," understanding that the band-infused tribute celebrated Swift's music and fans.

Performing a Swift tribute, however, elicits some negative reactions. The independent artist, whose "Less Screen Time, More Dream Time" initiative inspires young people "to spend more time building their own dreams than scrolling through someone else's," said her career gave her thick skin.

"One thing that has surprised me is reading some comments online when people hear a Taylor Swift tribute is coming to their town. Sometimes they're incredibly harsh before they've even seen the show."

Born in Dewitt, Michigan, Wren lives in Ann Arbor. As a child, she sang old songs by Frank Sinatra and more to her great-grandmother, assisted-living-community residents and geriatric-hospital patients.

"I remember seeing people smile, sing along and cry because a song brought back a special memory. I realized music was more than something I enjoyed; it was a gift



Kanin Wren will bring her Taylor Swift tribute to the main stage at 7 and 8:30 p.m. Aug. 27. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

that could change someone's day."

Wren, whose youth included musicals and summer theater camps, started recording covers in a studio at age 9. Around 11, she picked up

See **SWIFT** on Page 15

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Trio ready to 'Rock Around' the WE Fair

BY JIM RADENHAUSEN
TNEDITOR@TNONLINE.COM

Richie and the High Street Rockers will evoke memories of early rock 'n' roll and oldies hits during the act's West End Fair debut Aug. 26 on Fairgrounds Road, Gilbert.

The trio, set to take the fair's Main Stage at 4 and 8:15 p.m., formed in 2023 in Pottstown and plays covers from the 1950s and early 1960s, plus originals.

The High Street Rockers takes its name from Pottstown's main thoroughfare, where founder Richard "Richie" Thomas spent years developing a love for vintage dance at now-defunct Ballroom on High.

Aside from Thomas on lead vocals and guitar, the Rockers features John Pachnos on bass and Austin Bright on drums. The group recorded its 2025 debut album, the all-original "Welcome to High Street," at Sun Studio in Memphis, Tennessee, largely regarded as the birthplace of rock 'n' roll.

The Rockers' "Live on the Midway," released in April, includes covers of classics such as Dion's "The Wanderer," Elvis Presley's "That's All Right" and Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode." A second live set, "Going Steady: The Exciting Live Album," arrived in June.

"Going Steady" features, among others, versions of Bill Haley and His Comets' "Rock Around the Clock," Ritchie Valens' "La Bamba" and Jerry Lee Lewis' "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On."

Born and raised in the Pottstown area, the fairly introverted Thomas has "always loved performing. I joined every music group at my elementary school: band, orchestra and choir.

"It was never something I could imagine my life without," the songwriter continued, "but, like most musicians, there was always the fear I wouldn't be able to make a living with that passion."

As a teen, Thomas' personal musical tastes centered around the Beatles, while, thanks to his parents, he also grew up with country favorites such as Johnny Cash and Patsy Cline.

"For most of my life, I explored genres that came after the Beatles: funk, classic rock, reggae, etc. Once I started connecting the dots of what came before the Beatles, my eyes were opened."



Richie and the High Street Rockers will play at 4 and 8:15 p.m. Aug. 26 on the Main Stage. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

At that point, Thomas "heard all the magical influences of Elvis, Buddy Holly, Carl Perkins and more that gave the Beatles their foundation. I've been a fascinated student of the era ever since."

Thomas started dancing jitterbug/swing at Gettysburg College, "so when I moved back to the Pottstown area, I was in search of a new home for my favorite hobby," hence frequenting Ballroom on High.

"I have many cherished memories there. The swing dances no longer happen there, but we continue its legacy down the street at the SunnyBrook Ballroom."

Thomas somewhat stumbled into the rock 'n' roll scene. He earned an opera performance and classical music degree in college, and while "it was great music, I couldn't find the spark that I used to feel."

After graduation, Thomas went on to perform about 800 shows in local bars and restaurants as a live looping performer, à la Ed Sheeran. In those shows, he "learned how to not just be a musician, but an entertainer. My spark returned. The band is my quest to take that to the next level."

Thomas, considering challenges for the Rockers, noted last year's Bloomsburg Fair, which unexpectedly grew from two shows to eight.

"Five minutes before showtime, we were told the headlining bands wouldn't be able to make it for the next three days. I was asked, 'Do you think you could fill in?' We had

no change of clothes, extra setlists or food packed, so, of course I said yes."

The Rockers, after finishing its show, picked up yellow jackets, still used today, at Boscov's.

At the West End Fair, the Rockers "will mostly play the classic oldies," Thomas said, "but will throw in a couple of our original tunes. Most likely 'Call Me' and 'Little Emma' will make an appearance."

The act does have "exciting new songs in development that we're looking forward to showing you all," Thomas said, with the group aiming for a late winter release.

Aside from meeting Tommy James and opening for Chubby Checker at the SunnyBrook Ballroom, the Rockers' career highlights thus far include a performance at Thomas' old elementary school.

"Earlier this year, we put on a short assembly for about 500 students, all gathered in the school gymnasium. Once the teachers started doing the twist, the room was in chaos."

Kindergarten through sixth grade students, he added, "were all jumping and cheering at the top of their lungs. It's been a source of inspiration that I hope never leaves me."

Thomas' greatest goal with his group "is to reinvent this history for our teenagers, young adults and maybe even the world. I think we are in need of music with sincerity, optimism and a good message. I pray that I can be a part of that change in some small way."



Vinyl Rush will make its fair debut Aug. 29.
CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Youth band Vinyl Rush making its fair debut

BY JIM RADENHAUSEN
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Youth rock band Vinyl Rush, whose last two of its three members graduated from high school in June, makes its West End Fair debut Aug. 29 on Fairgrounds Road, Gilbert.

The trio, formed in 2021 in Reading, features cousins Dante Fioravanti on bass/vocals and Nic Alvine on drums, plus Alvine's lifelong friend Cody Toplak on guitar/vocals.

Fioravanti, a 2025 Muhlenberg Senior High School graduate, has attended college for a year, while Toplak and Alvine graduated from Berks Catholic High School in June.

This fall, Alvine will attend his first semester of college, with Toplak, who wants to build guitars, planning to attend a trade school for cabinetry and wood technology.

Vinyl Rush, winner of the 2025 Central Pennsylvania Music Award for Best Youth Band, will scale back its number of gigs during the school year.

To create its sound, Vinyl Rush fuses elements of classic, progressive and alternative rock, along with genres such as funk, jazz and pop.

Vinyl Rush's debut album "Dead Luck," released in January, in-

cludes 2024 singles "Wake Me Up" and "Move Me," plus 2025's "No Fear." The seven-track set also features "Drafted," "Fight Till the End," "Rooftops" and "Go Home."

All three Vinyl Rush members had a musical history before coming together to form their trio, starting in school or youth groups such as band, orchestra or jazz ensembles.

Fioravanti knew he wanted to pursue music as a career "when we all got serious about performing and gigging two years after we joined. We had some fun writing songs when we were younger and decided we wanted to do an album, and that's when I knew we were in it for real."

English rock band Queen serves as a "huge inspiration for me," he added. "The theatrics, the crying guitar harmonies and each song captured me for as long as I can remember."

When Toplak first picked up a guitar, "I was attached instantly. I knew that I wanted to pursue a career where I can play and express my love for music and the instrument."

A wide variety of genres and styles of music
See **VINYL** on Page 15

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SWIFT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

the guitar, which she initially picked out at 5, as a songwriting tool.

As she got older, songwriting became Wren's way to tell her stories. Aside from Swift, Olivia Rodrigo, Sabrina Carpenter, Tate McRae, Gracie Abrams and Megan Moroney inspire the Michigan native.

Wren, when playing her Swift show, steps outside the tribute to perform songs by some of her favorite artists and her original music. The Eras Tour-like surprise section inspired Wren's Pop Girl show.

Wren, at age 12, had a song featured in the Pure Michigan Tourism Campaign. Later, early solo gigs became "my real classroom. I gained experience you can only get by being on stage night after night."

During her first year of high school, Wren recorded a four-track EP with Elton John bassist Matt Bissonette. She released the pop-/singer-songwriter-leaning set under the name Kanin Elizabeth.

Wren, whose debut album includes tracks such as "When I Was" and "Fake," re-released 2024 singles "Cry Baby" and "Hell or Minnesota" earlier this year. Wren's new single "Look at Her," which arrived Aug. 7, "is part of a much bigger project I'm excited about."

With about six songs ready to release, the singer-songwriter/guitarist wants people to experience the "beautiful chapters" of a touring college student's musical diary as more than individual songs.

Wren, pursuing a degree in music with a vocal focus at the University of Michigan, plays one or two shows monthly during the school year and tours full time in the summer. Seeing young girls in the audience, singing the words to her songs, provides "the biggest motivation to keep creating."

In terms of Wren's career highlights, "nothing compares to pulling up to a venue and seeing my name on the marquee with the words 'Sold Out' underneath. With so many Taylor Swift tribute shows out there, moments like that make me proud of the show we've created and the audience we've built."

One memorable moment occurred after a show when someone from Swift's team—a neighbor of the record-breaking artist's dad—asked if he could speak with Wren.

"He told me, 'Taylor would be so proud, and she would have loved this show.' That meant the world to me because I've always wanted the show to come from a place of respect."

If Wren had the chance to meet Swift, "the first thing I'd say is thank you. She changed the music industry for women and inspired an entire generation of artists, including me."

"Then I'd probably ask her to start her own record label," she continued. "She's learned so much about the music business, artist ownership and navigating the industry."

"She could mentor the next generation of artists and create changes that would have a lasting impact on the music industry for years to come."

VINYL

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music has influenced Toplak, with Queen, Avenged Sevenfold, Daft Punk and Arctic Monkeys ranking among his favorite music artists.

Alvine, who never looked back after acquiring his first drum set at age 3, "started taking music seriously once I began drum lessons in the second grade. Then, once the band formed, I knew that's what I wanted my

career to be."

Canadian rock band Rush ranks as Alvine's all-time favorite band, though more recently, "I've been listening to Avenged Sevenfold and more heavy metal drumming."

Vinyl Rush members, during their first couple of practices, "were already writing music, and some of those songs evolved and made it on our debut album," Fioravanti said. "Once we decided to book longer gigs, we had to fill time with

cover songs."

While Alvine and Toplak have always fallen back to being a trio after trying few people to join the band, Fioravanti has always had an eye for a fourth member who would strictly sing lead.

"As of right now, I don't want another instrument in the band, but a fourth voice would make us that more powerful."

Vinyl Rush, looking forward to playing on the last day of the West End Fair, plans to perform music from the 1970s to

now, with its personal twists. The band soon will take new material it has written over the past few months to the studio, with plans to release a new album in early- to mid-2027.

Vinyl Rush regards its CPMAs win as the greatest highlight of its career thus far, with its sights set on playing a full gig of original music as a headlining band.

"The ultimate goal," Fioravanti said, "is to fully embrace original music."



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