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BY IT STAFF

WILD CARD – BEST ARTIST

Felicia Olin

The bright red flowers float effortlessly against a turquoise background as the corseted waif looks on pensively. It's a scene depicted vibrantly in one of Felicia Olin's signature paintings, and it shows why Olin was voted "best artist" as a wild card by IT readers. A reader writes: "Felicia Olin blew me away this year with her gallery show at the Robert Morris Gallery downtown. Her creative expression is a treat to behold!" Evoking shades of Salvador Dali and Mark Ryden, her paintings convey profound emotion, despite the often impassive expressions on her subjects' faces. Her style, she says, came from trusting her instincts and making art that she enjoys. "I look at everything, and I take things that I like and mesh it together," Olin says. Her art hangs in galleries from the Hoogland Center to the Sangamo Club and more. "I think there's just some kind of connection," Olin says when asked why her artwork has become so popular. "I'm able to put something on the page that people just relate to."

BEST TATTOO ARTIST

Kevin Veara, Black Moon Tattoos

1009 W. Edwards St., 793-1875

www.kevinveara.com/art/

Even if you have never had any desire to have any ink inserted into your skin with a pointed instrument, we urge you to visit Kevin Veara's Web site and look through his gallery of paintings. No sooner will the window open than you will be saying "take this sharp object, sir, and draw this bird all over my face. And let's throw in some ear gauges while we're at it. Rawk." On your skin or on a canvas, his art is just that: art. Beautiful, stunning, intricate, and above all else, passionate art. A self-identified environmentalist, Veara's work shows a keen interest in the natural world, and his bird pieces are famous. Using natural color schemes and extraordinary attention to detail, Veara is slowly wearing away most preconceived notions of tattoos and tattoo artists. One pin prick at a time.

Runner up: Jason Lee at New Age

BEST THEATRICAL PRODUCTION - MUSICAL

Fiddler on the Roof

Springfield Muni Opera

You know we are a town that loves our theater when we brave the mosquitoes to head out to the Muni in droves at least four times a year every summer. No show brought out the Off Spray-coated crowds quite like Fiddler on the Roof. Directed by Chuck Hoots, and starring Muni's own jack-of-all-trades Steve Kaplan (he sings, he acts, he directs, he sits on the board, he drills teeth!) as Tevye, Fiddler is the classic Broadway tale of a poor milkman and his family in a 1905 Russian shtetl as he attempts to maintain his strong faith in the face of his daughters' changing lives, while the Tsar is evicting Jews from their village. It's a beloved story of clinging to tradition as the world around you changes.

Runner-up: The Muni's High School Musical

BEST THEATRICAL PRODUCTION - DRAMA

As You Like It

University of Illinois at Springfield

Shakespeare's tale of love, deception and cross-dressing has been performed many times, many ways, in many places. For the first time ever, UIS was the stage, and its students not-so-merely the players. Associate Professor of Theatre, Eric Thibodeaux-Thompson tells us that the show came about as schoolwork. "For the 2008-2009 school year, my idea was to offer, in tandem, a Shakespeare class and a Shakespeare production." The class, "Playing Shakespeare," was offered for the first time in the fall of 2008 and by spring, they were ready to take the stage, with Thibodeaux-Thompson encouraging his students to audition. "We had a total of 18 actors in 23 roles. Approximately 80 percent were students, with 20 percent community actors, faculty and alumni. I enjoy a mix of students and community actors. I was very proud in a lot of ways."

Runner-up: Rod Blagojevich Superstar!

BEST HIGH SCHOOL PRODUCTION

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Back to the 80s

Sacred Heart-Griffin High School

Written like a teen comedy, Back to the 80s features an array of songs more often heard on your favorite mix tape. "Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go," "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun," "Come On Eileen," and the Rick Astley 80s classic/modern-day Internet sensation "Never Gonna Give You Up" are some hits in this show, first staged in Australia in 2004. Narrated by a near-30 man waxing nostalgic on his high school years in the Me Decade, it's fun, lively and really colorful. Neons abound. Never heard of it? Director and teacher Bill Bauser reminds us that this is nothing new for SHG. "SHG likes to do shows that are undiscovered. It was fun for the faculty and staff to work on a show with music we grew up with, and fun for the kids to discover a new decade of music they wouldn't normally get to sing in school."

Runner-up: Glenwood High School's Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat

BEST ACTIVIST CHURCH LEADER

Rev. Msgnr. John Ossola

Little Flower Catholic School

The Rev. Monsignor John Ossola wouldn't call himself an "activist," he says, nor does he consider himself a leader – but isn't that what humble people always say? Serving the Church of the Little Flower and the church's nearby school, Ossola often works with youth and has directed the diocese's anti-abortion office, earning him the title of "best activist church leader" from IT readers. A member of the clergy for 45 years, Ossola enjoys counseling his parishioners in times of need. "I enjoy dealing with people at pivotal times in their lives," Ossola says. "It's so growth-fulfilling for them."

Runner-up: John Wentz of South Side Christian Church



HARDEST WORKING LOCAL BUSINESS OWNER

Unverzagt Family Chiropractic

1329 S. Fourth St., 544-3628

Not much can ruin a relaxing weekend as easily as back pain. That's why Stephen C. Unverzagt is happy to swing by his chiropractic clinic even after hours or on weekends to give the occasional back adjustment. Chosen by IT readers as the hardest working local business owner in Springfield, Unverzagt offers treatment for all sorts of back, neck and joint pain, as well as sports rehab, nutrition counseling and more. His comfortable office feels like a home, and his warm family is always there to make you feel welcome. He especially likes proving to suffering skeptics that chiropractic care really works. "Everyone that has come to us has stayed," he says. And if that's not enough, the recently-added massage therapist should have you back on your feet in no time.

Runner-up: Tracey Sims - TurnOut Movement Arts Studio

WILD CARD – BEST CHIROPRACTOR

Stephen Unverzagt

The wild card is the peoples' category: you told us what "best of" we missed. Stephen Unverzagt staged a write-in campaign for Best Chiropractor on Facebook, and his eager clients were more than happy to nominate him. One satisfied customer says, "Stephen Unverzagt is the best chiropractor ever...He is so good that none of my 'old' aches and pains hurt anymore." Unverzagt says almost all of his clients are referrals from other clients, which just goes to show that a job well done is its own advertisement. In business since June, Unverzagt says he is glad to be serving Springfield, and he enjoys making clients feel comfortable and pain-free.

Wild Card Runner-up: Best Sandwich – Head West Sub Stop

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In my opinion, the "Best Cover/Tribute Band" voting should be limited to actual existing bands. While F5 WAS a great band, and their victory in this category this year is a testament to this fact, it is also a fact that they broke up after the 2008 Illinois State Fair. They indeed DID pack the crowds in whenever and wherever they performed. "DID" being the operative word. They did perform two re-union shows during the first weekend of the 2009 Illinois State Fair, but these are the only performances of the group in the last fourteen months. This is not what I would consider an actual existing band. If enough people voted for Mickey Mouse, would he be named the best local cover/tribute band?



Hank

Chill Hank, it's just a poll. F5 paid their dues, now go pay yours. Better luck next year!



Earl

Earl, I do not need to chill...I am simply stating facts, and actually complimenting F5 in the process. I have a few really good friends in that now-defunct band. It is not a matter of paying dues...i simply think that if there is going to be a poll as to who is the best local cover band, it should be an existing band, and not one that has been defunct for 14 months.



Hank

By the way, if you were to ask any club owner in town what band has the biggest draw, I think you might be surprised...lol



Hank

Hank I agree with Earl, chill man. Only 2500 voted in the entire poll, compare that to the amount of people who live round here, small potatoes dude. F5 has had the biggest draw for several years, show some respect. They have been the best band, hands down. The other 3 bands were within two-three votes of eachother and all deserve it but each have room to improve to be halfway to F5 level. Maybe next year.



Matt

Matt, chilling has nothing to do with it...I am not angry, and have shown my friends in the former F5 NOTHING but respect. One would suppose that the reason for having a best cover band poll would be so people could go see the band that won...Impossible in this case. I disagree that all the runner-ups deserved to win...thats like saying that the guy who gets the third and fourth amount of votes in a presidential election deserve to be president...nope...just the guy who gets the most votes...and he should be an actual person.



Hank

Ok then. We agree, F5 won because they deserve to. You didnt because you didnt deserve to. I am a club owner so I know who "deserves" to, F5 & Dirty Ernies hands down. There are several bands not even mentioned that I would have thought too. So get over it, try again next year.



Matt

We can agree that F5 got the most votes. I simply have an opinoin that the voting should be restricted to actual existing bands. If that were the case, the outcome would have been different...no one can dispute that fact. Don't disrespect me for having an opinion. If your opinion is that the voting should be open to any band that ever existed, no matter how long ago, I can respect that. I only ask for the same in return.



Hank

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