The News-Herald

Life & Leisure

SECTION C

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TALK OF THE TOWN

The Downriver Arts & Crafts Guild will hold its next meeting at 6 p.m. Tuesday at **Southgate Veterans Memorial Library**, 14680 Dix-Toledo Road.

Meet local artists and listen to a guest speaker discuss the "New Year: New You" program.

Call 1-734-777-6109 for more information.

Historical presenter **Tony Lukas** from **The Henry Ford** will act as **Martin Luther King Jr.** during a special presentation at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at the **Lincoln Park Historical Museum**, 1335 Southfield Road.

The program is free and refreshments will be provided.

A **"Lincoln's Birthday Open House"** is set for 1 to 5 p.m. Feb. 12 at the museum to honor the country's 16th president.

Local educators and their classes are invited to submit hand-drawn illustrations of Lincoln or other important images from his life.

Feb. 10 is the deadline to submit drawings.

To participate or for more information, send an e-mail to lpmuseum@gmail.com or call 1-313-386-3137.

Author and certified addictions counselor **Larry Maule Jr.** will host a series of **Addiction Seminars** throughout the winter at **Allen Park Public Library**, 8100 Allen Road.

"Recovery and Treatment 101" will be the topic of discussion at 1 p.m. Feb. 14 and **"Relapse and Relapse Prevention 101"** at 1 p.m. March. 14.

'Piano Wars' rage in the key of fun

By Andrea Blum
The News-Herald

He might be at "war" on stage, but David Caruso plays music in the key of fun.

The Trenton musician shows off his musical prowess as owner and performer with "Piano Wars!," a dueling piano show, but stresses that it's all about the audience when he's behind the keys.

"The best thing I get from this is the reaction from the crowd," Caruso said. "The whole point is to do what they want."

As a musician for more than 30 years, he has plenty of experience feeding off a crowd's energy.

He started in the 1980s as the primary songwriter and front man for the band Caruso, along with his three brothers, Mike, Joe and Rob.

The band opened for such artists as Joan Jett, UB40, Burton Cummings, John Cafferty and Corey Hart.

Since then, Caruso, who plays piano, guitar, bass and drums, has performed at colleges and clubs in 23 states and Canada.

In 2001, he began working as a dueling pianist at local bars, including Jimmy K's in Lincoln Park and the former Hickey's Grill in Woodhaven.

His company, "Piano Wars!," has entertained at hundreds of corporate events, private parties, wedding receptions, outdoor festivals and house parties.

He and main dueling partner, Paul Bickel, just wrapped up a series of shows at Fratello's Restaurant in Trenton and have dates on tap in Ypsilanti and Pontiac.

Comedy, music and a little theater combine as the musicians behind two face-to-face pianos pound out hits in the "live jukebox" show.

"The chemistry is what makes it go to the next level," he said. "One guy says something and the other guys feeds off it.

"If you do it right, people just light up."

Caruso bills himself as the "Man of a Thousand Songs," and takes on ditties from ABBA to ZZ Top.

"People can ask for almost any song from any genre and we can do it," he said.

"Anything goes at the bar shows. People can tip to have a song played and someone else can tip to stop a song. They can start a song war if they keep going back and forth."

Watching the song wars unfold can be a big part of the fun, according to Caruso.

"Rockers will fight the chick songs and people battle it out with fight songs sometimes, too," he said.

"People feel like they are in control. It's almost like them having a remote in their hand."

The rowdy renditions take on an even zanier vibe through his use of wigs, props and costumes.

Ask for an Elton John song and the entertainer appears, complete with rhinestone glasses and boa.

Request a Michael Jackson tune and Caruso whips out an eerily similar rubber mask.

Song parodies are another way in which Caruso puts the spotlight on audience members throughout his show.

People celebrating a special occasion such as a birthday or bachelorette party also are invited onstage to join the fun.

"My goal is always about the audience," he said. "It's not about 'look at me,' but if they see that I'm a good piano player somewhere in all of this, that's good, too."

To get a taste of the show, visit www.pianowars.com.



A longtime musician, David Caruso shows off his piano prowess during every show, but stresses that his main focus is making sure the audience has a good time.



Comedy, music and a little theater combine during "Piano Wars!" as Caruso dons costumes and props such as his Elton John rhinestone glasses and boa to match the audience's song requests.