

The Cheerful Tortoise

50th Anniversary

by Ardis Hedrick

On Saturday, Sept. 28, near Portland State University's campus, the strains of the ultimate summer song lured bypassers up the street by their ears. Van Morrison's Brown Eyed Girl and the smell of a BBQ in progress filled the air on S.W. 6th Avenue.

The occasion? One of the city's most enduring waterholes and gathering places celebrated its 50th Anniversary! The Cheerful Tortoise hosted its "first annual" Battle of the Bands and Street Party to benefit PSU athletics programs.

For this party, The Tortoise's management pulled off the closure of College Street, which was blocked off to accommodate dancing and a beer garden that offered a dozen or so brews on tap. The event boasted many sponsors from major breweries and liquor distributors. The BBQ was fired up and manned by the staff serving some tasty \$2 eats.

Numerous specials during the preceding week led to this climax and brought back memories of some of the venue's bygone days, price wise; remember "Dimers" and "Buck Nights?"

Cheerful Tortoise manager Steve Singley handled the stage announcements and drawings for T-shirts and Vikings football tickets between the battling bands. He made a jovial announcer as he filled in the crowd on some history of this enduring community icon. Owner Pat Lockhart, a Portland State University alumni, roamed the affair, clearly enjoying the day. He proudly donated a large part of proceeds to the college athletics programs. They thought of everything to make this gig a success, right down to the porta-potties.

Timing for this event was perfect. Summer was taking its last shot before the rains moved in the next day and everyone basked in the heat of the unseasonably warm weather.

The Climb warmed the crowd up, though that was hardly necessary. The band's energetic set featured covers of

danceable popular hits by the likes of Van Morrison, Bonnie Raitt, Stevie Ray Vaughan and The Doobie Brothers. Their originals had a more modern and unique sound in the vein of the Wallflowers or New Bohemians.

The Climb's female vocalist's style displayed a broad range from a gutsy blues shout to a more sweet and melodic, almost folksy, tone of voice. The guitar player was quite versatile and the rhythm section was tight.

Next up was Probable Cause, whose tag line is "Dance 'til ya Drop." Living up to that motto, the band jumped right on in to a kickin' version of The Romantics' catchy, upbeat **What I Like About You**. Just when it started to bear a strange resemblance to John Mellencamp's **Rockin' in the USA**, they seamlessly merged the two tunes for a smashing rave-up opener. This writer later visited the band's website (www.probablecause.com) and has since enjoyed listening to a free MP3 download of that first cover tune.

Probable Cause has a broad repertoire, only a slice of which could be sampled for the battle's short set. But it was enough to earn the band second place in the day's contest. Their second song was an original ballad that showcased the strengths of the group's harmonies, both vocal and in their guitar work.

The band consists of lead guitarist Mark McDermott, founding member; rhythm guitarist and lead singer Greg Dawson; drummer Dana Watson and bass guitarist Marvin Slifman. McDermott has contributed his writing talents on several original tunes. He and the rhythm section also assist on vocals.

Other dance-oriented numbers this outing included Tom Petty's **You Wreck Me** and Roy Orbison's classic **Pretty Woman**. The band has a big sound for a four-piece. Later they even covered Stone Temple Pilots **Interstate Love Song** and 3 Doors Down's guitar-driven showpiece tune **Kryptonite**, both crowd pleasers for the predominately college-aged attendees.

McDermott contributed the day's best quote from the stage. Perhaps pointing out the obvious, he noted how The Tortoise has been in place "50 years and the thing hasn't moved an inch!" The blonde Fender Stratocaster he wields visibly heated up from his emphatic guitar playing on **Mustang Sally** and helped get the first dancers up to their feet and off the curb. A spirited rendition of **Sweet Home Alabama** and a rousing cover of the Kinks' **You Really Got Me** completed the set.

Probable Cause will play Saturday, Oct. 26 in Vernonia at The Lyon's Den Pub & Eatery's Traditional Halloween Party. Call 503/429-0606 or visit their website for driving directions. Congratulations to Plain Jayne, winner of the day's Battle of the Bands. The other participating bands were Burnout, Valhere and Mulligan.

Congratulations are also in order for the Cheerful Tortoise owners and its many employees and supporters. Thanks for the party and thanks for being there for Portland all these years. If T-Shirt slogans can be harbingers of things to come, those who actually survived the first event will certainly be set to attend the second annual event.

This article appeared in the October 15, 2002 edition of:



* **NOTE** a few minor corrections were made for the sake of accuracy - gd