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LOCAL NEWS

The rise of the Eric Grant Band

By Adam Drapcho
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GILFORD — Eric Grant, who grew up and lives in Gilford, has been a working musician since high school. Now, at 39, he's suddenly having the greatest success of his career, which soon will take him and the other members of the Eric Grant Band to Nashville, Tenn. and to Pigeon Forge, Tenn. to compete for the North American Country Music Association, International's title of "Band of the Year," "Vocal Group of the Year" and "Best Male Vocalist."

Grant's band, comprised of experienced, battle-hardened professionals, first played together during the summer of 2009 and became a serious, full-time operation about 18 months ago. A year after that, they couldn't get away from the podium at the annual awards ceremony for the New Hampshire Country Music Association and the New England Country Music Organization, earning them the right to take their talents to the stage in Pigeon Forge.

Such a precipitous rise is due to the experience, professionalism and work ethic of the band members, said Grant. However, their quick success has inspired a common refrain said during band meetings: "What a great problem to have," Grant said.

Grant is experiencing the greatest professional success he's known, and with that success comes complications. For example, they aren't signed to a major record label and don't enjoy the trappings that come along with such an arrangement. Plans for their trip next week have a core group of the band traveling to Nashville, where they'll network with industry representatives, before meeting the rest of the band in Pigeon Forge for their competition performance.

Without corporate backing, the band will have to fund the trip themselves. To help them do so, they're holding a fund raising concert tonight (Friday) at Shooter's Tavern on Rte. 3 in Belmont. The concert will feature a raffle with tickets costing \$10 each. The band will take the stage at 8 p.m., play three sets, and at the end of the second set the winning ticket will be drawn.

The raffle prize, Grant said, will be "a night with the Eric Grant Band — you pick when and where and we'll play your party, your barbecue, you're wedding, whatever."

It might seem like an unusual level of fan support that the band is asking for, but Grant said the reaction has been even more unusual. On top of buying tickets, he said, several people have made outright donations, some in the triple digits, to help propel the band onward. It would seem there are many vying for the title of number one fan. Grant said he often gets "choked up" thinking about it.

Beyond their own success, Grant said the band is heading into the heart of the country music industry with a mission: show that there's a healthy country music scene in New England, New Hampshire in specific. Grant noted that when the Meadowbrook U.S. Cellular Pavilion books country acts, they often sell out. "We really take pride in New Hampshire, we want to let Tennessee experience a little bit of New Hampshire country," Grant said.

Regardless of the outcome of the competition at Pigeon Forge, the Eric Grant Band's star appears to be on the rise. The final preparations of an album, recorded at Studio Metronome in Brookline, N.H., are being made, and Grant said the band hopes to schedule a CD release party sometime at the end of March or early in April. They'll hope to sell those CDs by the box full, as their tour schedule is booked for nearly every weekend for the remainder of the year.

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With what they've experienced in the last 12 months, it's hard to limit their expectations for the coming year. Their maturity has afforded them the perspective to enjoy the ride, Grant said. "This whole thing of chasing the dream is absolutely brand-new, it's like we're all 20 years old again. It's amazing, it's overwhelming at times, it's emotional, it's exhilarating."

The Eric Grant Band plays a genre of music called "new country" or "crossover country." They play a mix of covers and original songs, performed featuring acoustic instruments and piano, electric guitars and prominent vocals and harmonies.