

All Eyes On: Robert Banning



Bethany Coury/Index

Kirksville resident Robert Banning watches Crossover, a band from La Plata, play a set Saturday at Bacon Fest on The Square in downtown Kirksville.

BY BETHANY COURY
Staff Reporter

Kirksville resident Robert Banning heard the rhythm and blues band playing in front of the courthouse at Bacon Fest after he left work at Shelton Construction. Standing alone, hazy blue eyes fixated on the band, Banning let the music take him back. Rhythm and blues is one of his favorite music genres.

Music is the constant in Banning's life. He said rhythm and blues reminds him of the sad times in his life and rock 'n' roll reminds him of the best parts of his life,

when he was a young child. Country is his favorite, he said, because it reminds him of his dad.

Banning's mother had personal issues, which kept her away, he said, and when Banning was 11, his dad died. Banning said that when that happened, he had personal issues as well. Banning was sent to Boys Town, a children's home in St. James, Mo. It was one of the three times in his life he left his home in Novinger.

"Boys Town in Missouri taught me respect for other people," Banning said with a characteristic, subtle shaking. "I was close to my dad,

and when he died, I felt that I lost my last friend. But I found out that's really wasn't real."

Banning discovered at Boys Town that he had friends, friends that went through similar problems. He said he's found peace after losing his father.

"I have peace with that because I still have memories of him," Banning said. "Like every time I have a problem, I still think about what my dad would do if he had that same problem."

Country music reminds Banning of the way he's lived, he said.

Banning said he left Boys Town

closer to God. He graduated from Missouri Baptist Children's Home, in Bridgeton, Mo., and moved back to Novinger after graduation.

Banning said hard work has made him who he is today. He enlisted in the army in Fort Polk, La., and now works in recycling. He rests and listens to music during the weekends, he said.

The band Banning appreciated the most of Saturday's lineup was Crossover. Crossover vocalist and guitarist Derrick Gunnels, a senior at La Plata High School who plans to attend Truman State and "rock out" professionally, said he's seen

Banning at multiple concerts.

Gunnels said Saturday's performance was special.

"It was nice because they listened," Gunnels said. "Usually, people are drinking and I'm in the background, but here they listened."

Banning was perhaps Gunnel's biggest fan that day. Having lived in the Kirksville area most of his life, the area he calls his "life-long home," Banning said there's one thing he appreciates about his community.

"There are perks to this town," Banning said. "The music's pretty good, like rhythm and blues."

Renewable Energy Summit

Hosted by Representative Zachary Wyatt

September 30, 2011

9 a.m. - 12 p.m.

1 p.m. - 3 p.m.

In the
Truman State University
Student Union Building

Speakers and elected officials will be discussing the issues facing our state in regards to renewable energy.

Former Lieutenant Governor,
Joe Maxwell

will be delivering
opening remarks.

Recommendations impact applications

Recommendation letters have the ability to make or break a student's application

BY SCOTT HENSON
Staff Reporter

Brooke Kelsey, an admissions counselor for A.T. Still University, pores over 20 to 30 recommendation letters for the school's medical program every day. With each letter, she said, comes the potential to make or break a candidate's chances at a future with the University.

Assembling a resume and taking graduate entrance exams are only a few of the many steps Truman State students often take toward landing an internship, job or graduate school acceptance letter, said Polly Matteson, Career Center assistant director. One of the most crucial of these steps is obtaining references from the right professors, she said.

Kelsey said A.T. Still's admissions office receives more than 3,000 application files every year, each including at least two recommendation letters. While the admissions office tries to look at the student's application file as a whole, she said a generic recommendation letter with a one-paragraph summary of the student's class performance could negatively affect the rest of his or her file.

"Recommendations can be huge," Kelsey said. "[The applicant] could be really genius and their numbers are really great, and then their letter can be what kills them."

During A.T. Still's application process, candidates typically waive their rights to see what professors and advisers are writing about them. She said a few of the letters she receives even will include unflattering information about the applicant.

"I have some that will talk about how a student wasn't really active in class, wasn't active in the group discussion, didn't seem to put forth the amount of effort that they should have," she said. "That's one of the big

red flags — just [recommenders] talking about either [an applicant's] lack of maturity, their lack of respect for other students, their lack of respect in general for the course."

Matteson has written recommendation letters for several of her student workers at the Career Center, she said. One of the best ways to avoid offering employers or graduate programs negative or generic recommendation letters is knowing professors personally, she said.

"I think people don't put enough thought into who they ask," Matteson said. "I think they really need to consider what it is they're applying for and who have they worked with most closely that can be positive about their skills."

She said employers and schools place so much importance on these reviews because they allow recommenders, like her, to supplement applicants' résumés with an outsider's perspective.

"There's a lot of things you don't see on the transcript or the résumé that I feel would strengthen their candidacy," she said.

She recommends students approach reference writers with a few suggestions in mind regarding what to include and to ask them to write it at least three to four weeks

in advance.

Writing recommendation letters on short notice, however, isn't an uncommon practice for Gregory Richter, linguistics and German professor. He said students sometimes will ask him to complete recommendation letters just a few days before their deadlines.

"Students probably know that I do things very conscientiously, and therefore they wait until the last moment sometimes," Richter said.

Despite his quick turnaround, he said he often spends hours writing these letters.

He said he shoulders this workload because as someone who reads recommendation letters for Truman's English and linguistics graduate program, he understands their importance.

"The student can say, 'Oh yeah, I like this and that, and I'm good at this and that, and I've done this and that,' but that's just the student's word for it," he said. "If it's in a letter, that makes the committee that's working on accepting students take it more seriously."

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— Brooke Kelsey
A.T. Still University
admissions counselor