

38 Special, Little Big Town to entertain at 2009 fair

Written by Russ Pankonin, The Imperial Republican

Both rock and country music fans will get to enjoy their genre of music again at this year's Chase County Fair in Imperial, Neb.

Fair organizers announced this week the rock group 38 Special and the country group Little Big Town will headline this year's grandstand shows.

38 Special will appear on Friday, Aug. 14, with Little Big Town taking the stage Saturday, Aug. 15.

Fair board president Dave Schilke and entertainment chair Dan Kunnemann both said they were pleased to get the two groups booked for this year's fair, which runs from Aug. 9-16.

Kunnemann said both groups carry large fan bases and expects great shows from both groups.

This marks the second year that 38 Special has performed at the fair. They headlined the rock show in 2000.

For Little Big Town, this will be their first appearance at the fair.

Schilke said this year's selection of shows will continue a tradition of bringing great performers to the Chase County Fair.

38 Special, Friday, Aug. 14

The music of 38 Special spans more than three decades after being founded in 1975 by neighborhood friends Don Barnes and Donnie Van Zant in Jacksonville, Fla.

Since then, the band has released more than 15 albums and have toured relentlessly.

In its early days, the band built its reputation with its own brand of Southern boogie and blues-rock. From there, they transformed into a more arena-rock-friendly style.

In its second decade, the band scored big with a slew of hits, including such rockers as "Caught Up In You," "Hold on Loosely," "If I'd Been the One" and "Rockin' Into the Night."

Van Zant, the brother of late Lynyrd Skynyrd frontman Ronnie Van Zant, said the magic's still there.

"When I walk up those steps to the stage and hear that audience roar, sometimes I feel like Don and I don't even have to sing, because the crowds are so vocal," Van Zant said.

Barnes said it's all about maintaining the intensity they deliver during their live shows.

Little Big Town, Saturday, Aug. 15

Becoming a top country act with their own tour in 2009 didn't come easy for Little Big Town.

Their success is the result of almost a decade of deep friendship and camaraderie among the members, Karen Fairchild, Kimberly Schlapman, Phillip Sweet and Jimi Westbrook.

Fairchild and Schlapman began singing together while students at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala.

Both moved to Nashville in the mid-1990s, and invited old Alabama friend Westbrook to join them in 1998. Sweet completed the band later that year.

"There's a special connection between the four of us, for whatever reason," Westbrook says.

38 Special, Little Big Town to entertain at 2009 fair

Written by Russ Pankonin, The Imperial Republican

“Who knows why that happens? You like to think that maybe it was meant to be, and I really do believe that. This group of people came together for a purpose.”

The band’s uniqueness made it a hard sell at first in the ever-cautious country music field, but Little Big Town pushed forward with characteristic determination.

Their patience paid off with “The Road to Here” released in 2005. The album sold more than a million copies and produced four Top 20 hits including the Top 10 smash “Boondocks,” the Top 5 “Bring It On Home,” “Good As Gone” and “A Little More You.”

In 2006, the foursome landed two Grammy nominations including Best Country Album for “The Road to Here” and Best Country Performance by a Duo or Group for “Boondocks.”

Billboard Magazine also named them Independent Artist of the Year and named “The Road to Here” Independent Album of the Year.

In 2007, they were awarded Academy of Country Music’s Top New Vocal Group.

Their latest CD, critically-acclaimed “A Place to Land,” was re-released on Capitol Records Nashville in October, 2008. It includes four new tracks including the Grammy-nominated hit collaboration with Sugarland and Jake Owen, “Life in a Northern Town.”

This marks the band’s third Grammy nomination.

Before touring on their own, they toured with the likes of George Strait, Kenny Chesney, Keith Urban and Martina McBride.