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As a Quad Cities area musician, and one who is very proud to have been a part of the River Music Experience (RME) since its inception, I have to wonder how many of the folks who are saying RME is a “failure” have actually ever been here to see and/or hear some of the things I’ve been fortunate enough to witness. Granted, everyone is entitled to their opinion, but I would like to ask these folks a few questions.

Have you ever been at RME to see a room full of wide-eyed, smiling fifth-graders learning as they play and sing along to the music that grew up along our river? Have you been there to see those same young faces light up, when they learn how contemporary artists such as Prince and Nelly tie in to the evolution of our river music heritage? Or when they see how the Rolling Stones and other British groups were so deeply influenced and inspired by our very own American blues, R&B, and early rock ’n’ roll artists? Were any of you at RME, either of the past two years, when we honored music legend Louie Bellson on his birthday? Or when musicians Bill Bell, Bill Allred, Pinetop Perkins, and Delbert McClinton visited our facility? (All of whom were not only honored to be recognized at RME, but praised the very creation and existence of our unique American music center.) Have you ever been to an open-mic night in Mojo’s at RME to see a young musician perform for the first time before a live audience, and be recognized by their peers? Do you know how much that means to a young musician?

Do you know that since we opened in June of 2004, RME has welcomed visitors from Germany, England, Australia, Japan, Korea, Israel, Scotland, Ireland, and virtually all corners of the globe? More importantly, the general consensus from these international visitors was that RME is not only a great place to learn about America’s music traditions, but an even better place to experience that music – *live*. The key word here is *live*. Midwestern folks have historically been stubborn and resistant to change – yours truly guilty as charged. We don’t always welcome new ideas, and sometimes we don’t even give them a fighting chance. In doing so, we risk not only cultural and economic stagnation, but the loss of our young people – who will, rest assured, go elsewhere to live, to work, and to enjoy the amenities that other cities will offer them. The establishment of the new Redstone Room at RME will play a very crucial role in the success of our mission to provide the experience of America’s music, through education and live performance, to both the people who live here and to our visitors from all over the world. I

sincerely hope that our community, the Davenport City Council, and the many – young and old – who continue to enjoy our programs and live music at RME will rally in support of our mission. The only "failure" I see would be the failure to do so.

Ellis Kell
Director of Marketing & Promotions
River Music Experience
Davenport

How Liberal Are CNN and MSNBC?

In a recent letter (*River Cities' Reader* Issue 571, March 8-15, 2006), a Mr. T.J. Otting compared Air America Radio (AAR) to "those far-left kooks" on almost every major network in the USA. Mr. Otting, I'd like to point out a few facts for you.

CNN and MSNBC are attempting to out-conservative Fox "News" at every turn. If this is not the case, then why did Chris Matthews recently have a so-called forum featuring some possible Republican candidates for president in 2008? We are still waiting for him to do something on the Democrats. MSNBC also has Joe Scarborough, who is as conservative as they come, and Rita Cosby, whose specialty seems to be the missing white woman du jour, and was recently quoted comparing all black people to hoods.

As far as CNN, do you ever watch Wolf Blitzer? First of all, I think he may need more fruit in his diet to increase regularity. There is a study by a media watchdog Web site (http://www.mediamatters.org)
that points out the disparity of conservative guests as opposed to liberals. There is approximately a two-to-one ratio of conservatives to liberals. Look it up.

Now to Air America Radio. The network has been around for two years nationally, and almost a year locally. WKBF recently recorded a 2.6 share in Arbitron ratings, far and away outpacing all talk radio stations except one in the area. And they started this from scratch, as did AAR. All of this despite the fact that 1270 does not advertise and has not updated its Web site since the launch of progressive talk. And not all shows on said station are AAR. Stephanie Miller, Ed Schultz, and Lionel are syndicated by Jones Syndication, which also syndicates Neil Boortz. Sorry to burst your bubble, Mr. Otting, but we on the left read and verify our facts before making crazy accusations, unlike your heroes such as Limbaugh and Hannity. Progressive radio doesn't have any known drug addicts on the air, either. We are also all looking forward to the day when O'Reilly has his final meltdown on the air. What a ratings bonanza that should be for Fox!

Joseph Penry
Davenport

Davenport Must Target Other Neighborhoods

The travesty of the Davenport city budget is not that the council chose between public safety

(fire department) and public health (Neighborhood Enhancement Office), but that cumulative decisions led them toward this ridiculous set of options. The continued focus on building ever more amenities in the downtown and along the riverfront comes at the expense of reviving long-term stability in the surrounding neighborhoods. Supporting neighborhood reinvestment will do more for the city's General Fund "structural imbalance" than maintaining and policing a skate park and additional park lands.

Downtown and the riverfront are the opening acts in central-city reinvestment; it is not the entire play. It's time for our council to prioritize the next scene: existing residential neighborhoods. When the city leads by committing capital dollars and other resources to our older neighborhoods, more residents and businesses will be attracted to the central city by choice, not just by necessity.

Through committed efforts of many people I call neighbors, and already more-than-sufficient investment through River Renaissance, the stage has been set for the wider central city to come back. The turnaround will be delayed and compromised as long as aldermen commit more millions to entertainment amenities. Aldermen must instead fund neighborhood infrastructure. Fund the city staff charged with protecting citizens and businesses and ensuring that a decent standard of living is the standard, not the exception. Businesses, residents, and tourists will commit their economic resources to the central city – including downtown – when established neighborhoods receive needed infrastructure improvements and become reliably safe and clean.

Cathryn Lass
Davenport