



**ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR**  
**Rod Piazza**

Riverside City College, Class of 1979  
Legendary blues harmonica player & singer

**R**od Piazza, the 2013 RCCD Alumnus of the Year, picked up his first guitar in 1957, a \$4 model snagged at a yard sale, but it wasn't until five years later that he took up music seriously.

In 1962, musician friends started giving the 15-year-old pointers; in 1963, he blew notes on his first harmonica; and in 1965, when prospective bandmates told him to "just blow harp and sing," he dropped the guitar and fronted the group that became "The Mystics."

Years of playing the club scene in Los Angeles generated a lot of face time with live audiences, but little cash. Piazza returned to Riverside, still taking gigs in LA and the OC. A newspaper article in the LA Free Press, followed by a club visit by ABC Bluesway record executives to hear the band, resulted in the christening of the Dirty Blues Band. Piazza and the guys recorded two LPs before the Vietnam War draft broke up the band.

For Piazza, what followed in quick succession was a new group and a chance stage performance with George Harmonica Smith that would lead to a professional collaboration between the two artists. In 1974, Piazza left Bacon Fat and went solo. Six years later, he started touring with the Mighty Flyers Blues Quartet, a group that morphed out of Piazza's earlier Chicago Flying Saucer Band.

Known as one of America's premier blues harmonica players, Piazza has recorded 24 albums, appeared as a guest performer on over 21 releases, and toured concert venues, blues clubs, and festivals worldwide. He is credited with creating a style that combines Chicago Blues with West Coast Swing, R&B, and Rock and Roll.

Piazza, who attended Riverside Community College from 1978 to 1979, lives in Riverside with his wife, Honey, a classically trained pianist who jams hard on the blues, and is a founding member of the band, Rod Piazza and the Mighty Flyers. Piazza is also known to surf daily when in residence, though no photos are known to exist showing him hanging 10 while blowing Hoodoo Man Blues.