April 29, 2013

Countdown to Riverside City College's 100th Anniversary

On April 25, 2013, at Riverside Community College District’s Annual Recognition Awards & Arts Gala held in the Riverside Auditorium and Events Center, Blues musician Rod Piazza was formally honored as the 57th RCCD Alumnus of the Year.

Rod Piazza is one of the true “Road Warriors” of the Inland Empire music scene. Piazza has been in groups for over 47 years beginning in late 1965 with “The Mystics” of Riverside. By the spring of 1966 “The Mystics” repertoire had moved closer to a Chicago Blues style and they changed their name to “The House of DBS” (“Dirty Blues Sound”). This band inked a deal to license an LP to “ABC Records” to be released on its “Bluesway” imprint. Their manager, at the time, informed them that they would be changing their name to “The Dirty Blues Band”. Two LP’s were released, “Dirty Blues Band” (1968) and “Stone Dirt” (1968). Between the first and second LP’s three members of the group were drafted necessitating a change of personnel. This revamped band also broke up soon after the release of their second LP. Piazza then formed “The Rod Piazza Blues Band” which evolved into “Bacon Fat” with the addition of legendary Blues harmonica player George “Harmonica” Smith. “Bacon Fat” was signed to the “Blue Horizon” label and released two LP’s “Grease One for Me” and “Tough Dude”. In 1973 Piazza released a solo LP on the “LMI” label entitled “Bluesman”. In the mid-1970s, health issues took Piazza off the road, but by 1976 he was back on tour. He formed a new group “The Chicago Flying Saucer Band” and released an LP on his “Gangster” label entitled “Flying Saucer Band” in 1979. By the early 1980s, Piazza had formed “the Mighty Flyers” and has been on the road with them ever since.
Piazza, born less than a mile from Riverside City College at Riverside Community Hospital, graduated from Old Riverside Poly High in 1965. It was the last class to graduate from that site, located across the street from RCC. He started at the college that same year. On his RCC days, Piazza recalled:

“Coming out of high school, I didn’t have a definite direction, wondering which way I would go other than knowing that it was going to be something to do with music. I think attending RCC helped me define where I wanted to go. “I took Music, Accounting, the Music course was the one that meant the most to me knowing that that’s where I wanted to go in life. I think I had a Geography course that probably helped me go on the road.”

On his life in Music, Piazza said:

“It’s been the greatest thing that I could have done. I’ve traveled the world, just that little harmonica and my band has taken me. When I get up and play music now at 65 years old, it’s like I’m 16, playing in a band. I don’t think when you play music live, you ever age, other than when you look in the mirror in the morning.”

On being named the 2013 RCCD Alumnus of the Year Piazza stated:

“I think it’s an award to add to the richness in my life. I’ve won the “W.C. Handy Award” four or five times, and that’s about the biggest award you can win in blues music. (I’ve won) countless other music awards and I think this is right up there with them. To me, to be recognized in my home city, it means a lot.
It is 2 years and 45 weeks until RCC’s 100th Anniversary on March 13, 2016.

The Riverside City College Instructional Media Center is bringing you this five year countdown to RCC’s 100th Anniversary. Our intention is to give everyone a weekly glance at the many people and events that have been a part of the college.

Our thanks go to the RCC Digital Library Archives and the District’s Office of Strategic Communications and Relations for allowing us to use their photo and newspaper collections. Thanks as well to all of the RCC students and Faculty Advisors that were a part of the yearbook and newspaper staffs. Thanks also to Tom Johnson and Gilbert Jimenez who wrote “the book” about RCC’s history. “Riverside City College 1916-1981- A 65 Year History” is available in the RCC Digital Library.

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