

Spider's the 'Gump' of punk

Rock festivals raising funds for animal welfare

By Jack Le Blanc
The Trentonian

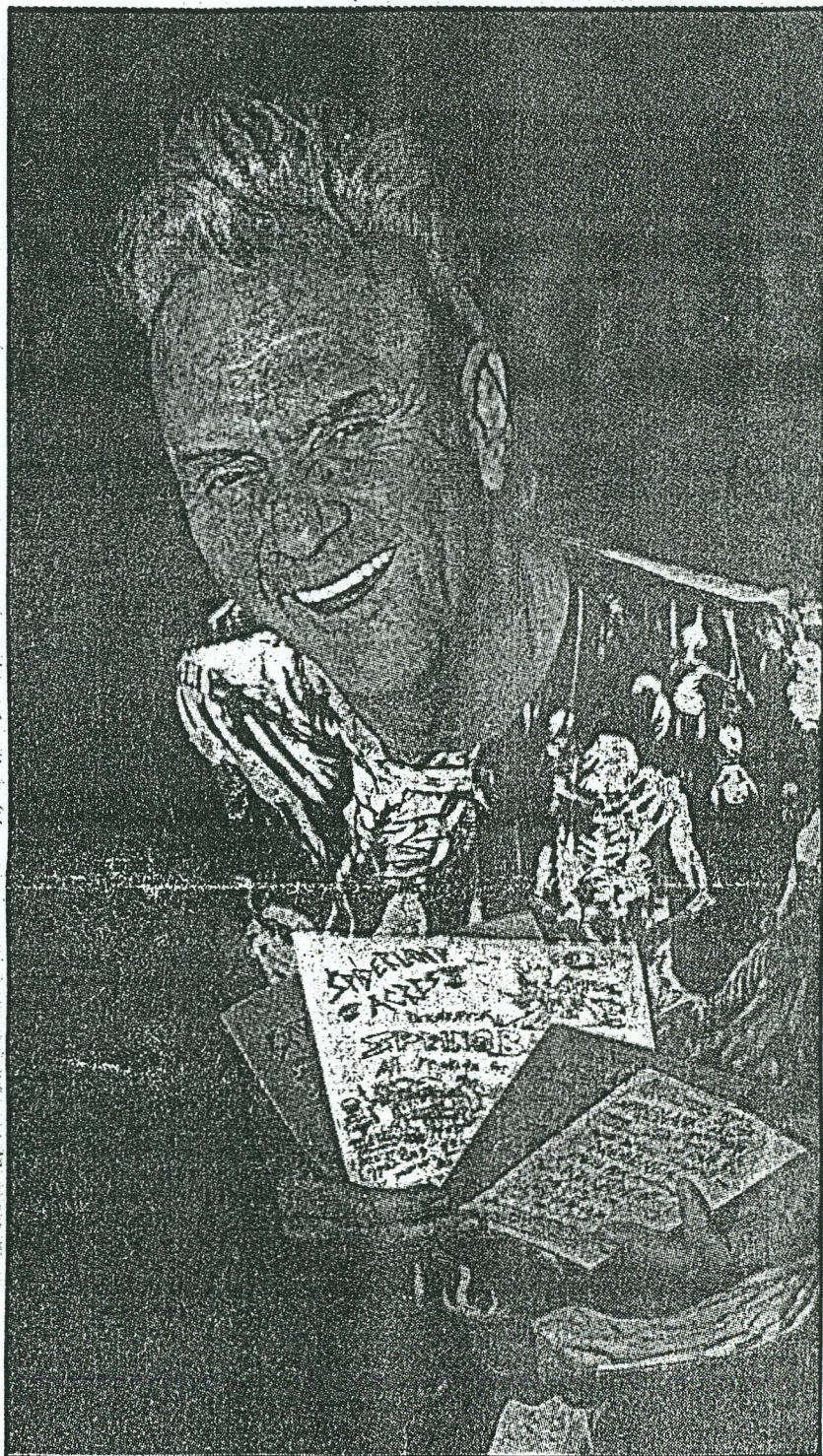
He's the Forrest Gump of Punk. The six-foot, five-inch, 215-pound man known as Spider, is immediately recognizable as he makes his way through downtown Trenton with his multi-colored Mohawk haircut. Warren Hastings, going on 59, has found the fountain of youth and it's punk rock.

Spider's led a musically- charmed life, getting to know jazz greats and stumbling onto the humble beginnings of the punk scene in London, England. He's moved constantly but has always managed to land with his feet firmly on the ground. Today he's organizing four punk rock festivals for his RR2 Marmora abode — the first, Spring Bash, this Victoria Day weekend — all in support of animal welfare.

"Spider was the name given me accidentally years ago when I worked for A&P as a stockboy in Toronto," he said. "One of the girls, a cashier, came up with all these nicknames and somehow she came up with Spider and it stuck ... This old lady dropped a whole bag of groceries because she thought there was a spider on her and there was a big mess I had to clean up. Everyone started to laugh and called me Spider, and it stuck. I suit it anyway because I'm all arms and legs when I dance. That was over 45 years ago."

Spider's early musical leaning was toward heavy soul, jazz and rhythm and blues.

"I think I was nine-years-old when I went to my first jazz concert: Norman Granz Jazz at the Philharmonic, in Toronto. They used to travel all over North America, and some of the jazz greats were on that bill.



Spider promotes his Victoria Day weekend Spring Bash in Marmora to raise money for animal welfare. Derek Baldwin photo

"I used to go out dancing a lot and was always going to start a band, but never did. I've always been around the musical scene

and gotten to know a lot of bands and musicians.

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Spider was drawn into the

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"I guess somehow I feel myself directed into promotion. I figure once I retire that's what I'm going to end up doing because it seems to be happening anyway."

Spider never got beyond Grade 11, but has always had a job, whether in an architect's office or with a thermos bottle manufacturing company.

"But I was always restless and always searching. I was always on the move," he said.

That transient feeling saw Spider in Montreal for five years, where he worked in an A&P bakery before heading to a farm in the Maritimes as part of the self-reflective Woodstock generation in late 1971.

"It was a wood lot farm with a country garden; enough to keep myself going. I was very influenced by the Woodstock generation. I was into macrobiotics and didn't eat meat for a few years; I'm trying to cut out eating meat again today. Then I got bored with the farm scene ... It's a funny thing."

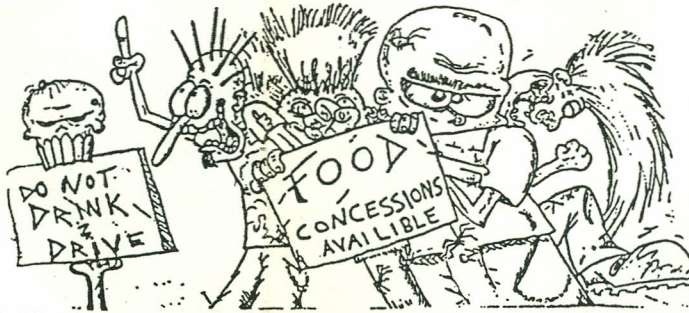
Spider said he was torn between two choices, Europe or the west coast.

"It's the last minute and I'm standing in front of the ticket guy at the airport at Halifax, and he says, 'Where to?'"

"I said 'Just a minute.' I thought I'd flip a quarter and if it turns up the Queen, I'll go to England; if it turns up the moose I'll go to Vancouver. It turned up the Queen, so I said, 'One ticket to London', and that's how I got to England."

Spider went sight-seeing for a month and landed the job of Woolworth's credit manager, shortly before joining the punk scene.

"I didn't look then like I do now, but I didn't like dressing in a pinstripe suit and a tie all day long either. I hated it. I had the best of shirts and ties, but I could hardly wait to get my shirt and tie off at night. In fact it's funny. I turned into the punk scene when I was a



Spider hosts people from around the world at his Marmora punk festivals, as fun as his own promotional art work.

Woolworth's manager; I'd rush home, pick up a couple of cans of beer at the off-licence (beer store), rush back to my flat, mess my hair up and off comes the suit and on comes the black leather and chains. By day I was a business man, by night a punker."

It was late 1976 and punk hit London like the blitz when fate threw Spider head-long into punk and the Sex Pistols.

"They (Sex Pistols) phoned me up because I'd bought a mobile disco — two turntables in a box a little bigger than a coffin — and I started hiring myself out for parties...I used to call myself Spider's Funky Mobile Disco. When the punk scene came out I called it Spider's Punky Funky Disco.

"The Sex Pistols hired me. They'd hired a strip tease club, the Tropicana in Soho, to get recording executives out so they could land a recording contract. They wanted music which lead up to the type of music they were going to play; the music that influenced them ... I loved it right away, the outrageousness of it, the honesty of it. Singing about the problems of the day instead of the dreams you can't live."

Spider continued his night and day life, working in places like Luton, England for the Vauxhall Motors plant and travelling to London and across Europe at night and on weekends to continue his punk odyssey.

"I've had the best time with punk bands in England," he said. "The scene was a lot more intense there than here, probably because of the stiff English upbringing; then all of

a sudden it was a break from tradition."

Fate pulled Spider back into Canada's web; his father and sister died, and his mother was getting on in years when he took her touring across Europe and parts of Africa.

Shortly after his mother died in 1981 Spider was diagnosed as having a weak heart, told he had less than two weeks to live, told to quit drinking and smoking.

"I got stuck here ... There were a few nights when I thought I was on my way out, but managed to survive. I was very sick for quite a while. Even though I was on welfare — I wasn't home long enough to qualify for unemployment insurance — I was bored so I started volunteering for animal welfare groups. My doctor advised me to move out to the country and get better air, so that's why I ended up in

Marmora in the fall of 1983."

Spider wound up working at CFB Trenton a couple years later, again quite by accident.

"I'd had a couple of jobs in Belleville that it turned out weren't worth anything. So I'm talking to my neighbor who's in hospital in Belleville when something told me out of the clear blue sky to come to Trenton. I went to the employment office, and for one hour they had a sign up about jobs at the base. They put the sign up and took it down in the time I was there, and I applied for a job and got it. It was an accident; it was so weird. They love me. I'm everything they can't do, and everything they can't be."

Spiderland Acres is about 80 acres of rough timberland that hosts several punk fests each year in support of animal welfare. But Spider, and Spiderland Acres, nearly bought the farm two years ago.

"I had some weirdos who tried to burn me out; tried to kill me two years ago on Labor Day ... I lost everything. I lost all my tapes, my videos my pictures of my family, everything."

That same summer he got a role in a movie, TekWar, with William Shatner where he plays a green-haired street

web of punk

person banging on a telephone booth.

"I'm only in it for a few minutes but I'm there ... I was with a few other movies before, dealing with the punk scene. When punk exploded I was on the BBC and there was a German film crew that took pictures of me dancing, but I never saw those."

Punk, Spider says, keeps him young. He's run into older punk rockers, including an 80-year-old Toronto couple.

"Sure it's uncommon to be a punk at 59 ... Does punk keep you young? Probably. Punk keeps me going ... I'm not treated or dealt with on an age basis. A lot of kids I know treat me like one of them because I think like them. Yeah (it's like a fountain of youth); that's the way it's always been." Driving a hearse as his per-

sonal vehicle never bothered Spider because "death doesn't have any significance to me: To me it should be as beautiful as birth. It's just an exit you know. I think people build it up bigger than it should be."

Beside Springbash this weekend there's the fifth annual Punkfest, July 14-16, in honor of his 59th birthday, this July 13. This will be the fifth annual event. The Labor Day punk fest last year was 90 per cent french, with bands out of Quebec. "It was just an amazing party. It was very interesting. I couldn't understand a lot of what they were singing, but boy it was good." A Halloween/Thanksgiving bash is slated for the Thanksgiving weekend.

For those of you who don't know there's a lot of slam dancing or moshing.

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