



The Clinton Courier

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Bishop Gunn to headline annual July 4th Family Fireworks Extravaganza

Special to The Clinton Courier

On Thursday, July 4, Clintonians are encouraged to head to Clinton's Traceway Park to enjoy the 30th Annual Family Fireworks Extravaganza, billed as the biggest and best Independence Day party in the metro area.

Presented this year by Continental Tire, the event will be headlined by Bishop Gunn, a group rooted in Mississippi who is attracting national attention for their blend of rock and roll, soul and blues, rooted in the history and sounds of their home in Natchez and the surrounding Delta.

The group is comprised of members Travis McCready, Drew Smithers, Ben Lewis and Bruce Sharp. With a hometown of Natchez, the group draws its name from John Edward Gunn, who served as the Catholic Bishop of Natchez in the early 1900s.

Last year, the band opened for Gov't Mule, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Whiskey Myers, The Outlaws, Black Stone Cherry, and The Marcus King Band. In addition, they went on their first European tour, which included opening seven dates for Guns N' Roses' lead guitarist, Slash.

Bishop Gunn released their debut full-length album in May 2018.



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They worked on the release with Grammy Award-winning producers Casey Wasner and Mark Neill at the legendary Muscle Shoals Sound Studio and FAME Studios, as well as The Purple House in Leiper's Fork, Tennessee, where the band currently lives and creates in a farmhouse on the outskirts of Nashville.

In 2017, the band appeared on Kid Rock's 8th Annual "Chillin' the Most Cruise" and was voted the best band on the boat. The group went on

to do a commercial film for Southern Comfort in Clarksdale, Mississippi, and spent their summer touring. In September, Bishop Gunn took the stage at the Pilgrimage Festival in Franklin, Tennessee, alongside artists Justin Timberlake, Eddie Vedder, Mavis Staples and Gary Clark Jr. The band then played Laid Back Festival dates with Jaimoe's Jasssz Band, Jimmie Vaughan, The Gregg Allman Band and Lynyrd Skynyrd.

The group's *Natchez* album,

named after the band's hometown, entered the Billboard charts as the #4 Blues Album and also appeared as #8 on their Heatseekers South Central chart. Rolling Stone Country featured the band among their "Artists You Need to Know," asserting "anyone can cite the Muscle Shoals sound as an influence, but few acts can actually pull off making music worthy of such a claim. Nashville band Bishop Gunn is one of those acts...The resulting music is the perfect blend of Nashville and the Shoals, and is the rare album that builds upon its influences rather than resorting to outright mimicry."

Prior to the release of *Natchez*, the band was featured at SXSW, played support dates for Blackberry Smoke and was invited for a return appearance on Kid Rock's 9th Annual "Chillin' the Most Cruise."

Kicking off the Family Fireworks Extravaganza event as the opening act will be Hannah Belle, a "true country girl hailing from Red Lick, Mississippi." Belle is a 2011 graduate of Mississippi College, with a mass communications degree and a master's degree in education.

Singing since she was three, Belle says country music came naturally to her, with a love and respect for the traditional country sound, but

cont. on page 12

INSIDE:

- Free smoke alarms4
- MC freshman orientations.....5
- Milepost 89.....6
- Mystery Sculpture.....9
- Ink Slingers release new book.....11
- NJCAA tournament pics.....20
- Library trail adds new honorees...24-25
- Summer Safety.....28
- Band scholarship winners.....34
- Teacher Incentive Program.....40
- Miss Clinton headed to pageant.....41

Two Clinton High School players chase big league dream

By Mike Christensen

Christian Johnson and Dallas Dyer have taken the first step on a journey that only a relative few get to experience. The Clinton High School graduates were picked in Major League Baseball's amateur draft on June 5, and both have signed pro contracts.

Johnson, a center fielder, was drafted in the 19th round by the Tampa Bay Rays. Dyer, a right-handed pitcher, went to the Philadelphia Phillies in the 21st round. Both are expected to take the field for the first time as pros this month in the Florida-based Gulf Coast League, the first of the many levels of the minor leagues.

Though they're a long way from the big leagues, both are excited about the opportunity to chase a dream they've had since they were little kids.

"Ever since I started playing baseball, when I was two or three, playing T-ball," Dyer said.

"I told my third-grade teacher I wanted to be a big league player someday, and he said, 'Go for it,'" Johnson said. "So here I am."

Clinton High coach Trave Hopkins said both Johnson and Dyer are smart kids from good families and will do

fine with the adjustments they must make in their new life, where baseball is a full-time job.

Hopkins played pro ball for several years in independent leagues and went to spring camp with the St. Louis Cardinals, so he knows a little about what awaits his former players.

"They're special athletes," he said. "I stand behind them."

Johnson, who had signed to play college ball with Alabama-Birmingham, and Dyer, a Southern Miss signee, were among just seven players drafted out of Mississippi high

cont. on page 3



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