

Rockin for Rock Springs: Concert to help park security after Christmas Wonderland thefts

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON – After news broke earlier this month that the Grandpa Gang had been robbed of their Christmas cheer yet again, many people in the Riverbend stepped up to the plate to take a swing at saving Christmas.

Michael Weber and his wife, Erin Jo Paddlefoot, have gotten together to host an event to raise money to help the gang of retired men replace nearly 1,500 feet of copper wiring

stolen earlier this month from the Christmas Wonderland display at Rock Springs Park. This incident was far from the first time the group has had Christmas display wiring stolen from them and Grandpa Gang lead, Al Cowgill said enough was enough and fully intended to end the event – at least for this coming holiday season. Alton Mayor Brant Walker assured the group the city would get behind them and protect the Christmas Wonderland site, and Cowgill and the gang agreed the show could continue.

While Cowgill said money was not the issue, replacing the wiring could cost more than \$500. In previous years, wire thefts have cost even more. To help offset those costs and show the Grandpa Gang just how much their efforts were appreciated by the community, Weber and Paddlefoot are hosting Rockin' for Rock Springs Nov. 21 at 8 p. m. at Bottle and Barrel on Broadway in Alton. The event already has a fully-loaded playbill and as many as 500 people claiming interest on social media.

“So many people have reached out wanting to be a part of this,” Weber said in an email. “It just got crazy and exploded beyond anything we thought. There are over 500 people that have responded interested, or going to the Facebook event.”

Tickets for the event are \$10 and can be attained through [www.Facebook.com /Paddlefoot](https://www.facebook.com/Paddlefoot), at Bottle and Barrel and at the door that night. Donations will be accepted for people who want to contribute, but cannot make it. Bands playing will be Paddlefoot, Overnighter, Mindframes, Distant Eyes and Biff K'narly and the Reptilians.

Since so many people came to the aid of the Grandpa Gang, the money raised from this show will go toward the greater overall future of the park.

“The original intent was to give it directly to the Grandpa Gang, but it looks like the city and other businesses stepped up and got them out of the hole this year,” Weber said. “Our plans now are to use this money to help with the infrastructure the city is going to put in, so they no longer will have to run extension cords and power across the ground. This will help with the security and also with safety concerns. We see this as both helping better Rock Springs and directly helping the grandpas.”

Weber has a history of fond memories at the park, which until recent years under Walker's administration with the help of the Rock Spring 2020 initiative has been severely neglected.

“I remember as a child going to Rock Springs,” he said. “Back then, there were train cars you could climb on. I remember passing the entrance and seeing kids playing in the fountain. My mother talked about how they would always have family reunions there

and she would catch crawdads out of the spring with a hot dog on a string. It is such a beautiful park and we feel it has been forgotten because of its location. It seems everything gets funneled into Gordon Moore.”