

# Folk concert a homecoming for Gordon

BY DOUG HARRISON  
The Rockwood Miller

It could have been billed *Tamarack on the Grand*: The story of a river and the James Gordon homecoming.

The Rockwood native brought along the other two members of his folk band, Carole LeClair and Alex Sinclair, for a little music by the water in a 90-minute set at the Rockwood Conservation Area pavilion recently.

The 16-year-old band — Gordon being the only original member — is celebrating the historic Grand River Valley this summer by appearing at various Grand River conservation areas on their Heritage River Tour.

The river was recently designated a Heritage River by the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board, thus recognizing the unique and pristine Grand as part of Canadian history. The tour, which honours many historic places and faces in the river valley, features a bevy of cuts from Tamarack's recently

released album, *Tamarack on the Grand: the story of a river*.

"I don't think we've ever played in Rockwood," said Gordon while equipping the stage for the Friday performance, the fifth stop of an eight-venue lineup. We had done all these special areas, but not even our own backyard ... I expected a parade and banners to be raised."

"Playing in these parks is wonderful. I haven't been here in 20 years, so it's nice to come back and see what it's like," piped in Sinclair, who used to work summers at the Rockwood Conservation Area as a teenager.

Sinclair, who joined Tamarack in 1985 after a stint as the band's road manager, handles the mandolin, guitar and vocals for a band whose trademark is bone-chilling three part harmonies. Newcomer LeClair, a Maritimer, couples bass guitar with vocals.

Gordon heads the band with a repertoire that includes a banjo, guitar, tin whistle, accordion, harmonica and vocals. He says learn-

ing about the Grand River has been a great discovery process for Tamarack.

"A lot of people don't know about their history, so it's neat for them to learn about themselves," said Gordon, who now resides in Guelph after spending more than 25 years in the village of 2,100.

However, it wasn't until five years ago that the band had a grasp of what they were all about.

"The band's really come into its own in terms of our identity. We know what we're all about and have put out four albums in the last five years," explained Gordon, who's in his late 30s and mentioned he didn't indulge in folk music until his university days.

The band caught the eye of Folk Era, their record label based in Chicago, and to their own surprise, has intrigued mid-west and southern folks with their Canadian content.

"It's almost a Canadian thing," begins Gordon, "but we wondered who would be interested in what we have to offer? We do talk about ourselves and they (Americans) love it. They don't mind if we talk about Thunder Bay in our songs.

"But we don't want to be dry and educational. We're really en-

tertainers first."

Following the tour, which wraps up with a performance at the Hillside Festival in Guelph from July 22 to 24, Gordon said Tamarack's career thrust is to expand their base in the States with more performances. Also, with LeClair on the scene, a trip east to gather Maritime material and write songs could be in the making.

"We're a good vocal band. We all wedge into a van, so we have to get along, and we do. It's nice," he said. "Our songs come from the project we're doing at the time, not what pops in our head."

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SWEET SOUND! Rockwood native James Gordon, centre, and fellow players Carole LeClair and Alex Sinclair performed at the Conservation Area recently. (Doug Harrison photo)

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