

# Return of the Granville Blues Festival

NATIONAL ACTS TOP THE BILL AT THIS SUMMER'S NORTH SIDE EVENT

BY DAVID LUHRSSEN

Granville was a largely rural township in northwest Milwaukee County until its annexation by the City of Milwaukee in 1956. The area saw a building boom from the late '50s through the early '70s including Northridge Mall, the jewel of the district until its decline and closure.

But Granville moved on without the mall and for the past several years—except 2020 during the pandemic—it has been the site for a long weekend of free music. This year's Granville Blues Festival features three headlining acts, the Otilia Donaire Band (July 15), John Primer (July 16), Cash Box Kings (July 17) and Toronzo Cannon (July 18).

The four headliners represent a cross-section of contemporary blues and blues rock. San Francisco's Otilia Donaire is a vocalist in the gritty mode of Koko Taylor and Janis Joplin. John Primer played with Muddy

Waters and Willie Dixon and remains a mainstay of the Chicago blues scene. The Cash Box Kings draw from Mississippi Delta as well Chicago blues in songs that speak to contemporary concerns. Guitarist Toronzo Cannon brings rock-inspired energy to the blues.

In previous seasons, the event was called the Granville Blues and Jazz Festival. As explained by Mary Hoehne, executive director of the Granville Business Improvement District, "This year it is the Blues Fes-

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tival because it's the appropriate music and feel for coming out of the pandemic." After all, blues isn't simply about sadness and deprivation but is all about the strength to turn troubles into celebration.

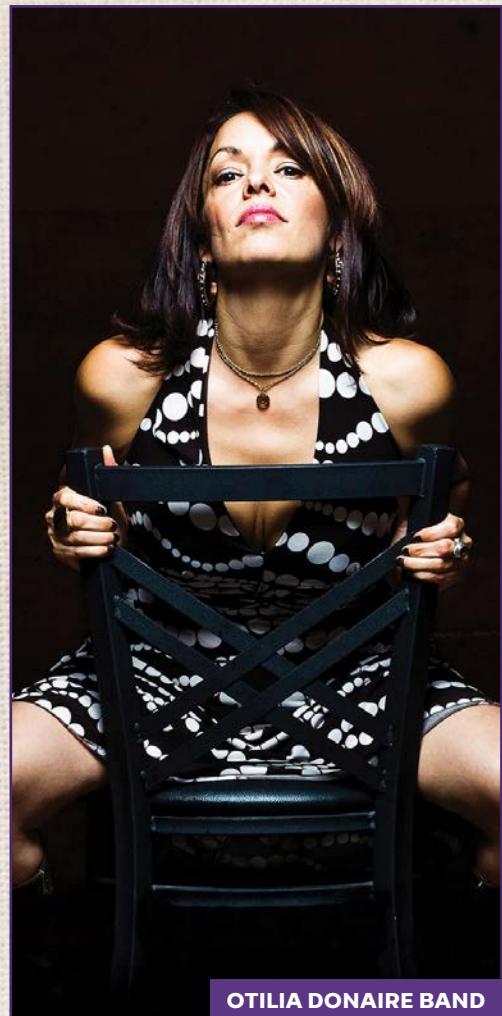
Local acts including Only Tonite and the Lloyd Stephens Band will fill out the bill. Food booths and pop-up retail vendors will also be on hand. "We aim to bring regional and national acts to Milwaukee without charging people for the opportunity to hear great music," Hoehne says. "We bring the music you don't normally get to hear without a trip to a blues club, a concert or another fest in another state."

The much-publicized decline of Northridge put the district in a bad light. "Granville's biggest challenge is changing [people's]



JOHN PRIMER

Photo by Marilyn Stringer.



OTILIA DONAIRE BAND

perspective," Hoehne continues. "It's one of the safest places in the city. It has a wonderful diverse population. Many people have lived there for years. We are surrounded by lovely homes and condos and apartments. We are diverse in all aspects, which gives the area wonderful character. We have hundreds of jobs. Nestled behind the commercial corridor are beautiful homes, with lovely landscaping, caring neighbors, and nature. It's a lovely place to raise a family."



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*Granville BID's 4th annual*

# BLUES FEST

JULY 15-18

rain or shine

Thursday July 15 4:00 -10:30

Headliner: **The Otilia Band**

Friday July 16 4:00 -10:30

Headliner: **John Primer**

Saturday July 17 1:00 -10:30

Headliner: **Cash Box Kings**

Sunday July 18 1:00 -10:30

Headliner: **Tornozo Cannon**

**Featuring:**

Nu Blu Band • Cheryl Youngblood • Tonight Only •

Mike Wheeler Band • Lloyd Stephens Band

## 8633 W Brown Deer Rd

THE GRANVILLE CONNECTION PARKING LOT

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**granville**  
business improvement district



## TORONZO CANNON

Could Granville be the face of Milwaukee in the future? Says Hoehne, "Our biggest challenge is the attitude of others who forget about the area and do not include it in the conversation. The economic machine forgets that if you want to be inclusive, invest in an area that is already showing you that inclusiveness works. People talk diversity and inclusion, write mission statements, change up their marketing pieces and ignore areas like Granville where it already exists."

Aside from the music, the Granville Blues Festival is an opportunity to show people from around the Milwaukee area what Granville is all about.

The Granville Blues Festival runs July 15-18 at 8633 W. Brown Deer Road. Headlining acts take the stage 8 p.m. nightly. For more information, visit [granvillebusiness.org](http://granvillebusiness.org).

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*David Luhrssen is Managing Editor of the Shepherd Express and coauthor of The Encyclopedia of Classic Rock.*



CASH BOX KINGS