

Clouds and sun.
High: 61. Low: 58.
Details, B5

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Serving Solano and Napa counties

From news to *Blues*

By Rich Freedman
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Michael Robinson made two pivotal business decisions in his 52 years. He left the newspaper industry for music, learning guitar at 34. Then he left alternative rock for the blues.

Living proof of "better late than never" takes his band to Gentleman Jim's on Saturday in a return to Vallejo after a Solano County Fair appearance last summer.

Robinson was just short of his 44th birthday when he did a workshop with noted Bay Area bluesman Johnny Nitro.

Rock out, blues in.

"I felt I had said everything there was that I could say about rock and alternative rock," Robinson said from his Oakland home. "So I went back to my early love — blues. Obviously, I had a wake up call."

It became obvious to Robinson during a gig at a small Merced bar, where he joked that "there was a three-tooth minimum and someone snuck in."

The owner booked Robinson's band, The Tabloids, for three long sets. And Robinson didn't think they could handle it.

"So I went out to the van with the guitar player and wrote a bunch of blues songs in 10 minutes," Robinson said. "And we played a set of these made up songs. The next

night, people came back and asked to hear them again."

Robinson laughed and took a phrase from the pro football handbook.

"It was the hurry-up offense," he said of the instant songs.

If nothing else, Robinson was able to think on his feet. And blues was his destiny.

"When people heard I would be doing blues, they'd say, 'That's what he really loved.' It was obvious," Robinson said.

The genre has changed, but the bottom line remained: the same, Robinson said.

"We're there to have a good time and make sure everyone else has a good time," he said.

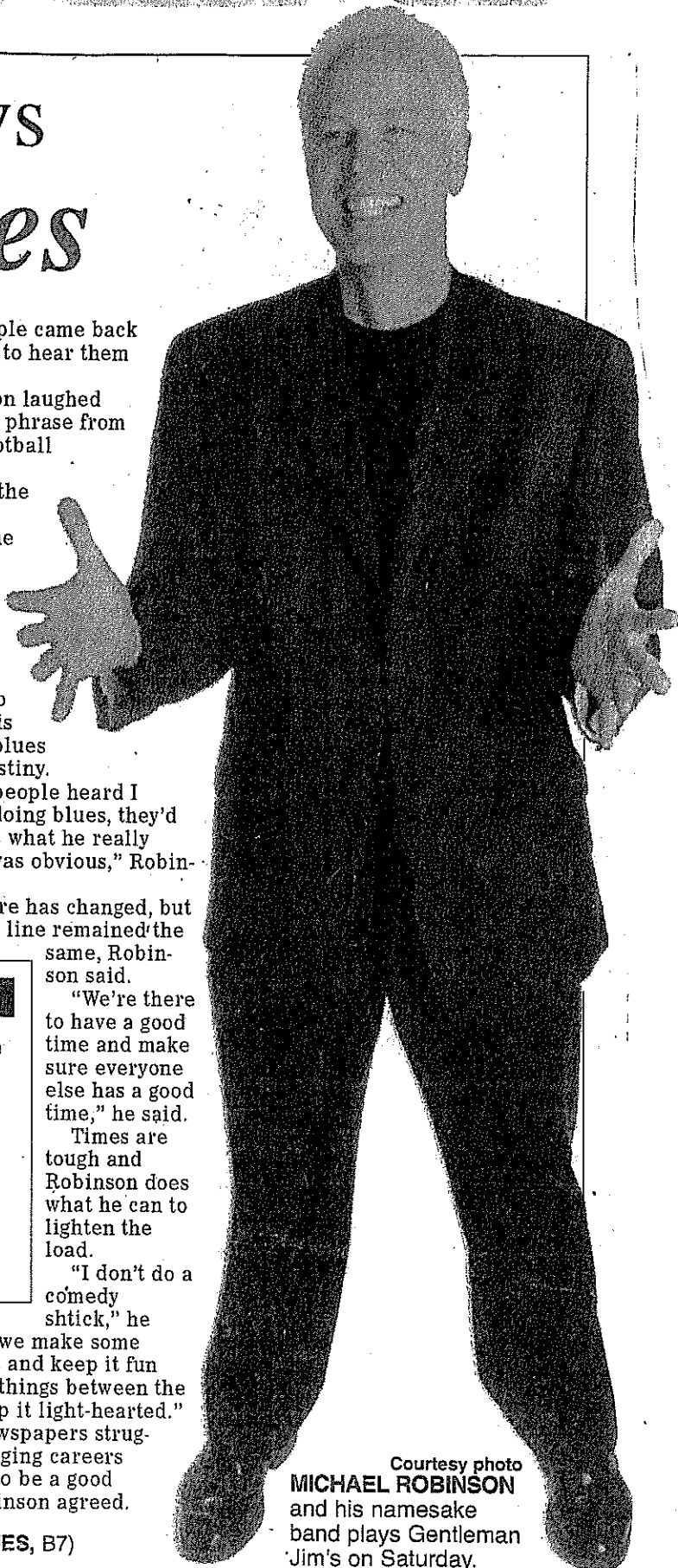
Times are tough and Robinson does what he can to lighten the load.

"I don't do a comedy shtick," he

said. "But we make some wisecracks and keep it fun with little things between the songs. Keep it light-hearted."

With newspapers struggling, changing careers appeared to be a good move, Robinson agreed.

(See BLUES, B7)



Courtesy photo
MICHAEL ROBINSON
and his namesake
band plays Gentleman
Jim's on Saturday.

Blues

(From B6)

"So many of my friends are gone or scared of leaving," he said. "I said, 'Thank God I did my music. And I have the CDs and videos and Web site to prove it.'"

The Michael Robinson Band is closing on finishing a live recording that should be finished by the end of the year, the front man known for clever lyrics said.

But first, there's Saturday's 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. gig at Gentleman Jim's.

"I never met the man," Robinson laughed. "I'm looking forward to it."

Robinson won't be looking forward to accepting free drinks from fans. Not that he's not gracious. He's just responsible.

"I'm careful about drinking and playing," he said. "It's a beer with a glass of water, no ice. And I never drink during the third set."

Robinson's so careful, he keeps a breathalyzer in his vehicle.

"I've got kids," he said. "I believe in personal responsibility."

Sure, he said, it was different at 22 than it is at 52.

"There was a different consciousness back then, a different perspective," Robinson said. "I'm a fun lovin' guy, but I know my limits. If I'm irresponsible, I'll be it at home where I can just fall off the sofa."

The Michael Robinson Band works three or four gigs a month, Robinson said, and has steady bookings through 2009. The economy, Robinson said, may even help.

"A lot of our shows have either no cover or a very low cover," he said. "Most people in economic times are not paying \$100 to see Eric Clapton. So we're finding people are staying closer to home."

Wherever the band plays, the music stays up tempo outside of a handful of ballads, Robinson said, lamenting that his status doesn't include roadies.

"I've got to do a lot of heavy lifting," he said.

The shoulder hurts. The neck hurts. But the show must go on.

"People ask when I'm going to slow down," Robinson said. "Probably when I'm dead."