

# Blues festival founder feted on walk of fame

By JOHN STEWART  
Staff

Despite what some people might tell you, the Southside Shuffle was not born 15 years ago at the St. Lawrence soccer fields at the foot of Hurontario St., where Downchild and Fathead played for a small but enthusiastic crowd.

It actually started many years before that, in a house at the foot of Mississauga Rd. in what is now J.C. Saddington Park; the house where Chuck Jackson's grandparents lived.

That's where the ritual gatherings of the clan took place, often on Sunday afternoons. Everyone grabbed an instrument and took a featured spot on the musical bill of fare.

Brothers, cousins, uncles, aunts, parents, and grandparents played various instruments, mostly guitars — Chuck probably plucked away on his first bass purchased from the Dixie Music Centre in Dixie Mall, and his grandfather played spoons.

It was a musical mishmash full of mayhem and fun and a lesson in the collective joy of making music which Jackson tucked away in his fertile Credit River delta memory banks.

In fact, it could have been the inspiration for a memorable song he wrote many years later called *Dew Drop In*.

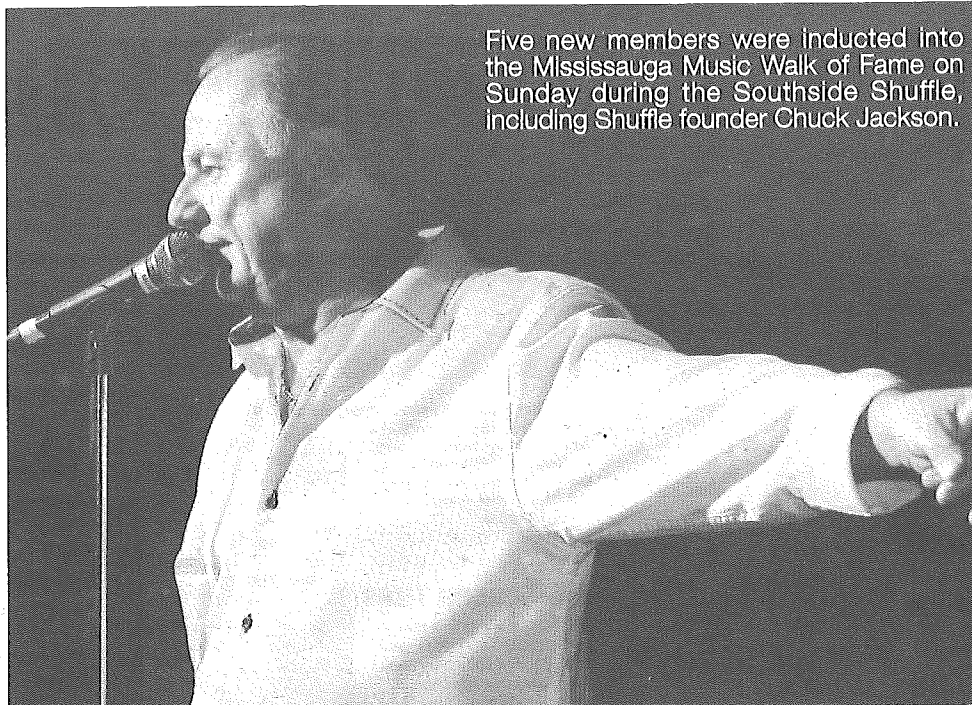
There was another ritual that took place at the Jackson homestead every fall — a giant family corn roast. When Jackson started the Shuffle in 1999, he made sure it was scheduled for September, in honour of his grandparents.

This twin divinity of family and music is what the Southside Shuffle has always been about and what it remains about today.

Chuck Jackson lived the first 56 years of his life in Lakeview and Port Credit.

His musical education got a big boost in Grade 5 at Forest Ave. Public School when the regular music teacher took a leave of absence. The substitute just happened to be the guitar player in a great Toronto band — Robbie Lane and The Disciples.

It wasn't long before Chuck and four of his



Five new members were inducted into the Mississauga Music Walk of Fame on Sunday during the Southside Shuffle, including Shuffle founder Chuck Jackson.

buddies formed a band they called Barewires. A couple of years later they hit the big time — playing the afternoon school dances in grades 7 and 8.

Port Credit Secondary School brought more bands — Full House, the Madison Street Walkers — and a new awakening.

At 16, he had the life-changing experience of seeing Buddy Guy in the flesh at the CNE. In 2007, Chuck would bag one of his biggest catches ever for Southside when he got Guy to agree to be in his lineup.

The same year he saw Guy play at the CNE, his buddy Angus McKie went on holiday in England and returned with two records more precious than gold — an album by John Mayall and The Bluesbreakers and a song that had yet to be released in North America called *Sunshine of Your Love* by some new group

called Cream. That really solidified Chuck's love of the blues.

Pretty soon he hit the road — Dixie Rd.

At a talent show at Dixie Mall in 1971, the judges — the well-known local group of Edward Harding and McLean — placed Chuck's band first. They won a recording contract with Stop 8 Music and the resulting album, *Get On Up with Dancer*, captured the first-ever appearance of a Chuck Jackson vocal on vinyl.

Greater glory awaited on Dominion Day in 1972. Chuck and the band headlined at the A

& W drive-in on Lakeshore Rd. at Front St. — near where the Starbucks now stands. The sound and light man for the show was a young man from Erindale Woodlands named Gil Moore.

Jackson earned his stripes on the road with an R&B tribute band that played on the east coast before he joined the Cameo Blues Band in 1978. Two-and-a-half years as the house band at the Isabella Hotel refined the vocal and harmonica styles.

He joined Canada's premier blues band Downchild 24 years ago and is now their longest-serving vocalist.

He has flipped, flopped and flown his way to three Juno nominations, three Maple Blues Awards, the Toronto Blues Society's Blues With a Feeling lifetime achievement award and innumerable other industry markers. Last year he was enshrined in Festival and Events Ontario's Hall of Fame for his work founding and directing the Shuffle.

As successful as he has been over his long career as an artist, his work as artistic director of the Shuffle may be Chuck's greatest achievement. He has created a vibrant, elastic, living/ breathing blues and jazz festival that has stood the test of time.

He has "borrowed" liberally from the best of the ideas he has seen playing festivals around the world and brought it all back home.

Jackson says that the Shuffle has taken on a life of its own. In his words — "the event itself has become the star."

If that's so, it's largely because of his passion, persistence and perspiration.

If you were a lyricist, you might say that Chuck Jackson called the blues home to Port Credit and, in establishing the Shuffle, made Port Credit the home of the blues.