

Edison Festival focuses on fAMILY

Outer Toons one of many kid-friendly attractions

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Just like Mighty Mouse, The Outer Toons are swooping in to save family fun.

Everybody loves cartoon theme songs, says bandleader Chris Charles (better known as The Maestro Klutz). And his silly Orlando band specializes in just that, belting out everything from the Spider-Man theme song to Ren & Stimpy's "Happy Happy Joy Joy."

Joy is what it's all about, Charles says.

"The kids love it," he says. "Everybody's dancing, and they really get involved."

In fact, it's all about the kids at this weekend's Light Up the Town Block Party, part of the ongoing festivities for the annual Edison Festival of Light. The festival concludes Saturday, Feb. 16, with the Grand Parade through downtown Fort Myers.

Festival organizers are emphasizing more family fun this year, says organizer Bobbi Stage. "This way, an entire family can come out and have fun for very little money."

The Light Up the Town block party starts Friday with



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live bands in downtown Fort Myers, including Galo's Santana Tribute Band and local bands such as The Catman Doodz and Cracker Blues (see profile on page 12).

Then the tunes continue Saturday with sax-slinging rocker Eddie Money, power balladeers Night Ranger and toon-loving goofballs The

Outer Toons.

The Saturday party also includes a free Family Fun Zone from 1 to 4 p.m. Along with watching local performers on a community stage, kids can ride on several small rides, including a rock-climbing wall and a train children can ride.

Of course, there's also the

Junior Parade on Sunday, Feb. 10. That's when kids wave from floats in a smaller version of the big Edison Grand Parade.

On Feb. 16, the Grand Parade culminates in the stadium show at Edison Stadium at Fort Myers High School.

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"Joy is what it's all about"

FAMILY

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featuring Pat Monahan, lead singer and songwriter for Train. That show will also have a Bounce House and other kids' games and activities.

"We're trying to get it back to the way it used to be," Stage says. "Before, there was only so much for children to do."

That's why they booked The Outer Toons cartoon band. Stage and her family have seen the band several times at Universal Studios, where they perform regularly.

Those tunes from 'toons keep the kids happy, and they also send adults on trips in the Wayback Machine — thanks to familiar theme songs from "The Jetsons" to "Mighty Mouse."

"It's good for adults, too," Stage says. "Because there's a kid inside all of us."

Charles and the Toons can't wait to rock Fort Myers. OK, rock

might not be the right word. But whatever it is, he says, it'll be fun.

The seven-piece band dresses in funny costumes and hams it up on stage with saxophone, xylophone, flute, clarinet and more.

Charles spent years rocking the bar circuit, but then he wanted to do something more kid-centric. He had two young kids, himself.

"There wasn't any family entertainment out there," he says. So he started his own.

That was about six years ago, and now The Outer Toons are working on a TV pilot for a music-education show. With any luck, they'll be the next Wiggles.

"We would LOVE that," he says.

Until then, they'll keep the tunes coming in their live shows.

Nothing beats playing for a crowd of screaming, enthusiastic kids, Charles says.

"I love playing for kids," Charles says. "It's the best audience. They love it, and then everybody else loves it, too."