

LIVING

Audio connoisseurs come together for music magic

By **ANDREW HOSHKIW**
The Whitehorse Star

HAINES JUNCTION – For James King, a bluegrass musician who grew up near the Blue Ridge Mountains on the border of North Carolina, Haines Junction reminds him what life was like as a boy.

"This wilderness is how it really used to be in the country when I was growing up," he said during the weekend's Kluge Mountain Bluegrass Festival. "Now it's got all packed up down in the States; you can't breathe."

"I like this. It's the country, the deep country."

Organizers of the festival, now in its fifth year, opted to bring back their favourite acts from the first five years for a "best of the best" festival. King first played the event in 2005.

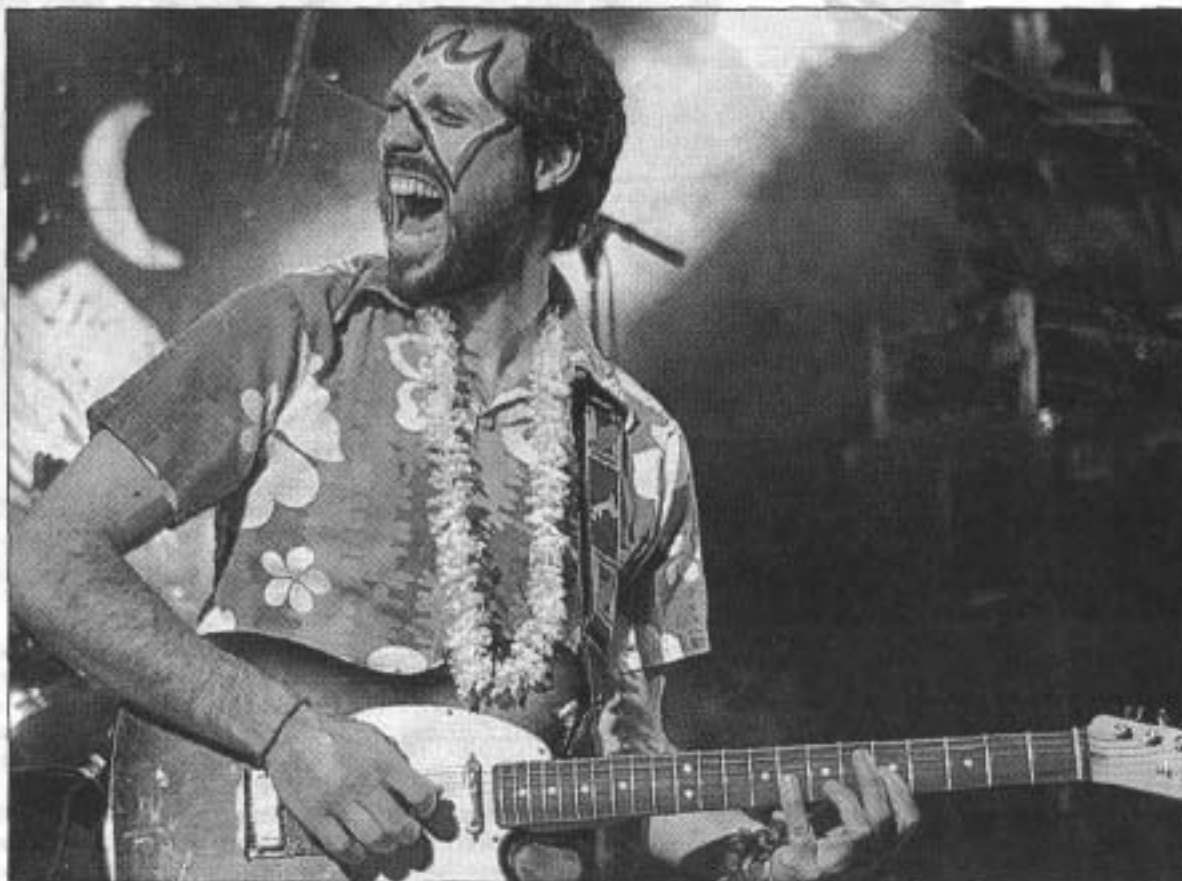
"You get to come one time to the Yukon, it's killer, you get to come two... I'll come back in 2009 if I don't kick the bucket," said King. "I love it."

The fishing, the scenery and especially the people are what made him want to come back.

"I don't want to get rich, I just want to make enough to get to the next job," he said. "As long as I pay the bills every month and got a little money to go fishing, I'm happy."

In addition to playing in Haines Junction, the James King Band also made appearances in Atlin and Teslin. Already anxious to return in two years, he hopes next time to bring his sons with him.

Ike Sheldon, a member of The Wilders and a participant of last year's festival, had similar thoughts.



Star Photo by ANDREW HOSHKIW

FRENCH CONNECTION – Pascal St-Laurent, guitarist for *Soir de Semaine*, roused the Friday night crowd at this year's Alsek Music Festival into a raving, dancing frenzy.

Alaskan tour. This year, playing the Yukon again was their primary focus. "We're in the middle of everything," said Sheldon. "This is pretty exotic for us flatlanders from the middle of the U.S."

"It's so different from where we're

"We got a sense that people really liked the dynamics of this festival," he said, alluding to the "best of" aspect. "I heard lots of good comments about that."

A big part of what made the event such a success was the volunteers, he

tation methods, including dances, concerts, gospel sessions, workshops and even a band scramble which mixes audience members with the bands, this festival is a beautifully unique experience like no other in the North.

"There's such a large investment in

grass Festival was held at the community centre, a short distance down the road, on the banks of the Dezadeash River, another festival was taking place.

Now in its 16th year, the Alsek Music Festival provided a showcase for the Yukon's finest musical talent.

Artistic director Richard Godson said the event went off without a hitch and that he had heard nothing but good comments.

"It was a pretty good Alsek turnout," he said. "We had awesome volunteers and it all worked really well."

The biggest draws were the closing bands Friday and Saturday nights, *Soir de Semaine* and *Scotch* respectively, though all participating artists were warmly received by their audiences.

"The second generation aspect – the fact that there were so many younger players and definitely younger crowd too – nice to see that developing," said Godson, reflecting on the weekend's highlights.

"Scotch blew me away," he added. "And I really thought HammerHead was quite a surprise, a really talented group of Whitehorse kids."

A long-time veteran of both festivals, Kim Beggs said she "had a really awesome time."

Beggs took centre stage at the Bluegrass festival this year, accompanied by a group of Whitehorse's finest musicians.

"I've got Daniel Janke on upright bass, Natalie Edelson on vocals and Steve Dawson on dobro," she said. "I really enjoyed this new configuration of a band."

Beggs was especially drawn to the community aspect of the event.