



Photo courtesy Paperwork

Paperwork, an Austin-based indie rock band with El Pasoan members, will play Ft. Bliss's Rock the Fort fest with four other acts.

ROCKIN' THE FORT

By Ryan B. Martinez

It's no minor task to organize Rock the Fort, the annual music festival for Ft. Bliss soldiers, their families and some civvies.

Just ask Kirsten Dahlberg, who visited local battle-of-the-bands contests and sifted through mounds of local MySpace band profiles in the hunt for the perfect bill. It wasn't all pretty.

"It got to the point where you would hear the music on a profile, hear the drums and guitar kick in, and think, 'Oh, these guys are good,'" says Dahlberg, a coordinator for Army Morale Welfare and Recreation. "But then the singer would start singing, and it was like...[crickets]"

Somehow she made it through. The final roster at the fest, which takes place Friday at Biggs Park, features Dahlberg and company's picks.

All told, you can expect four El Paso-based bands and one other with local roots: Raw Deal, New Horizon, Brown Betty, Sweet Wolf and prodigal sons Paperwork.

Organizers hope for between 4,000

and 5,000 people - military and their families, retirees and Department of Defense civilians - to turn out at the fest, which also includes food and beverage vendors, a beer garden and several car shows with as many 40 cars.

Also in order? A fireworks show and the night's emcee, sleight-of-hand comedian Jamie O'Hara.

"It started as an event to welcome back soldiers, because three years ago it was the year the war, or conflict, started, so it was something for soldiers and families," says Bill Ketcherside, MWR special events coordinator. "We wanted to help take their minds off everything, to relax and have a good time."

The bands represent a spectrum of sound - see Raw Deal's foot-tap-inducing rockabilly, or Sweet Wolf's somewhat edgier jams - that Dahlberg deems apt for a big family event.

"They're different," she says. "It goes from more laidback rock to more rock-and-roll-based bands, like true rock-and-roll. I wanted to make sure it's a progres-

sion and it doesn't flip-flop."

You can probably file Paperwork, an Austin-based quartet and the lone out-of-town act on the bill, under "laidback."

"We're not too hard and not too soft," says Jarrod Mackay, singer and lead guitarist.

Formed in January 2005, the band plays a brand of melodic indie rock that Mackay likens to Death Cab For Cutie and Now It's Overhead, an act on the famous Saddle Creek Records.

He and Paperwork's other guitarist, Ross Ingram, are El Paso natives and both graduates from Franklin High School.

"The music scene is a lot different out here than it is in El Paso," Mackay says. "El Paso is a fantastic place to play, but it's harder to get on bills with big touring acts. There aren't as many in El Paso."

In Austin, the band has opened for such buzz-garnering indie bands as Koufax and Cordero. But at Ft. Bliss, they'll get to play to huge numbers and in front of a crowd they've never really tried before - the military crowd.

"Part of the reason I'm particularly excited about this trip is I don't know what to expect," he says. "The audience will certainly appreciate that everyone's out there to entertain them and show their appreciation for them. The military people that I'm personally friends with all seem to react to rock-and-roll, so it should be a good show."