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Southern Nevada's Johnny Fortuno Captures Second Annual Elvis Rocks Mesquite at the CasaBlanca Resort

Colorful event again packs the CasaBlanca Showroom as Elvis Tribute Artists continue to carry on the name of the King of Rock eighty miles north of Las Vegas.



From left, Elvis Rocks Mesquite winner Johnny Fortuno; runner up Robert Washington; Matt Joyce, ERock; James King, Daniel Jenkins and Frank Werth in the CasaBlanca Showroom of the CasaBlanca Resort Saturday night in Mesquite.

“ I love Mesquite. There is a wonderful coziness with the showroom at the CasaBlanca. ”
Mesquite, NV (PRWEB) June 28, 2011

The second annual Elvis Rocks Mesquite lived up to its billing as a blockbuster event June 23-26 at the [CasaBlanca Resort](#) in so many ways.

First, [Elvis Tribute Artists](#) (ETAs) raised hundreds of dollars for the victims of the tornadoes in the Midwest with special performances in the lounge that resulted in an estimated 25 performers converging on the stage in a heartwarming demonstration that illustrated the camaraderie necessary to help others.

The benefit run through the Red Cross lasted two nights drawing a good following as did all of the events related to [Elvis Rocks Mesquite](#).

“The entire event went incredibly smooth,” said Mark Messchino, who worked with several others to put together the fund raiser. “Sue Arko and I coordinated the entire (Red Cross) event and worked between the hotel which included sales, marketing, and the technical staff of the showroom. We were the go-between and it took a team to pull everything together. The fund raiser was a small part of Elvis Rocks Mesquite and it was an ideal addition considering what’s going on in the Midwest.

“This event went so well and the people at the CasaBlanca are wonderful people to work with. They are all very creative and they really like to make the event look incredible.”

Fittingly, three days of singing Elvis Presley songs from the 50s, 60s and 70s was capped by a down-to-the-wire showdown between winner Johnny Fortuno of Henderson, Nev. and Maine’s Robert Washington whose



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renditions of The King had a packed house of more than 500 fans thinking about the period decades ago when times were seemingly more fun and freer of the hassles the nation is facing now.

Interesting was the fact that Fortuno was visiting [Mesquite](#) for the first time even though he resides only 80 miles south of the city. Following his blockbuster victory in May at the 2011 Ultimate Elvis competition on Fremont Street in Las Vegas, Fortuno jetted to the competition in Mesquite to highlight an event so serious that it boasted a \$7,000 purse.

"I am really humbled," said Fortuno after the victory adding that his already busy schedule is going to get even more intense after the victory at the CasaBlanca. "I'm sure glad that I decided to come to Mesquite this year. I have lived in Vegas since 2001, but never been to Mesquite. When your peers encourage you, it's just very humbling. This competition was a very pleasant experience for me.

"It was a great group of guys competing and everyone from the CasaBlanca and Uniquely Elvis were amazing to us."

Fortuno's song selection included "All Shook Up" and "Heart Break Hotel."

The wildly talented Washington was quick to praise the event while he was on stage. His rendition of song selections included a very impressive performance doing the Elvis hit "Poke Salad Annie."

"I have had a blast in Mesquite," said Washington, who has been doing his tribute to Elvis for 24 years and won the Images of the King contest in Memphis in 2003. "It's been a great time."

For his efforts, Fortuno pocketed \$3,000 in prize money to edge the talented Washington, who earned runner up money of \$1,500 after scurrying to Mesquite from Europe.

Finishing third was enthusiastic former construction worker ERock, a tireless Bruckner, Mo., performer who not only looks the part of Elvis but plays the part, too, considering his countless appearances promoting ETA events all over the country throughout the year.

Kansas resident Frank Werth earned the Peoples Choice Award.

As was the case in the inaugural Elvis Rocks Mesquite event, the second gathering of super stars was so anticipated that Saturday's finale had fans lined up at the door long before the first Elvis song was sung.

"I'm elated with the outcome of the event," said Sue Arko, a Phoenix ball of fire who promotes events throughout the year at various venues. "I think it certainly lived up to what people expected especially when you tie the related events into the equation."

Rea Link, the founder of the competition and a resident of Branson, Mo., echoed Arko's words. Known as "Mama Rea" among those involved in carrying on the legend, she is renowned in carrying on Elvis's name.

"I love Mesquite," said the friendly Link while sitting in the back of the showroom. "There is a wonderful coziness about the showroom and everyone works so well together to make the event happen."

In the words of one on-looker, it often takes time for events to mature. However, Elvis Rocks Mesquite took off from the get-go and during a time when it's tough to get good crowds in other cities, the Mesquite spectacular is batting 1.000 after recording a pair of sellout crowds.



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In particular, Link lauded CasaBlanca Director of Entertainment Jim Ericson, a former resident of Colorado who joined Black Gaming in 1997.

"Jim does a phenomenal job," Link added. "The job of making sure the sound system and everything else related to the mechanics of the show is Jim's and we all appreciate him so much."

The combined efforts of all those involved to present a true showpiece was evidenced by the fans who traveled to the event.

"I follow James King," said Sue Rivera, a Redondo Beach, Calif. businesswoman who operates a property management company. "I received a flyer from one of the competitors and I also belong to the Jail House Rockers in California. We are also connected with several Elvis Tribute Artists, so we follow the events."

"I had never been to Mesquite and it's a pretty amazing place. This was my fifth time to see an Elvis competition and this show was the best produced contest that I have seen. The lighting and the showroom are fabulous."

Evidence that the ETA competition has risen even more is the fact that Fortuno has his own publicist.

"Elvis Rocks Mesquite was such a unique competition for the Tribute Artists to perform in," said Traci Easton, who has also found the Elvis entertainment fascinating.

"From the setup of individual competitive events of 50's, 60's and 70's, to the lighting, sound, the CasaBlanca showroom - everything was run as professionally as possible through "Uniquely Elvis," explained Easton, "I had the opportunity to meet the most wonderful fans from all over who came to Mesquite to reminisce, have a fantastic time and cheer on their favorite artist. It's because of all of these people that 'Elvis Rocks Mesquite' will continue to be a success!"

Judy Miller of Trabuco Canyon in Orange County, Calif. also lauded the event.

"I have been an Elvis fan since I was five," Miller said. "I'll be back to Mesquite, for sure."

Elvis Rocks Mesquite also included the inaugural Renewal of Vows Sunday morning poolside at the CasaBlanca.

"We had six couples participate in our ceremony," said Joni Moss, who orchestrated the event as an addition to Elvis Rocks Mesquite. "Our group included one mid-age couple from Utah that got married. It went very well and everyone had fun. People danced and there was champagne. We are certain that it will be even bigger when we bring it back next year."

Moss also added that the participants included Elvis Tribute Artists Andre Giddings and Alfredo Sanchez who both renewed their vows with their wives.

"This went very smooth," said Moss, who owns LV Wedding Connection in Las Vegas. "In addition, we had an event called "Shake, Rattle and Bowl" that went very well Friday afternoon at the Virgin River."

The Black Gaming locomotive continues to roll July 1-2 with the Miss Nevada Pageant also in the CasaBlanca Showroom.

Other events planned at the CasaBlanca [Resort](#) include the first annual [Mesquite](#) Jazz Festival July 15-17; the Junior Golden Gloves Nationals July 20-23; and The Return to Mesquite presented by BPNONG.COM, a \$10,000 World Series of Beer Pong Mega Satellite Event in the CasaBlanca Event Center July 29-31.



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A full rundown of the events at the CasaBlanca may be found at <http://www.casablancaresort.com>.