

ENTERTAINMENT

Guitarist Harden returns to area

By KIRBY PRINGLE
kpringle@news-gazette.com

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Guitarist extraordinaire Keith Harden returns to the area for a series of weekend gigs that kick off at 9 p.m. today at the Embassy Tavern in downtown Urbana.



HARDEN

Other performances take place at 8 p.m. Saturday at Huber's in Champaign and at 2 p.m. Sunday at Pages for Ages Bookstore in Savoy. All the appearances will be solo gigs by Harden, known for his deft fretwork on acoustic and electric guitars, Dobros and even mandolins. He plays a mean harmonica, too.

Harden, who grew up in Tolono and was a longtime fixture on the local music scene before moving several years ago to upstate New York, has made another move. He now lives in Nashville and is working hard to establish a career at the home of the Grand Ole Opry.

"I needed a big huge change. I suppose I had another midlife re-evaluation and said to myself, 'I gotta be in a place where creativity is sparking at a high level,' and so far Nashville really seems to have that," Harden said.

He had plenty of gigs in the Finger Lakes region, where he lived, but found himself pining away for something more.

"I want get to the next level or at least do things differently," he said. "I had a pretty good amount of gigs and did a lot of writing and recording when I was upstate. I learned a lot and sort of ended up becoming known on a regional level in a scene where you couldn't get past a certain plateau.

"I'm never done trying to reinvent myself in little ways, and now my goal is to reinvent in a larger way," he added. "Sometimes it feels like you're pruning yourself for later growth — I haven't given up dreaming."

Harden has several contacts in Nashville and plans to make use of them.

Former C-U resident and musician/songwriter John Pennell is one of those who can help Harden make the transition.

"I've had a restless nature ever since I left home at 17. I'll put out a CD from time to time because it's a good thing for me to do, but I want to get my songs recorded by other artists. I also want to work in a support role with other artists," Harden said.

"I've got good friends in the music scene and family here, and I've already met and played with a few people who are supportive. It's tough to get gigs until you learn the ropes and get your name around, but it will happen in the long run. There are some really incredible musicians that live and play here."

And now that he's closer to home, Harden will be returning on a more regular basis. That means he'll still be hosting his annual "Keithmas" show at the Iron Post in downtown Urbana in December.

"I'm so busy writing that I don't want to start recording until the new song stream dries up a little. Then I'll make demos to play for people in the 'biz' or whatever. Eventually I'll record a CD to release under my name," Harden said.

Go to www.keithharden.com for more information.