



Suburban rockers to open up for Bon Jovi at Soldier Field



7th Heaven beat out more than 570 acts in an online contest to open for Bon Jovi at Soldier Field July 30 in front of an expected crowd of 57,000.

A quarter-century after the band's formation, suburban rockers 7th Heaven has landed its biggest gig yet.

The band beat out more than 570 acts in an online contest to open for rock icons Bon Jovi at Soldier Field July 30 in front of an expected crowd of 57,000.

"Normally I like to attribute any success we come across to our hard work, but this was all about the fans who voted for us," said Keith Semple, the band's 28-year-old lead singer. "And that makes it an even bigger privilege."

7th Heaven has managed to build name recognition and an extensive fan base by playing to about 1 million people each year at 250 shows - nearly a third of them festivals. Almost 30,000 fans have signed up for its electronic newsletter, making word about the contest easier to get out.

The contest allowed each band to post one song online, and 7th Heaven picked the popular "Better This Way," a fitting selection given the path down which Semple, of Hanover Park, nearly headed.

The Northern Ireland native auditioned for the current season of "American Idol," but producers later reneged his "golden ticket" to Hollywood because he's in the U.S. on a work visa and lacks permanent resident status.

He was bound to do well, given his two top-10 hits on the British charts with former band One True Voice, and in 2002 was a winner on Britain's "Pop Stars: The Idol," which drew more than 7 million viewers each week.

Semple said he hasn't watched "Idol" this season, but hears about the success of Mount Prospect's Lee DeWyze daily.

"I'm kind of glad the way it's turned out because I'm in a proper band playing proper music, and that's the reason I'm alive," Semple said. "I wish Lee all the best and think he could win. Good luck to you, mate."

Bandmate Richie Hofherr, a guitarist and backup vocalist from Streamwood, said 7th Heaven won't be out of its element at Soldier Field given the big festivals on its resume.

"Put us on a big stage and that's where the band shines," said Hofherr, one of two original band members. "We move around a lot and really perform at the audience."

In addition to Hofherr, drummer Michael Mooshey of Algonquin also was part of 7th Heaven when it started in 1985. Mark Kennetz of Carol Stream and Nick Cox of Mount Prospect round out the band.

7th Heaven is one of 13 bands selected to open for Bon Jovi's The Circle Tour at stops across the U.S. and Canada. Nashville-based rock group The Worsties also will play the July 31 show at Soldier Field.

7th Heaven also is releasing a box set of 500 original songs and is in the midst of launching a radio campaign with the help of promotion company Jeff McClusky and Associates.

"Things are going really well in our world," Hofherr said.

To learn more, go to 7thheavenband.com.