Welcome to the Chicago premiere of *Five Presidents* written by Ensemble member Rick Cleveland and directed by Ensemble member Marty Higginbotham. We’re thrilled to have Rick’s work return to our stage; his previous plays at American Blues include – *Dogman’s Last Stand* (our inaugural production in 1985), *Bad Moon*, and *Tom and Jerry*. Since then, Rick’s career skyrocketed as an award-winning writer for “West Wing”, “House of Cards”, and many others (see full bio in program). It’s only fitting to have his acerbic political wit return to Chicago.

Think back to your childhood. Did someone ever say – *you could grow up to become president someday!*? Maybe a well-intentioned grandparent or aunt who believed in you? A teacher? I recently made that innocuous remark to a 4th grader and was treated to a gruesome reenactment of the gag reflex. It was followed by such a violent rolling of eyes I worried the optic nerves were going to snap. “Why would anyone want to be that?!?” he questioned.

Smart kid – though not a new sentiment.

What should give us pause, however, is the child’s age – 9 years old.

The next generation is watching. Hopefully, each generation improves upon the systems in place. A reasonable fear is the next generation might lack interest in tireless, thankless public service. However, I assure you there will always be someone willing to step into the position. The kid asked a profound question if you just change the emphasis to “why”.

There have been 44 individuals serving 45 presidencies. Grover Cleveland (no relation to Rick) served 2 non-consecutive terms and is counted twice. Throughout the years, these presidents anchored different parties – Republican (19), Democratic (14), Democratic-Republican (4), Whig (4), Federalist (4), National Union (1), and “none” (1 - George Washington). Tonight, you’re invited to watch 5 of these U.S. Presidents – each with personal policies, agendas, and favorite cocktails.

Rick Cleveland brilliantly dramatizes this imagined once-in-a-lifetime conversation. Written during #44’s tenure, today’s 2019 America represents a different political, ideological, and cultural awareness than even four years ago. Cleveland returned to the play with a sharpened pencil and tongue. While we celebrate this Chicago premiere, the manuscript has been a living document for Cleveland. Like the U.S. Constitution, it got amended. We are grateful to Rick for joining us through the rehearsal process!

To the parents of the 9 yr-old kid: leave your browser open to our community partner - *Chicago Votes* – a non-partisan, nonprofit organization that educates the next generation about politics and civic responsibility. Perhaps the question of “why” will evolve to “why not”?

— Gwendolyn Whiteside
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Chicago premiere

FIVE PRESIDENTS

a play by Rick Cleveland*
directed by Marty Higginbotham*

Scenic Design.......................................................... Grant Sabin*, USA
Lighting Design........................................................... Alexander Ridgers*
Costume Design ........................................................ Michael Alan Stein, USA
Sound Design .............................................................. Warren Levon*
Properties Design ........................................................ Mary O’Dowd
Production Stage Manager ........................................... Shandee Vaughan*^

* Ensemble member or Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater
^ Member of Actors’ Equity Association

SEPTEMBER 12 – OCTOBER 19, 2019  (previews Sept 6 - 11)

Five Presidents was commissioned by Milwaukee Repertory Theater,
Mark Clements, Artistic Director and Dawn Helsing Wolters, Managing Director.

It received its first public performance on March 10, 2015.

American Blues Theater
4809 N. Ravenswood Ave., Suite 221, Chicago, IL 60640
Phone: (773) 654-3103   AmericanBluesTheater.com

American Blues Theater is a constituent of the Theatre Communications Group, Inc –
the national organization for nonprofit professional theaters, the League of Chicago Theaters,
Arts Alliance Illinois, and Lakeview Chamber of Commerce.

American Blues Theater operates under agreements between Producers’ Association of Chicago Area Theatres,
Actors’ Equity Association – the union of professional actors and stage managers,
Stage Directors & Choreographers Society, and United Scenic Artists of America, Local 829 – AFL-CIO.
CAST

Gerald R. Ford, 38th President ................................................................. Tom McElroy^  
Jimmy Carter, 39th President ............................................................. Martin L’Herault^  
Ronald Reagan, 40th President ...................................................... James Leaming^  
George H.W. Bush, 41st President ................................................... John Carter Brown^  
Bill Clinton, 42nd President ............................................................. Stephen Spencer^  
Agent Kirby ........................................................................................ Denzel Tsopnang*

* Ensemble member or Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater  
^ Member of Actors’ Equity Association

As a courtesy to the actors and your fellow patrons, please turn off your phone before the performance. The taking of photographs and the use of any type of recording device are not allowed in the theater during the performance and is a violation of state and federal copyright laws. Digital media will be deleted and tape or film will be confiscated.

SETTING

THE TIME
April 27, 1994

THE PLACE
The Nixon Library in Yorba Linda, California.

THE OCCASSION
The funeral of Richard Milhous Nixon, 37th President of the United States.

The production runs 90 minutes with no intermission.

PRODUCTION STAFF

Production Manager ................................................................. Shandee Vaughan*  
Assistant Stage Manager .......................................................... Brianna Consalvo  
Artistic Specialist ................................................................. Manny Buckley*  
Publicist .................................................................................. Cathy Taylor PR  
Technical Director .................................................................. Manuel Ortiz  
Master Electrician .................................................................. Rachel West  
Scenic Painter ......................................................................... Eileen Rozycki*

COMMUNITY SERVICE FOR FIVE PRESIDENTS

American Blues Theater believes it is an honor and duty to serve our community. We raise awareness of other non-profit organizations’ great causes through creative collaborations. We partner with Northwestern University’s The Family Institute, Chicago Public Schools, and Chicago Votes. We continue our “Pediatric Previews” that donate proceeds of preview performances to St. Jude’s Children’s Research Hospital. To enrich your experience, visit AmericanBluesTheater.com.
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SPECIAL THANKS

The biggest Hoosier fans, Michael Brosilow, Rick Cleveland, Paula Conrad, Marty Higginbotham, Michael Levinson, The Saints, X-Man, and the staff of Stage 773.

Our ushers are provided by the Saints—Volunteers for the Performing Arts.

For more information visit Saintschicago.org or call (773) 529-5510.

BIOGRAPHIES

JOHN CARTER BROWN

(George H. W. Bush) is happy to be returning to American Blues Theater in Five Presidents where he was first seen as “Guy” in “Groovy Town” for the initial production of Monsters. He was last seen in Chicago as “Thomas Cromwell” in A Man for All Seasons with TimeLine Theatre. Other credits include work with Steppenwolf Theatre, Victory Gardens Theater, Zebra Crossing Theatre, Open Eye, Griffin, Mary Archie Theatre, Edinburg Festival Fringe, several others, and Boxer Rebellion Theatre, which he helped found in the late 90s. Film and Television credits include Boss, Detroit 1-8-7, ER, Under the City, Surviving Christmas, In the Company of Darkness, and numerous commercials. Two eye blink.

JAMES LEAMING

(Ronald Reagan) is a proud founding Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. On-Going projects: national tours of Defamation and Botanic Garden with Canamac Productions; This Wonderful Life (solo version of It’s a Wonderful Life featuring 47 characters) at American Blues Theater, North Coast Repertory Theatre (CA), Laguna Playhouse (CA), Cleveland Play House (OH), Syracuse Stage (NY), and Asolo Repertory Theatre (FL), directed by Peter Amster & Carmen Roman. Regional theater: Indiana Repertory Theatre, Kitchen Theatre (NY), Geva Theatre (NY), North Coast Repertory Theatre (CA), Alliance Theatre (GA), Peninsula Players (WI), and Asolo Repertory Theatre (FL). Chicago: Steppenwolf Theatre, First Folio Theatre, Northlight Theatre, Next Theatre, Victory Gardens Theater, Goodman Theatre, Drury Lane Theatre, Fox Theatricals, Second City, and Body Politic. Training: American Conservatory Theatre (San Francisco) and Second City (Chicago). Awards: 2000 After Dark Award (Chicago) – Best Actor; 2009 Sarasota Magazine Awards – Best Actor and Best Show; 2012 Joseph Jefferson Award (Chicago) – Scenic Design; 2014 Craig Noel Award nomination (San Diego) – Solo Performance; 2018 Joseph Jefferson Award nomination (Chicago) – Solo
**BIOGRAPHIES CONT.**


**MARTIN L’HERAULT** *(Jimmy Carter)* is excited to be making his American Blues Theater debut and to be in the cast of this fascinating play. Recent credits include: *Five Presidents* (Old Log Theatre), *Once* (Theater Latte Da), *Guys and Dolls* (Old Log Theatre), *The Country House* (Morningside Players), *Bonus Army* (The Gym at Judson), and *Playboy of the Western World* (Pacific Art Center). TV/Film credits include: *A Crime to Remember: Judge, Jury, Executioner* (Investigation Discovery Channel). More about Martin at: martinlherault.com


**STEPHEN SPENCER** *(Bill Clinton)* is honored to be performing with American Blues Theater, a company he has long admired. Chicago: *Queen* (Victory Gardens Theater); *Blizzard ’67* (16th Street Theater/Chicago Dramatists); *The Life of Galileo, Our Class, Night and Day* (Remy Bumppo Theatre Company); *Body + Blood, Ten* (Gift Theatre); *The Quality of Life* (The Den Theatre & Theater on the Lake); *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom, Wait Until Dark* (Court Theatre); *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* (Congo Square Theatre/Goodman Theatre); *Comedy of Errors, Love’s Labour’s Lost* (Oak Park Festival Theatre). Regional: *Blackbird* (Riverside Theatre); *Romeo & Juliet, The Winter’s Tale* (Illinois Shakespeare); *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Shakespeare Rep); and *Heroes* (Nebraska Repertory Theatre). Also: Utah Shakespeare and Asolo Repertory Theatre. Overseas: *Medeamaterial* (Moscow’s Leninsky Komsomol Theatre) and *Battery* (Edinburgh Festival Fringe). He’s a proud Associate Artist at Chicago Dramatists and a Founding Member of The Chicago Shakespeare Project. TV/Film: *Fargo* (Season 4, upcoming), *Empire, Public Enemies, Henry, Mr. Lonely, Greg’s Leg,* and *Morning Due* (Cannes). Steve is represented by Shirley Hamilton Talent. Love to B & K.

**DENZEL TSOPNANG** *(Agent Kirby)* is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater. Hailing from Batavia, IL, Denzel holds a BFA in Musical Theatre from Millikin University and is represented by Gray Talent Group. After joining last year’s Jeff Award winning production of *Buddy - The Buddy Holly Story,* he is thrilled to be returning to American Blues Theater with this amazing team and cast! Some of his favorite Chicago credits include: *South*
**BIOGRAPHIES CONT.**

*Pacific* (Drury Lane Theatre), *Five Guys Named Moe* (Court Theatre), *Ragtime* (Griffin Theatre), *The Scottsboro Boys* (Porchlight Music Theatre), *Annie Warbucks* (Theatre at the Center), *Smokey Joe’s Cafe* (Drury Lane Theatre), *Velveteen Rabbit* (Marriott Theatre), *Heathers: The Musical* (Kokandy Productions), and *Northanger Abbey* (Lifeline Theatre).

**RICK CLEVELAND (Playwright)** is a proud founding Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. Rick is a playwright and an Emmy winning writer/producer whose television credits include *The West Wing, Six Feet Under, Mad Men, Nurse Jackie, House of Cards, Archer, Legit,* and *Man In The High Castle.* Rick performed his one man show *My Buddy Bill* at the Berkshire Theatre Festival, the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, Victory Gardens Theater in Chicago, the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles, and won the Best Solo Performance Award at the HBO Comedy Arts Festival in Aspen in 2006. He also performed the piece at the 92nd Street Y in New York City for a one hour Comedy Central special in 2007. As a playwright, Rick has earned playwriting grants and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Kennedy Center’s Fund for New American Plays. Rick was invited to the National Playwrights’ Conference at the Eugene O’Neill Theatre Center twice, and he is a Founding Member of the Ojai Playwrights Conference. Rick was a commentator for NPR’s “All Things Considered” and he received his MFA from the University of Iowa’s Playwrights’ Workshop.

**MARTY HIGGINBOTHAM (Director)** is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. American Blues acting credits include: *Desire Under the Elms, Monsters, On the Waterfront, Tom and Jerry, The Homage that Follows, Stalag 17, Bus Stop, The Three Penny Opera, Working, The Trip to Bountiful, American Dead,* and *Oklahoma;* American Blues sound design/original score credits: *Monsters, Monsters II, Monsters III, Food from Trash, The Homage That Follows, The Million Bells of Ocean,* and *A Lie of the Mind.* Marty has also worked on and off stage at The Old Globe, The Prince Music Theatre, Goodman Theatre, Northlight Theatre, Oak Park Festival Theatre, Circle Theatre, and Organic Theater Company. Marty directed the original full production of *It’s a Wonderful: A Live Radio Play* in 2004 and continued to helm the production up to 2008, moving with the Ensemble in 2009 to the Biograph, and remounting at the Greenhouse. Marty is also Founder and President of The Stage Channel, a video production company serving the Arts in Chicago and across the country since 2001.

**GRANT SABIN (Scenic Design)** is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater. A native of rural Illinois, Grant blends his rural roots with urban art. He’s a recipient of the 2015 Michael Maggio Emerging Designer Award. He’s a graduate of Columbia College with a BFA in theatre design where he was awarded the 2005 Michael Merritt student scholarship for collaboration in theatre design. He is known throughout Chicago for his keen eye in capturing atmospheric detail and his ability to design “impressively executed sets” on a storefront-theater budget. His designs have been seen at Northlight Theatre, Victory Gardens Theater, Steppenwolf Theatre, Next Theatre, The Royal George, Overture Center WI, Theater Wit, Gallagher Bluedorn IA, American Blues Theater, American Theater Company, Christina Isabelle Dance, The Seldoms Dance, and A Red Orchid. He was nominated for a Joseph Jefferson Award for his design of American Blues’ production of *Yankee Tavern,* A Red Orchid’s production of *The Sea Horse,* and Dog & Pony’s production of *Mr. Marmalade.* He was recently named one of the Top
BIOGRAPHIES cont.

50 Players in Chicago Theatre by Newcity Magazine. Grant is currently a part-time faculty member at Columbia College.

ALEXANDER RIDGERS (Lighting Design) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater and is very excited to be working on *Five Presidents!* Other notable design credits include working with House Theatre of Chicago, Chicago Children’s Theatre, Griffin Theatre, Writers Theatre, Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, Kokandy Productions, Next Act Theatre, Indiana Repertory Theatre, Lucky Plush Productions, Hedwig Dances, Flint Repertory Theatre, and UIC School of Theatre & Music. Assistant lighting design credits include working with Marcus Doshi Design LLC, Steppenwolf Theatre, Goodman Theatre, and National Theatre, London. Alexander has an MFA from Northwestern University and teaches lighting design at University of Illinois at Chicago. More information at: alexanderridgers.com

MICHAEL ALAN STEIN (Costume Design) is a costume designer and the chief fashion designer of the eponymous Michael Alan Stein Collection; a prestige, ready-to-wear women’s apparel line launched in spring 2012. A career spanning more than two decades, Stein’s costume designs have graced many stages across the United States including: the Guthrie Theatre (Minneapolis, MN); Steppenwolf Theatre and Goodman Theatre (Chicago, IL); Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (Washington, DC); and the Long Wharf Theatre (New Haven, CT). On stage, screen and personal appearance, his designs have been worn by such celebrated artists as: Whitney Houston, Angela Bassett, Jane Seymour, Erykah Badu, Jennifer Holiday, and Elizabeth Berkley. Stein is the recipient of many awards and honors including, a fellowship from The National Endowment for the Arts and he was recently listed by Fashion-Schools.org as number seventy on the top 100 Most Influential Fashion Designers of 2012. In addition to his stage and film work, he has also designed special projects for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, NYC and Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd, Co.

WARREN LEVON (Sound Design) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. He is ecstatic to sound design for this wonderful production! His previous Blues credits (as an actor) include *Dutchman/Transit, Waiting for Lefty, and Ripped.* Warren has been a sound designer and engineer for 7 years working with various theatre companies throughout the city. He welcomes you to the American Blues experience. Enjoy the play!

MARY O’DOWD (Properties Design) is honored to return to American Blues, having designed props for *The Spitfire Grill, On Clover Road, Six Corners, This Wonderful Life*, and *Beauty’s Daughter.* She has created props/set dressing for dozens of shows and received several Jeff nominations. Most recent design: *Into the Breeches!* (Northlight Theatre); favorite projects ever: *Rock ‘N’ Roll* (Artistic Home) and *Bakersfield Mist* (TimeLine Theatre). Mary is a graduate of the United States Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, NY. As a plebe, she marched in Ronald Reagan’s first inaugural parade.

SHANDEE VAUGHAN (Production Stage Manager/Production Manager) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater. She is excited to be working with such a stellar team for *Five Presidents!* Blues credits: *The Spitfire Grill, The Absolute Brightness of Leonard Pelkey, On Clover Road, It’s a Wonderful Life, and Beauty’s Daughter.* She has created props/set dressing for dozens of shows and received several Jeff nominations. Most recent design: *Into the Breeches!* (Northlight Theatre); favorite projects ever: *Rock ‘N’ Roll* (Artistic Home) and *Bakersfield Mist* (TimeLine Theatre). Mary is a graduate of the United States Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, NY. As a plebe, she marched in Ronald Reagan’s first inaugural parade.
Theatre). Shandee is a freelance stage manager and production manager from Arizona. shandeevaughan.com

MANUEL ORTIZ (Technical Director) is a Chicago native actor, carpenter, designer and photographer. He received his BFA in Acting at DePaul University. When he is not building and/or performing on stage, you can find him at home joyfully playing with all 15 of his animal friends (yes, he has pictures). As an artist, he has devoted himself to many artistic mediums such as puppeteering, makeup, lighting, and more. Working in such a prodigiously diverse community of captivating artists, Manny has grown and hopes to continue to collaborate and cultivate communities of inclusion and equity filled with ardent passion for theater. Manny Buckley (Artistic Specialist) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. He is an actor, writer, director, performance and dialect coach. He is a BFA graduate of William Carey University with a degree in speech communication in theatre.

MANNY BUCKLEY (Artistic Specialist) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. He is an actor, writer, director, performance and dialect coach. He is a BFA graduate of William Carey University with a degree in speech communication in theatre.

GWENDOLYN WHITESIDE (Artistic Director) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater and has served as Artistic Director since 2010. Under her leadership, American Blues has nearly doubled the size of its Ensemble, added Artistic Affiliates, and diversified its base of artists. She created the nationally-recognized annual Blue Ink Playwriting Award, Blueprint Development for new work, implemented community service into the company’s mission, and adapted the arts education program The Lincoln Project for Chicago Public Schools serving nearly 3,000 students annually. Whiteside served numerous panels for the National Endowment for the Arts and sat on the Board of Directors for Network of Ensemble Theaters and League of Chicago Theatres. She’s a graduate of Northwestern University (cum laude), The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (MFA), and a Kellogg Executive Scholar in Nonprofit management (Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University). She’s been named in Newcity’s annual Players list numerous times. In 8 years, 9 American Blues Theater shows were nominated or won Joseph Jefferson Awards. She’s received 14 Joseph Jefferson Awards, Citations, and nominations as an actress and Artistic Director. Her favorite performances include On Clover Road, Grounded (Jeff Award for Solo Performance), The K of D (Jeff Award for Solo Performance), Collected Stories (Best Actress Broadway World Chicago Award), and 8 years as “Mary Bailey” (It’s a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!). She’s the recipient of two (2) After Dark Awards, and numerous Broadway World Chicago Awards and nominations. She directs the Chicago holiday tradition It’s a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!
ABOUT AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

Winner of American Theater Wing's prestigious National Theatre Company Award, American Blues Theater is a premier arts organization with an intimate environment that patrons, artists, and all Chicagoans call home. American Blues Theater explores the American identity through the plays it produces and communities it serves. American Blues Theater follows three guiding values both on and off its stages – to be accessible, responsible, and true.

Our diverse and multi-generational artists have established the second oldest professional Equity Ensemble theater in Chicago. Our 33-member Ensemble has nearly 600 combined years of collaboration on stage. As of today, our theater and artists received 204 Joseph Jefferson Awards and nominations that celebrate excellence in Chicago theater and 38 Black Theater Alliance Awards. Our artists are honored with Pulitzer Prize nominations, Academy Awards, Golden Globe Awards, Emmy Awards, and numerous other accolades.

American Blues Theater is committed to developing the classic plays and musicals of tomorrow. Our new work development consists of a variety of programs – including world and regional premieres, the Blue Ink Playwriting Award, Blueprint commissions, and Ripped: The Living Newspaper Festival of new short-plays. More than half of our mainstage productions are world and Chicago premieres.

DEFINITION OF “ENSEMBLE”

An Ensemble theater is a group of individuals dedicated to collaborative creation and committed to consistently working together over years to develop a distinctive body of work and practices. Ensemble members, both artists and administrators, are empowered to help shape their theater’s artistic direction and organizational structure.

AMERICAN BLUES THEATER ENSEMBLE FOUNDED IN 1985

Dawn Bach          Joe Foust          John Möhrlein
Ed Blatchford     Jared Gooding     Christopher J. Neville
Matthew Brumlow   Marty Higginbotham   Suzanne Petri
Manny Buckley      Philip Earl Johnson Carmen Roman
Dara Cameron       Lindsay Jones      Editha Rosario
Casey Campbell     Kevin Kelly        Sarah E. Ross
Darren Canady      Steve Key         Chuck Smith
Rick Cleveland     Ed Kross          Wandachristine
Austin Cook        James Leaming     Gwendolyn Whiteside
Ian Paul Custer    Warren Levon      Dennis Cockrum, emeritus
Lauri Dahl         Michael Mahler     William Payne, emeritus
Elyse Dolan
American Blues Theater was founded in July 1985 by a director, playwright, designer, and actor. The company dedicated itself to new and classic American plays. Richard Christiansen of the Chicago Tribune cited American Blues in his editorial “Chicago Theater Forges New Standards of Glory.” In August of 1993, the company leased a warehouse on Byron and Lincoln. In 38 days, James Leaming led a community-based 90+ volunteer crew to transform the space into an intimate 134-seat theater. From 1994-1997, the Ensemble was lauded with numerous Joseph Jefferson Awards and After Dark Awards.

leadership from outside the ensemble
From 1997-2009, the company was led by Artistic Directors from outside of the Ensemble. Under the leadership of Brian Russell and Damon Kiely (’97-’07), the theater’s name changed to American Theater Company (ATC), the mission statement was revised, and the business expanded greatly. In 2008, under new management, the Ensemble theater practice was dismantled. After 18 months of talks with the new management, all four Founders and every Ensemble member prior to 2008 chose to leave the ATC organization in March 2009 citing “major administrative and artistic differences”.

Blue skies ahead
The Ensemble reformed under its original name American Blues Theater. Founding Board members reconstituted the Board, giving tremendous support and guidance. Ensemble member Gwendolyn Whiteside became the Artistic Director. Whiteside ushered in the annual Blue Ink Playwriting Award, Blueprint Development, implemented community service into the company’s mission, and adapted the arts education program The Lincoln Project for Chicago Public Schools that serves 3,000 students annually.


“One of our favorites in Chicago!” – Dean Richards, WGN

“Ensemble founded one of Chicago's most venerable off-loop theaters.”
– Chris Jones, Chicago Tribune

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If you are interested in joining the Board of Directors at American Blues Theater, please call (773) 654-3103.

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Please contact us at info@AmericanBluesTheater.com to correct any unintentional errors or omissions.
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The Gundis Kurdish Kitchen  
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Five Presidents  15
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Rivers Casino
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Burt and Sheli Rosenberg
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