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# RENSSELAER Republican

Community News for 150 Years

## Lincoln inspires at LCJ festival

**By Nick Fiala**

reporter@renselaerrepublican.com

Danny Russel, an actor from Indianapolis who specializes in portraying Abraham Lincoln and other historical figures, treated county citizens to a performance as the 16th president on the second day of the Little Cousin Jasper Festival. He touched on both the humor and the heartache of Lincoln's life, from his days working hard in a log cabin to his time bearing the burden of the Civil War in the White House. But he also cited the unique significance of Indiana for Lincoln. And during his performance, just one day shy of the 15th anniversary of 9/11, Russel honored an Iraq veteran who reminded the audience of the oaths taken by all those who have served.

The show featured all kinds of jokes and anecdotes, which Lincoln was so famous for.

"[She was] nine years my junior, from the richest and most prominent family in Lexington, Kentucky," The President said of his wife, Mary Todd. "That's 'Todd' with two 'd's. For God, one is sufficient. The Todds are so important, they need two in their name."

Naturally, he chided his political rivals as well.

"One gentleman in congress said 'Mr. Lincoln, I think you'd make a joke even



PHOTO BY NICK FIALA

Danny Russel is a professional actor from Indianapolis who portrayed Abraham Lincoln during the Little Cousin Jasper Festival on Saturday.

in hell," he recalled. "I said 'Yes, that's just about the distance from here to the Capitol Building.'"

A humorous moment occurred, when Lincoln pointed at one unsuspecting man trying to quietly pass by the stage, just as he delivered the punch-line of an anecdote from his days running for office.

"Newspapers at the time drew these vicious cartoons lampooning my appearance," he said, "saying I was running around the country threatening gentlemen — 'If you don't vote for me, I'll marry your sister!'"

The laughing elderly man quickly shuffled away from the President's pointed finger.

Russell's performing business, named Famous Hoosier, Inc., natural-

ly touched on the significance of Indiana in Lincoln's life, though he is often known for his time in Illinois.

"You folks might remember I was born February 12, 1809 in Kentucky," he said. "Unfortunately, Kentucky was a slave state...We moved here for liberty — Indiana, land of the free, home of the brave, because Indiana never had slavery as part of our constitution."

And later, he mentioned the 13th Amendment, ratified in 1865, which abolished slavery in all territories in the U.S.

"The word 'slavery' never appears in our constitution," he said, "until my amendment, which eliminates it forever."

As one might expect, Russel ended

his show with Lincoln's most famous speech, delivered at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania on Nov. 19, 1863.

"[They're] words that defined not only the direction of the war, but a new direction for America," he said.

One last unexpected audience interaction happened right as Russel had finished the last prepared line of his performance. This one came from James Bulington, who now resides in Rensselaer. He is a former Army Staff Sergeant who served two tours in Iraq between 2005 and 2008 as a medic and convoy security. His experiences overseas left him with both Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury.

"There's something else," he said to Russel. "As a combat veteran, I gave a sworn oath which can never be

given back, to protect the Constitution of the United States and its people."

Russel only hesitated for a moment before addressing Bulington and the audience one last time.

"He knows, all too well, the sacrifice for liberty and freedom, which must be eternal in this beautiful sacred land of America," Russel said. "I so appreciate what you did on our behalf. I honor you. I respect you. I salute you."

The crowd immediately burst into applause as the two men approached each other and embraced in front of the stage.

It was a chance encounter that put a renewed relevance behind the age-old promise that "these dead shall not have died in vain."