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## Blues band reuniting for music festival

By Troy Espe

Leader-Telegram staff

Sparky and the Wipers haven't played in three years. But don't expect the Eau Claire band to pull all-night cram sessions to prepare for the Lust for Blues 2 music festival Sunday.

"We'll get together a little bit," lead guitarist Mike Schlenker said. "We don't want to rehearse enough to hurt ourselves."

Lust for Blues 2 also will feature Mojo Lemon Blues Band and Left Wing Bourbon.

The event is a fundraiser for the Chippewa Valley Blues Society. The club promotes the blues and has grown to more than 200 members since starting in 2007. This summer the society will organize a weekly concert series at Owen Park.

"That's one of the goals of the Chippewa Valley Blues Club - to get early shows and family-oriented events," President Ken Fulgione said.

Schlenker, who owns Speed of Sound in Eau Claire, sponsors the Chippewa Valley Blues Society. He is excited to play at the festival.

"This is going to be just as much fun to see the people as it is playing," he said.

Sparky and the Wipers formed in the late 1990s. The band is named after guitarist and lead singer Paul Hinz, who owns Sparkle Wash of Eau Claire.

"He has a unique way of how he hears and plays things," Schlenker said. "His guitar playing is very cool."

In 2001, Sparky and the Wipers released a self-titled CD of blues covers. The group gained a following through energetic live shows.

"It's very guitar-driven," Schlenker said of the Wipers' sound. "It's pretty much wide open. We play a slow song or two, but the whole set is very up-tempo and in your face."

Sparky and the Wipers have been on hiatus as members became involved in other bands. It will be a treat to reunite for Sunday's festival, Schlenker said.

"Everybody enjoys playing in the same group," he said. "It's a lot of fun playing with these guys."

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Eau Claire blues band Sparky and the Wipers will play Sunday during the Lust for Blues 2 music festival. Band members are, from left, lead singer Paul Hinz, drummer Tom Ouimette, lead guitarist Mike Schlenker and bass player Duane Collier.

**Contributed photo**