

# Impact! Rudy Cheeks is the inaugural winner of Motif's lifetime achievement award



*Times photo by Antoine C. Boulanger*

Who is Rudy Cheeks & what is he up to now?

You wouldn't think there were many teenagers living in Pawtucket in the late 1960s who were heavily into John Coltrane, Thelonius Monk and Bob Dylan. But then again, Rudy Cheeks (*nee* Bruce McCrae) has always danced to his own drummer — and quite successfully —

which is why he is receiving *Motif's* Impact Award for his lifetime Rhode Island achievements in music, writing, TV and radio.

Cheeks grew up in The Bucket and became friends with another local unique character who called himself Stevie Thunder. Thunder had transferred to URI, where Cheeks was enrolled, from Northeastern. He was in a band called Pigtown, quite the glamorous name, with folks from RISD and around Providence.

Cheeks got to know the band members, and when Pigtown morphed into The Fabulous Motels, he was on board. The Motels were one of a kind in that era, and featured others who would go on to renown such as Charlie Rocket, Dan Gosch and Jeff Shore, plus their dancers, the Tampons, Barbara Conway, Bonita Flanders and Beth Claverie.

The Motels evolved into the Young Adults in 1975, who, with Cheeks in a featured singing role, playing his self-taught harmoni



ca and saxophone, made their debut on the Fourth of July in 1976 in the parking lot of the legendary Leo's bar on Chestnut Street in Providence. This wildly popular and unique act moved on to playing throughout the northeast. Both the Fabulous Motels and Young Adults were recently inducted into the R.I. Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. And if there was an iconic picture to mark their clever lyrics, solid music and wild outfits, it was the one of Rudy Cheeks on stage in a white wedding dress, holding his





saxophone.

The birth of the Young Adults kicked off a hot streak for Cheeks locally. He served as a sidekick to a popular radio host Caroline Fox. He began a show called "Club Genius" on the new community access TV show. He began a hilarious cult film performance called "Comediac" in which he voiced over commentary for horrible sci-fi and horror movies. He started a column called "That Proves It," a line lifted from *Plan Nine from Outer Space*, that appeared in the new and short-lived *Providence Eagle*. And he co-authored (with this writer) a satiric social commentary column, "Phillipe and Jorge's Cool, Cool World" in the *Eagle*, then *The NewPaper*, the *Providence Phoenix* and now in *Motif*. It began in 1980 and is the longest running column in RI newspaper history. And as Cheeks always informs people, the only way the writers will get into the R.I. Journalism Hall of Fame is dependent upon the weather: It'll happen when hell freezes over.

If you have lived in RI for even a little while (and have a clue) you will know the name Rudy Cheeks. He has had a hand in the progress of music, the arts, the media and comedy in The Biggest Little. Even with some recent health issues taking a little speed off his fastball, he is still out and about. And the *Motif* Impact Award is well deserved. Even if he has never had a driver's license. He's one of a kind.

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# Wind Power: It “Blowed Up Good”

Wind energy *is* all it's blown up to be.

States like Texas and Oklahoma know wind to be a viable and powerful source of renewable energy, and have been tapping into it on their plains and prairies for decades.

Rhode Island, being a bit short on plains and prairies inventory, took the best route available — looking to the ocean for the Ocean State.

The state recognized that ocean winds had sufficient power to produce usable amounts of wind energy in the early 2000s, and sought to take advantage of that untapped asset. The action taken on that potential valuable resource has resulted in The Biggest Little becoming the first state in the nation to develop an offshore wind energy farm in the Atlantic Ocean in the form of a pilot project by Deepwater Wind of five wind energy turbines off the shore of Block Island, which are now up and running and beginning to generate electricity for Rhode Island as a whole and where it was mostly badly needed, on The Block.

(A quick aside here: While the idea of also tapping into wave energy exists, the general rule of thumb in the science and renewable energy communities is “Wind on the east coast, waves on the west coast.” There have been incidents of wave energy projects being proposed off the shores of Rhode Island, but it simply isn't financially viable at this point, and at least one of the wave energy proposals appeared to be a mere stalking horse for developers hoping to acquire offshore leases from the federal government under the guise of harnessing waves, and then quickly shifting over to the more sensible wind alternative.)

If the Deepwater Wind pilot hopefully (and probably, it says here) succeeds, they have plans, and federal and state permission, to develop a 100+ wind turbine farm farther offshore to the northeast of the current project. And as technology races ahead on offshore wind generation, this will inevitably lead to more reasonable pricing, which is currently at 24.4 cents per kilowatt hour for the pilot project, falling between higher-priced solar and above fossil fuels, but meeting the legal requirement of being a “commercially reasonable” price charged through the agreement between Deepwater and National Grid, which controls Rhode Island's electricity grid.

For years, all the talk in New England had been about the Cape Wind project proposed for the waters off the coast of Massachusetts. Unfortunately for the developers, they made the mistake of identifying a site that would have been visible from the Kennedy compound in Hyannis, and we certainly couldn't have any of those unsightly wind turbines disturbing the water views of America's royal family, now could we? A combination of Kennedy political and media influence, opposition with backdoor funding by the fossil fuel power bloc, a stream of bullshit challenges on everything from aesthetics to the killing of sea birds, and a regulatory and stakeholder evaluation process that they could not have made more of a hash of if they tried, has resulted in Cape Wind becoming a lesson in what not to do. So enter Rhode Island, which can now claim rights to “first in the nation” status to something that does not involve mob hits or politicians in prison.

Believe it or not, Little Rhody did it the right way from start to finish, and the process they used became a national model for offshore wind energy exploration. With renewable energy just starting to roar publicly, an Ocean Special Area Management Plan, to be headed by the state Coastal Resources Management Council and abetted by the best minds and science at predominantly the University of Rhode Island, was authorized to try to back up the determination by the Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources in 2007 that investment in offshore wind farms would be necessary to achieve then-Governor Donald Carcieri's ambitious mandate that offshore wind resources should provide 15% of the state's electrical power by 2020.

Right now, New England is at the point where about half its energy is generated by natural gas; new and old renewable energy sources at about 20%; and the rest generated by a mix of sources that range from solar, oil and coal, and even some nuclear energy from the Seabrook (NH) and Millstone (CT) plants. As renewables such as wind energy gain traction, the use of fossil-fueled sources will decrease over time, welcome news to those who actually believe in climate change.

Jerry Elmer, senior attorney at Conservation Law Foundation's Rhode Island office, who studies energy issues harder than you ever cracked a book in school, says that wind energy is a "great idea" and "certainly an integral part of the future." This has great import as Rhode Island looks to the future of the use of renewable sources of energy as part of our energy resources. This efficient use of renewables will also help put a crimp in the plans for fossil-based energy sources, such as the bitterly contested Invenegy power plant being proposed for Burrillville, against which Elmer and CLF have been leading the charge locally.

If there is one nuanced fear that exists about renewables, it is that their success may drive out traditional sources before the renewables can completely handle the load. But CLF argues that the costs for building new renewable energy resources is coming down sharply as the industry matures and realizes economies of scale, and the actual build-out of renewables is happening faster than most people predicted.

So get to the point, already. Yes, wind energy is viable, renewable and a damn smart decision when you're looking at those winds blowing almost full-time offshore without punching a clock. And you're not getting unfairly hammered in the wallet just to be on the right side of the angels on climate change and able to wear your "Green" badge with pride. We are just being smart by maximizing a gift from Mother Nature in our own front yard. Wind energy, offshore or on, is a long-term win-win, and when those other eastern coastal states start putting up offshore wind turbines faster than a Trump hotel or casino can go under, take a little bit of pride in telling folks, "Hey, we showed you how to do it right, folks."

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# Time to Do Something

*The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.* — Edmund Burke, philosopher and politician, and a big fan of the American Revolution, 1729-1797.

While visions of sugar plums and the French Resistance dance in your heads after the abomination on November 8, let us please turn our attention to future social activism.

To trot out a couple of clichés, if you haven't learned the lesson of "divide and conquer," you weren't paying attention. And if you don't take Ben Franklin's advice about hanging together or hanging separately, you risk figuratively dancing on air.

End-of-year donations to your favorite non-profit are commonplace, hitting your wallet at the time you are inspired or guilted-out by the generosity-oriented spirit of the holiday season. But think of upping the ante for the new year.

When you think about what you can do, hark to a common way of thinking utilized by citizen advocacy groups to marshal their driving forces. That is looking for someone who can provide one of the three Ws: wealth, wisdom or work.

If you have the big bucks, toss them in the pot, but make sure the organization you are giving them to can show you they go to hands-on, frontline work in their programs, not to cover administrative costs. If you have a great deal of knowledge or experience in an area specific to the group's causes, offer them up on a *pro bono* basis to assist in areas where they would otherwise have to hire a consultant. And if you are simply pissed off or worried that by doing nothing you are aiding and abetting the enemy, volunteer your services to do the grunt work needed for most non-profits to survive and succeed.

But what is most needed today for social activism that makes a difference is a word that has already been beaten to death by liberals and conservatives as we emerge into a frightening futurescape: unity. The deep divides caused by the presidential election make this goal nearly impossible at the overall level, but something can be done about it working from the ground up. The old saw about "Think globally, act locally" has morphed into the reality of "Cry globally, try locally."

For all the best intentions, the progressive advocacy community has shown itself to be as concerned about turf battles, who gets the credit and public image polishing as any government entity. Major foundation supporters of advocacy groups have been pushing for partnering and coalition-building for years. But it is hard to make it happen in a viable way. Not impossible, but very difficult, even if the will exists.

What is needed are groups coming together with a clear, concise and consistent message to the public about what is trying to be achieved, in as selfless a manner as possible. While Occupy Wall Street participants mostly had their hearts in the right place, anyone want to give a quick, three-sentence elucidation of its primary goals? Thought so. Microphone-grabbing, shouting, ranting zealots looking for a spot on the nightly news aren't going to get you or your philosophical buddies very far.

You need to immediately answer the "So what?" question. If you are already involved in, or plan to undertake, certain activities, the public's first response is, "Nice. But what does it do for me?" And you

need a kitchen table answer, one that brings the benefits of your initiative right into people's houses and shows the firsthand impacts of whatever is planned or being done. (And an important corollary to this is knowing your opponents' arguments as well as your own, so they can be taken off the table before the debate begins with a "You are going to hear the other side say this, but it isn't true because..." Getting slapped down by a counterpoint response you didn't expect and looking like you were born that morning isn't a big way to draw support.)

This isn't as difficult as it may seem. Issue-oriented public advocacy groups have done a great job in recent years of showing the inextricable links between the economy, the environment, public health and social justice. But the individual organizations then tend to become too narrowly focused on their own issue. Instead of sitting down and creating a major scheme with other groups and trying to get more bang for their buck on a grander scale, it is a case of "Well, we'll let Save The Bay/The Nature Conservancy/Whoever handle the environment, and we'll take the social justice/public health/economic piece." Fine, but don't do it in a vacuum with only occasional updates from each faction so you don't step on toes in the media or public eye.

This isn't meant to be a lecture, and you are more than welcome to say, "Get stuffed." But if you are going to donate your time, energy, skills or money to a well-deserving social activist group, push them in this direction, because they still need that shove. The opposition bullshit you will face has done an excellent job of isolating arguments, neutralizing them with petty distractions and then wasting your time and money by having to defend themselves against fake news and baseless (and even lunatic) accusations.

A major, high-powered coalition of social activism groups in Rhode Island with clear, selfless goals that can be easily articulated to show how it will benefit each and every citizen who wants the payoff will not only get the attention of politicians who look at the public as walking voting ballots, but folks who you may not recognize as allies. The guy with the NRA cap may not be wearing a backpack and Birkenstocks, but he fishes and hunts and wonders where the winter flounder have gone and wants the forests protected. The investment banker in the Armani suit can't swallow the idea of selling a no-chance mortgage to a busboy at Chili's. The a-hole with the Brady jersey on yelling at the screen during a Pats game at a sports bar is sitting next to his or her childhood best friend who came out years ago, no big deal. The grease-stained guy fixing your car spent last night is wondering how he's going to pay for the nursing care needed for his mother.

Social activism is going to have to re-imagine itself to deal with a very different, already charred landscape in the future. If public advocacy groups are smart, they will hang together, act together and speak together. But *you*, man or woman, can't do nothing. The result of that is a future foretold long ago by Edmund Burke.

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