

## Hip Pocket plays music ambassador

by Karen Strawn  
Pantagraph Staff

Bloomington-Normal was well represented at the Illinois GOP Inaugural banquet Sunday night, according to local folk singer Marita Brake who performed for more than 600 people at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Washington, D.C., as part of the inaugural festivities.

"People were coming up to me and saying 'What is going on in Bloomington?'" Brake said.

The reason for the questions, Brake said, was the overwhelming response to local blues band Hip Pocket as they performed at Sunday night's banquet.

"Everybody was loving Hip Pocket," Brake said. "They were very well-received."

Hip Pocket also was scheduled as an opening act at one of the inaugural balls Monday night, but had to cancel because their drummer was sick.

Lead singer Marc Boon said drummer Jeff Shoemaker was "sick as a dog" during Sunday night's performance. "A couple of times I would look back at him and he was green," Boon said. "I can't believe he made it through the gig."

It was a hard decision to make, said Boon, but after careful consideration, all nine members of the band agreed it just wasn't worth it to stay.

"I would rather that we make no impression at all than to get another drummer on short notice and make a bad impression," Boon said.

As originally scheduled, President Clinton and Vice President Gore were to have shown up during the band's final act. Hip Pocket was scheduled to open for country singer Billy Ray Cyrus, and then close the show from 1:20 a.m. to 2:20 a.m.

"The president and vice president were supposed to make an appearance at 1:15 a.m.," Boon said.

Hip Pocket's performance Saturday night at The Lafayette Club in Bloomington meant more to the band than playing for "the people of the moment" in Washington, said Boon.

"Last Saturday's audience at The Lafayette Club came out in 42-degrees-below-zero (wind chill) temperatures to wish us well before we left for Washington," he said. "That meant more to us than anything that has happened here."

Boon said that trip was an experience the band will never forget and an opportunity of a lifetime. But getting Shoemaker home and getting him well had to be the priority.

"Nobody feels as bad about this as Jeff," Boon said. "He is so stressed out about this, it's making him even more sick."