

Robert Huggar headlines Urban League Family Day

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As a highlight of the Minneapolis Urban League's 24th annual Family Day celebration, hometown hero, Robert Lavelle Huggar, better known as R.L., former lead singer of R&B group Next returns home to perform.

On Saturday, Aug. 31 from 10 a.m. until dusk, Plymouth Avenue between Logan and Penn Avenues in north Minneapolis will be transformed into an urban festival, marketplace, and resource fair. According to organizers, Family Day focuses on promoting family traditions and values, healthy, secure neighborhoods and economic development. More than 3,000 people are anticipated to participate in this year's Family Day celebration.

"Family Day is about bringing unity to the community," said Minneapolis Urban League (MUL) executive director, Scott Gray. "This is an opportunity for everyone to come out and enjoy their neighbors and partake in some exciting entertainment, all designed to uplift the community."

Gray said the tradition of Family Day comes from the MUL's spirit of giving.

"When we started Family Day 24 years ago it was about the staff giving hot dogs out of the back of the old building," said Gray. "We want to continue that giving. There are a lot of fairs and events going on, but a lot such as the Minnesota State Fair charge a fee. A lot of our families may not be able to afford to go to the State Fair, so we try to provide a similar experience right here for free. It may not compare to the State Fair, but you can't tell our families that because they love it to death."

As part of providing the exciting fair feel, Family day offers a parade (beginning at 10 a.m.) with nearly 60 participants, a basketball tournament and, of course, the main stage entertainment featuring a multitude of local performing artist, highlighted by that evening's finale performance of R.L.

"What we do with Family Day is try to bring home national acts so they can present right in front of the folks that helped raise them," said Gray.

And with the location of Family Day being right outside of the MUL, 2100 Plymouth Ave. N., R.L. is almost literally coming home.

"It's kind of ironic because I grew up just two blocks from there," said R.L., who has lived in

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Atlanta for the past eight years. "When I come home I feel like a kid again."

R.L. said his show at this year's MUL Family Day will be all about having a good time.

"Phillip Bailey of Earth Wind and Fire is my cousin and their shows are always live, so that's what I'm going to bring to Family Day, a fun live show," said R.L. "So I'm going to do some of my old stuff I wrote for Next, some new stuff and some of the other songs I wrote for other people."

In addition to being the front man for Next, whose hits included "Wifey," "Too Close" and "Butta Love," R.L. is a prolific songwriter, writing for some of the biggest names in the industry.

"I've written for Jaheim, Luther (Vandross), Usher, Jamie Foxx and a lot of others," said R.L.

In addition to R.L., other acts to perform on the Family Day stage include Chantel SinGs, The Maxx Band, Lia Renee Dior and several other area artists.

MUL Family Day is presented in part by North Point Health & Wellness Center, the University of Minnesota Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center (UROC) and Estes Funeral Chapel.