

June 15, 2006

## The lizard king

Polyester and art are a winning combination for this lounge singer.

BY JIM WALKER

[jim.walker@intakeweekly.com](mailto:jim.walker@intakeweekly.com)

Mike Wiltrout has grown up. But not enough to keep him from dressing in silly outfits.

When Wiltrout, a local tongue-in-cheek lounge singer in the duo the Leisure Kings, emcees his third Art vs. Art event on June 16, he'll wear one of his trademark bad tuxedos. It might be gold or orange or sky blue. But it won't be boring.

"I figure people are coming for a show, so you may as well give them a show," said Wiltrout, 38. "In my old band, I used to wear pope costumes and banana suits and prom dresses. I like dressing up in funny clothes. And I'm lucky to have an outlet for it that doesn't land me in jail."

### A DREAM DEFERRED

After growing up in Indianapolis, Wiltrout attended Indiana University in Bloomington where he joined the ska band Johnny Socko. "They didn't know I could sing. I didn't know I could sing," Wiltrout said. "They just knew I could make a spectacle of things."

He did so for a decade -- touring America several times -- before giving up the dream to be a rock star. Wiltrout left the band in 1999. "I really got to see the country in a way that I never would have been able to without music," he said. "I'm really grateful."

"Now, I'm about to have my first kid and I don't feel like I got gypped," he said. "I got to have an incredible experience and settle into family life without feeling like I missed something."

While Wiltrout sang for Socko, he worked toward his journalism degree, studying in the back of the tour van. It took the student -- who always figured music would be his job -- 12 years to get his degree.

### GETTING A DAY JOB

While a member of Johnny Socko, it was Wiltrout's job to create posters for the shows. "Sometimes I enjoyed that even more than the singing," he said. "Making a funny poster and going and getting it printed up 500 times at Kinko's on some kind of eye-catching paper stock and then running around with some tape and your staple gun, I loved that."

"That (graphic design) was one of the things that guided me after that band was over."

After taking classes at Ivy Tech at night while delivering pizzas and working as a bellboy by day, Wiltrout became a graphic designer. Now, he works at the Finish Line headquarters on the Eastside.

"I took a couple of years off after Socko and I didn't do anything musical, and I just about went crazy," he said. "All I know now is that I got to do that. People honest with themselves would do it whether or not they're getting paid because, without it, their 75 years on this planet is going to suck."

### ROCKING LIKE A HURRICANE

These days, Wiltrout and Sean Baker, who plays keyboards as the other tuxedoed half of the Leisure Kings, have a regular Wednesday night gig in the lounge at Agio, performing -- in swinging lounge style -- favorites like Van Halen's "Jump," Styx's "Mr. Roboto" and the Scorpions' "Rock You Like a Hurricane."

"I'm grateful that I understand what I need," he said. "If I'm 60 years old and still cracking wise on a microphone at the VFW I'm going to be very, very happy about that."



**Lounge life: Mike Wiltrout, who performs regularly with the lounge band the Leisure Kings, will host Art vs. Art in Fountain Square June 16. -- Jim Walker / INTake**

### ART VS. ART

Mike Wiltrout's multiple talents as a wisecracker, musician and graphic artist make him a perfect choice for hosting Art vs. Art, presented by Primary Colours and Groove Truck.

- **Where:** Fountain Square Theatre, 1105 Prospect St.
- **When:** 8 p.m. June 16.
- **Tickets:** \$10 adult presale tickets, \$8 student presale tickets; \$12 adults at the door, \$10 students at the door.
- **Info:** [www.artvsart.com](http://www.artvsart.com)