

15 MINUTES

The man inside the chicken suit

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The giant unblinking eyes of the man-sized chicken are blue, the same color as the eyes of the man peering out from inside the full-body costume. A little girl runs toward the 6-foot, 3-inch bird and they dance to the live rockabilly music reverberating through the Patio De Leon in downtown Fort Myers and out over the crowd, hair sticking to foreheads everywhere in the humid night.

This bird is the bright yellow and more outgoing alternate persona of Andrew Rounds, a tall, skinny 21-year-old with an auburn beard and a reserved, hopeful demeanor. On his golden business cards, the tagline below the heading — “Mr. Feathers” — reads “Open for Anything.”

“When I’m outside the costume, I don’t wanna do anything,” said Mr. Rounds, “but when I’m in the costume I have the energy to entertain people, jump around.”

A crowd had filled the Patio in downtown Fort Myers at dusk last Friday night, circling around the rockabilly band. Mr. Feathers had pulled his rubber mask down over an already sweaty head and strutted out into the empty circle in front of the band, shaking his wings. First the little girl, and then three or four other children broke away from the crowd and were buzzing around him. Because of the length of the rubber feet he has to kind of high step when he walks.

An older guy with a cigarette and



COURTESY PHOTO

Mr. Feathers, aka, Andrew Rounds, entertains a crowd in downtown Fort Myers.

short gray hair hung his arm around Mr. Feathers while his friend took a picture on a cell phone. Mr. Feathers got a lot of sympathy because it was so hot outside.

“I can’t believe you wear that,” a woman said. “It’s so hot.”

“Are you selling nuggets somewhere?” someone else said. “You’ve gotta be hot.”

“Did anyone ever tell you you look like a chicken?” a woman said.

Wherever Mr. Feathers appears, his mother, Susan Rounds, is probably somewhere nearby. She helps him suit up, and works crowd control since her

son’s vision is limited inside the suit. She also makes sure he stays hydrated. “I’m his bodyguard,” she said, noting that sometimes in a crowd people get too physical when they dance with him. “I go over and tap ‘em on the shoulder and say, ‘no, no, no, no,’” she said. She was with him for his first appearance at a bar downtown earlier this summer. “We had so many cameras going off,” she said.

Mr. Rounds said he didn’t have an interest in theater or dressing up in costume when he was growing up in Fort Myers. He has held a number of odd

jobs: at a convenience store, a rest home, in a restaurant. Mr. Feathers is his favorite occupation so far.

He bought the chicken suit on the Internet to entertain children at The Imaginarium, a children’s museum, while he was volunteering there earlier this summer. He wondered if he could make money in the suit for birthday parties, weddings, parades or other events. Sometimes in the afternoons he calls up club or restaurant owners to “see if they’ve got anything going on, chicken wise.” So far, no luck in that regard. He was booked for one wedding, but the wedding was canceled. He’s mostly Mr. Feathers free of charge and on his own time.

“It’s slow right now, but I’m tuggin’ along,” he said.

Inside that chicken suit, dancing in the Patio, it only took 10 or 15 minutes for the climate to become suffocating. Mr. Rounds lifted off the mask, grinning, gasping, “Air!” Breaking away from the crowd, he walked up toward First Street, dabbing his forehead with a rough brown paper towel.

Two men, one with a video camera and one holding a microphone, asked him to stop for an interview. Mr. Feathers told them, “It’s all about the local artists and the local music and everything else.”

“You wanna cross the road?” a man on a bench called out.

Mr. Feathers waved and high stepped across First Street. People noticed him. He was a star. ■

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