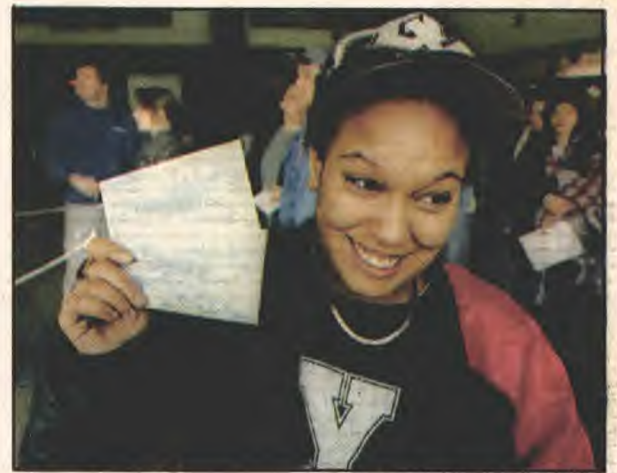


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Boyz II Men fans camp out in comfort to get choice tickets

Trebla Lowe shows off Boyz II Men tickets she got after camping all night inside the Metra.



Gazette photo by James Woodcock



Gazette photo by Larry Mayer

Boyz II Men fans camped out at the Metra Sunday night to get choice seats Monday morning.

Group makes fans, and 1 kitchen, shine with delight

By **CHRISTINE LYALL**
Of The Gazette Staff

The Mellgren family's kitchen at 2911 James St. is going to sparkle for the next few days.

Because of a deal that he struck with his parents in exchange for permission to camp out at MetraPark Sunday night, 14-year-old Chris Mellgren now has to clean the kitchen.

But Chris doesn't care. He will relish the chore. He got his primo tickets for the Boyz II Men concert slated for April 27.

Chris said he arrived at MetraPark with his friend Elizabeth Lay, 14, about 3:45 p.m. Sunday, equipped with "tons of hot chocolate," down-filled sleeping bags and big, warm boots. They were among an estimated 200 people — mostly youths — who bunked out in the lobby of the facility in

order to get the best seats for the popular rhythm and blues/hip hop group's performance.

Tickets went on sale at 8 a.m. Monday. By the end of the day, roughly half of the 9,340 available tickets had been sold.

"It was like a big slumber party," Elizabeth said of the night she spent at the

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Metra. She said people brought along televisions, videocassette recorders, Nintendo games, cellular phones, and "the pay phones were ringing off the hook."

Montana State University-Billings student Melissa Wilson, 20, was the first in line at 6 a.m. on Sunday.

"I waited for 26 hours," she said proudly. And she got eight front-and-center tickets.

All tickets are \$28.25 each.

"This is one of the first R & B/hip-hop concerts to come to Billings and we just wanted to get good seats," Wilson said. "Boyz II Men is generated more toward the

younger crowd, and young people would be more up to staying overnight" than older people who favor a big country act, she said.

Brandi Mays, 19, of Billings, got in line about 6:30 a.m. Monday and was afraid she might have missed out on the better seats.

Still, "It's exciting to have something new in Billings," she said of the greatly anticipated show.

Sandra Hawke, marketing director at MetraPark, said Boyz II Men's Billings appearance is more a result of luck than anything else — though she has been calling pop/rock promoters weekly to inform them of the area's market potential.

She said the group's Massachusetts-based promoter, Haymon Entertainment, Inc., booked Boyz II Men because the performers will be traveling throughout the region for a series of shows.

"It's just a matter of proper routing," Hawke said. Because of the city's relatively remote location, she said, "Nobody comes to Billings then flies out again just to do a show."

Hawke said there is a good chance that more contemporary groups will come to Billings, though that won't be because of the success of the Boyz II Men concert.

"Boyz II Men is not a good test, because they sell well anywhere," she said.

On a less positive note, a regional school official commented that Monday was a "bad choice" for the opening sale day, Hawke said. Many students skipped school to stand in line.

"Saturday is the best day, but ultimately, we don't make that decision," Hawke said. "The promoter determines the sale day."