

# Family band returns to festival with new acts

When you talk to Elvin Martin, father of the bluegrass music group "The Martins," there is pride, love and excitement in his voice as he talks about his three daughters and a son who, along with himself, make up the group which is in demand for festivals, concerts and churches performances across the country.

"I have an 11-year-old daughter who will be appearing as a professional clogger this year," Martin said. "She will be clogging to several of the pieces the band does at the Pickin' On The Plains festival in Colby, and along with that, my 13-year-old son is a guitarist, and he will be making an appearance too."

"The band is all family, and we have fun at what we do."

Martin said the four kids who play regularly in the band range in age from 19 to 24, and that when they started their career 10 years ago, it made the youngest one only nine years old at the time. He said they got their inspiration from a family band they had seen while they were on a trip to Branson.

"Before the family began to play together for real, we had instructional videos, along with a tape and a book," said daughter Jena.

In spite of no formal training, the self-taught band is so good they were named Instrumental Group of the Year in the Midwest competition of the Society for Preservation of Bluegrass Music of America in 2004. Also to their credit are five Dove Awards and a Grammy nomination.

Elvin says he is a finish carpenter by trade. When he was nine years old he had rheumatic fever and was stuck in bed for two months, with stacks of bluegrass records to listen to.

"I've been a bluegrass music junkie since that time," he said. His kids give him the credit for their love for the music.

The Martins, are from Versailles, Mo., and play more than 30 weekends a year. They average 30,000 miles a year, traveling to places as far away as Maine, New York and Vermont.

"It's amazing how those people up north love bluegrass music," said Dale, the only son in the group for now. "We actually brought the house down in Sydney, Maine, and they're still talking about it."

During the week, the family returns to a relatively normal life of work such as chores, and home school lessons, taught by the kids'



ANDY HEINTZ/Colby Free Press

The Martins performed at the Pickin' on the Plains last year. Band members are (from left) Larita Martin on dobro, Janice Martin on banjo, Jeana Martin-Farris on fiddle and Dale Martin on guitar. In the back is Elvin Martin on the bass.

mother, Verna. Then towards the end of the week, they pack the 15-passenger van and head to another bluegrass festival or concert.

"I used to make the list of songs for the set," said Elvin, "but now they just start playing and they know what they're going to do next."

He said playing has rewards, but it's not money. He added that for now, performing has its own rewards, because entertaining an audience is totally thrilling. Martin noted that each child carries out their own responsibilities while they are on the road, which the family considers to be an educational experience in itself.

"The kids are what puts the drive in the show," the dad said, "there's no sleeping when they're playing to an audience, because it's a good hot show."

The Martins are scheduled to take the stage from 2:25 to 3:05 p.m., on Saturday afternoon, July 17, at the Thomas County Fair Grounds and from 7 to 7:40 p.m. that evening.

The family will perform one more time at to 11:55 on Sunday morning, following the this year's Pickin' On The Plains from 11:10 church service.

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