

Bluegrass popular back east, says Colby musician

Blake McLemore – member of The McLemores, well-known local musicians and bluegrass music performance stars – is a soil conservation service employee in “real life.”

McLemore recently attended a “bootcamp” in Oklahoma for the Natural Resource and Conservation Service with people from all over the United States. He said everyone from “back east” like Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Pennsylvania, and other eastern states are well aware of what bluegrass music is, and they told him how popular the music is with people in those states.

“Bluegrass is so big, he said, “that a gentleman from Georgia told me you’re almost considered an outcast if you don’t play some sort of a bluegrass instrument.”

McLemore, who began playing at an early age, said he really likes the overall atmosphere he sees at bluegrass festivals, because it’s so laid back.

“It’s nice to just sit back and relax outside, even if you’re not really paying attention,” he said, “and you can just soak it all in.”

Kathy Leitner from Atwood says she agrees with Blake, and says it’s not only relaxing, but exciting too. She says that watching a live band just doesn’t get any better than at bluegrass festivals. She says she likes to watch the performers’ fingers fly and enjoys the interaction between band members and the crowd.

The McLemores said they try to impress upon “non bluegrassers” that there is nothing boring about their music. Some of it may be

old time music, they say, but the variety of traditional to the very progressive makes it easy to listen to, and gets your toes to tapping.

When Brandon McLemore did a stint as a sound intern in Nashville in 2009, he said the sound engineers he worked with agreed that the best pickers in Nashville are bluegrass musicians.

“Many of the well known country artists like Vince Gill, Diamond Rio, Patty Loveless and Keith Urban have a bluegrass background,” he noted, “so the musicianship found in bluegrass music is top-notch.”

Susan McLemore, banjo player with the McLemores said she really encourages people to take advantage of the festival workshops and open stage time on Saturday starting at 10 a.m.

“Another thing everyone should take advantage of is the potluck supper on Thursday night when there will be jam sessions. It’s all just lots of fun,” she said, “and everyone is welcome to bring a dish and relax.”

Susan said although the festival is a lot of fun, it still takes a lot of work to organize it.

“You can’t imagine what an undertaking it is,” said McLemore. “If it weren’t for all the support from the community, it would be nearly impossible. We can’t begin to express our thanks to the businesses and individuals who have helped to bring this thing together each year for the last 15 years.”

Susan said when they first started out, they had only the bands, but have added other



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Bluegrass musicians (from left) Jimmy Campbell, Blake McLemore, Jake Workman, Rodney Durst and Brandon McLemore jammed at last year’s Pickin’ on the Plains potluck dinner and jam session.

things during the years that have added to family fun, because it is about entertainment for the whole family.

“There are always activities for kids,” she said. “There’s the workshops, Cowboy Church, the gospel sing, the pony rides, and now they will be replaced this year with a kiddie train this year. I can’t forget the pot luck

for the community and the free jam sessions, and there’s the willingness of the Colby Swim Club to come and serve food, and then to others who are willing to take their time to have food booths.”


She said it really is amazing how willing the community is to offer help of every kind.

Come out to enjoy the 15th Annual Pickin on the Plains Bluegrass Festival!!


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