

# Festival committee gears up for bands

By Sam Dieter

Colby Free Press  
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Some nationally known bluegrass acts will be joining familiar area musicians this weekend for the annual Pickin' on the Plains Bluegrass and Folk Festival Friday, Saturday and Sunday at the Thomas County Fairgrounds.

Having grown over time, the festival has come to include several big names in bluegrass.

"I feel like we've just added stuff every year," said Susan McLemore, a co-founder of the festival and member of the committee. "I feel like it's just improved over the years."

McLemore, part of the family band the McLemores, was one of several participants who felt that the festival has improved greatly over the years.

She described the first festival 17 years ago as a "pickin' picnic" of 50 people. "We've grown from that," she said, "into a festival with an attendance of about 1,200 people last year."

She has seen more and more musicians attend over the years, including her sons Brandon and Blake, who played with their parents for 15 years before going on to form their own band, Driven, about three years ago. The band has changed members over the years and currently includes five people.

"They were at Winfield (the Walnut Valley Bluegrass Festival), it was 3 a.m. and Brandon and Blake were walking around and they found this guitar player picking by himself and they asked him if he wanted to jam," Susan McLemore said of how guitar player Jake Workman joined the boys' band. "The minute after they met Jake, they were like yeah, we need to have a band."

After the band's old fiddle player, Jimmy Vincent, quit, McLemore said, "Jake met a girl who played the fiddle, and he married her, and she's awesome."

Rebecca Workman became the new fiddle player for Driven. The band has been playing at the festival for several years now.

Headliners Dailey and Vincent are coming back for their second year at the festival. They received both the Entertainer of the Year and Vocal Group of the Year awards by the



Jimmy Campbell of Wichita, who plays banjo in the band Driven, jammed at the Pickin' on the Plains Bluegrass Festival last year with Joyce Gatlin (background left) and Ruth Galloway enjoying the tune. Driven will be playing the festival this year for the third year in a row.

International Bluegrass Music Association in 2008, 2009 and 2010.

"We're bringing in these national acts, and they are considered to be like the top-entertaining bluegrass act today," McLemore said. "You have these people say, 'I can't believe you have them here' because they're so close to home."

McLemore said festival attendance rose by about 25 percent last year.

Cody Shuler and Pine Mountain Railroad are returning to the festival all the way from Knoxville, Tenn. Shuler has been nominated for a Dove award for Gospel album of the Year and topped the SiriusXM radio chart.

Among the newer attendees, Triple L, a family band from New Mexico, met the McLemores some years ago. They are coming to

play in Colby for the first time this year. High Plains Tradition, from Denver, is coming back after having played several times before.

Longtime festival participants include Sappa Strings, the husband-and-wife duo of Wayne and Millie Lauritsen, originally of Gem, who moved to Divide, Colo. Solo guitarist Larry Booth helped found the festival with McLemore and will also coming back this year.

The festival kicks off Thursday night with a free potluck at 6:30 p.m. in the 4-H Building, followed by a jam session. Drinks and table service will be provided, but guests should bring a dish to share.

The bands will start playing at 6 p.m. Friday and finish up at 10:50 p.m. They will start again at noon on Saturday and continue until

Vincent and Daily finish their set at 11 p.m.

Children under 18 who want to perform with bluegrass instruments can sign up for a junior showcase from 10 a.m. to 11:50 a.m. Saturday Participants can play up to three songs, and time permitting, perform on an open stage.

"The thing that people like about our festival is they tell us over and over again how friendly and family-oriented it is," McLemore said.

Band members will teach kids to play different instruments on Friday and Saturday. These workshops will cover banjo, fiddle, mandolin, harmony singing and four different guitar lessons.

Also available will be youth crafts by the Pioneer Memorial Library and activities such as ink tatoos, horseback rides and a petting zoo. Concessions will be available on the fairgrounds.

On Sunday morning, the Sappa Strings, Triple L and High Plains Tradition will play between 9 and 11 a.m. The festival will come to a close with a Bluegrass Gospel Homecoming, featuring about 16 musicians at once, playing until 12:40 p.m.

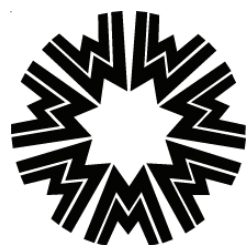
Marshal Allen Bailey, an actual marshal from Dodge City, will be back to act as the master of ceremonies, joined by his wife Janey.

The festival this year is dedicated to the memory of longtime supporters Janet Phelps and Bill Summers. Summers, who died June 15, started playing at the age of 16, McLemore said. Aside from being an accomplished musician who made a couple of records, he served on the festival committee and lent his sound system to the festival.

Admission for the weekend is \$40, or \$35 in advance, admission is also \$20 for Friday night, \$25 for Saturday, \$20 for Saturday night, \$15 for Sunday. Groups of ten or more can get in for \$10 each. It is \$10 for kids 12 to 16, and free for kids under 12.

Tickets are available at the Colby Convention Center and Visitors' Bureau, or at the F&M Bank at Dillon's.

The committee includes Susan, Bob, Blake, Brandon and Lottie McLemore, Jo and Larry Booth, Chuck and Lelani Thomas, Kenneth Gatlin and Cathy Leitner.



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Hours: M-F 8:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. & 1:00 p.m.-5:30 p.m.

Sat. 8:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.