

On the Path

Community Music Jams Continue!

By Keith Hammer

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With the shift in seasons and darker evenings, the biweekly Swan Range Community Music Jam Sessions become all the more meaningful as folks gather to share music and good food. Though the jams have been held year-round since 2007, there's something about the winter months that makes the companionship extra special.

The jam sessions are held on alternating Sunday evenings, beginning with a potluck meal at 5 followed by the sharing of music until 8 or 9. In the next few months, jam sessions will be held December 5 and 19, January 2, 16 and 30, February 13 and 27, and March 13 and 27.

The jam sessions are held during the winter months at the Mountain Brook Community Library, 2353 Foothill Road, on the old Mountain Brook School campus. As a school campus, no alcohol is allowed. There's lots of room for parking and donations for the rental fee go to the Mountain Brook Homestead Foundation to restore the old Mountain Brook Schoolhouse next door to the library!

To check on the jam schedule in 2011, simply email me at keith@swanview.org or phone me at 755-1379. You may also want to check the Mountain Brook Homestead Foundation's web site at <http://sites.google.com/site/mtbrookhomesteadfoundation> as they often list the jam sessions on their calendar of events. And don't miss the Homestead Foundation's twice-yearly pie social fund-raisers, during which the Swan Jammers provide free music!

The jam sessions are acoustic and non-electric. Folks of all abilities are welcome as we take turns going around the circle so everyone gets a chance to play or lead songs of their choice. The atmosphere is supportive, noncompetitive, and open to music of all types. Folks are welcome to just listen and relax if they don't wish to play or sing along, though they may get stuck with doing the dishes!

We've had a healthy mix of instruments lately; several guitars, a fiddle or two, a couple banjo, an autoharp, a hammered dulcimer, and an occasional mandolin. Over the years, group size has averaged about nine people, but has at times grown as large as twenty. Some folks play by ear, some read music, but all have a good time and we often share sheet music with one another.

It's been fun over the years to watch folks improve on their instruments or in their voice. The jam sessions are also a great way for folks to get over their fears of "performing" in front of others; largely because they are playing along with others, but also because everyone else is pretty well versed in making mistakes themselves!

If you've been longing for some homespun music, wanting to dust off your instrument, or just wanting some good company on a snowy winter evening, please come join us some Sunday at the Mountain Brook Community Library. You're never too young or too old to enjoy music!

Keith Hammer grew up hiking, skiing, camping, hunting, and fishing in the Swan Mountains. He has worked a number of jobs, from Forest Service trail worker to logger to backcountry guide, and currently works as an environmental consultant and head of the nonprofit Swan View Coalition. His column appears regularly in this paper and is archived at www.swanrange.org. Keith can be reached at 406-755-1379 or keith@swanview.org.



The author and his grandson “fiddle around.” Pam Willison photo.