

Table of Contents

Bluegrass Canada



VOLUME 18

ISSUE 2

On the Cover
VERANDA

24



By Mike Higgins



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10

The Doggone Brothers Band



By Rhonda Shippey

13

Old School Bluegrass Camp

By Dave Featherstone

16

The Story of a Guitar – Part 2



By Dave Porter

18

Radio Documentary Celebrating Ray Legere



By Mike Higgins

19

Ray Legere & Acoustic Horizon in Concert

By Wilson Moore



More News
By Mike Higgins

21

Attention Canadian Musicians



By Murray Hale

22

The History of Bluegrass around Coombs, B. C.



By Linda Thorburn

28

Alison Doody's Appalachian Trail



By Karen DeCoste

President & Editor's Message

- [5](#) President' Message
- [54](#) Editor's Message

Lessons

- [06](#) Banjo Lessons - Denis
- [07](#) Mandolin Lessons - Emory
- [08](#) Dobro Lessons - Pascal

Hall of Fame Updates

- [33](#) Denis HOF Update

CD Reviews

- [12](#) Pat Moore's CD reviews

Listings

- [47](#) Radio on the Air Chart cut out
- [48](#) Radio on the Air Listings
- [50](#) BMAC Members

[40](#) Leanne's Cartoons

Festival Listings

- [Inside Front cover](#) - Tottenham
- [30](#) Northern Lights
- [31](#) PEI -Bluegrass and Oldtime Music Festival
- [32](#) Cowichan BC Festival
- [33](#) Monroe Camp- Abington, VA US, Sue Malcolm BC
- [34](#) Evergood, Keremeos - BC, Evangeline Festivals
- [35](#) Shady Grove - Alberta
- [36](#) Norwood and Mud Creek - Ontario
- [37](#) Galop Festival
- [38](#) Coombs Bluegrass - BC
- [39](#) Old School Bluegrass Camp Ontario
- [40](#) Palmer Rapids, Clare, River Valley
- [41](#) Nelson Family Bluegrass Jamboree
- [42](#) Bluegrass in the Country Manitoulin Island
- [43](#) South Grenville
- [44](#) 51st Nova Scotia Festival
- [45](#) Blueberry Bluegrass Festival
- [46](#) St. Louis - PEI Bluegrass - New Richmond Quebec
- [Inside Back cover](#) - River Valley Festival
- [Back Cover](#) Martin Guitar

OLD SCHOOL BLUEGRASS CAMP

An outstanding Musical Experience – Elphin, Ontario

by Dave Featherstone

We recently had the extreme pleasure of interviewing the owners, Jenny Whiteley and Joey Wright of the Ontario based “OLD SCHOOL BLUEGRASS CAMP.”

DF - Thank you Jenny and Joey for taking the time out of your busy schedule to participate in our video interview.

J&J – You’re welcome Dave. We are excited to be here and share the “Old School Bluegrass Camp” story with all your members.

DF – Can you tell us about the Camp location.

J&J – The Camp is in the Ottawa Valley, near the town of Elphin, in the county of Lanark, Ontario. We are situated one hour north of Kingston and one hour west of Ottawa. The Camp is held on our two-acre property where we have lived for twenty-one years.

DF – Tell us about the history of how the Camp came to be.

J&J – The idea came to us fifteen years ago. We had seen there were a lot of Canadian musicians, both students and teachers, travelling to the U.S. to attend camps.

We started originally in Milford, Ontario where a friend bought an old school building, and as we were looking for a location, that is where we held our first Camps. We were in Milford for six years, then we moved the Camp to our own property, which was highly successful. This will be our fourth year, so 2024 will be our tenth anniversary of the “Bluegrass Camp.”

DF – Tell us about the instructors you have at the Camp.

J&J – We have instructors coming from all parts of Canada and the United States. We try to have a mix of new Camp instructors as well as a few returning instructors. About a third of our campers are returnees, so we like to switch it up with variety and new energy for everyone.

DF – Which instruments do you focus on at the Camp?

J&J – Acoustic for sure. We are open for anything related to traditional music and have had campers bring all the standard bluegrass and old-time instruments. We have also seen campers bring base recorder, ukulele, mandola and contrabass harmonica. At our 2023 Camp, some of our instructors put on a show featuring original African instruments. We try to bring in the history of musical ideas, and this has been a big hit with our campers and instructors.

Song writing is also featured at our Camp and we are proud to have Kristen Schmitt

with us as an annual instructor.

DF – How about the Camp accommodations?

J&J – We have several avenues campers can use, which include bringing their own trailer or tent. Please note there are no hydro or water hookups. Rough camping only. An extremely popular accommodation we provide is Glamping, where the camper can rent a tent from us. It offers a nice space and comes equipped with a bed. There is also nearby Airbnb, as well as hotels and motels.



The property does have heated outdoor showers, along with central washrooms and water locations.

DF – How many campers do you normally have at the Bluegrass Camp?

J&J – We would like to have a maximum of 60 campers. We run seven different classes, so that puts each class at under ten students per class. We have campers from the age of 18 to 80 years old, and the classes run concurrently at various locations throughout the property.

We like to keep the numbers low for the attention of each teacher.

DF – The Meal Plan. Tell us about that.

J&J – Joey is our chef, as he has been in the business as a trained chef for many years. We have both run a catering company. All food is made from scratch, no deep-fried foods here. We have a commercial kitchen across the road, and of course many volunteers to support Joey with this part of the Camp experience. Each day we supply different three course meals and we can accommodate anyone with special dietary needs.

DF – What is the vision of the Camp?

J&J – To have a safe space for everybody to be able to perform. As you know, we can all learn something no matter our own individual level. We pride ourselves on showing beginners that they can play music and interact with a group. To have music instructors and campers together allows folks to share, learn and play up with an improved level of knowledge of music. And most importantly - have fun!

DF – We would like to know more about your own musical history.

Joey: Well I'll tell you briefly about Jenny. She has won two Juno Awards for her solo

recordings and has been nominated for five more. Jenny has come from a long history of family musical endeavors. She had a bluegrass band in Toronto called "*Heartbreak Hill*," and has performed in numerous folk festivals all across Canada, including as the headlined performer at the "*Ottawa Folk Festival*."

Jenny's latest project is the group "*Le Volume*," consisting of Julian Brown, Joey Wright and Jenny. The trio writes in both English and French and is about to release a double album featuring their bi-lingual folk-pop compositions.

Jenny: Well here is a small summary of Joey's history. Joey has also been nominated for the Juno Awards. He is a songwriter, composer, multi-instrumentalist and performer. Joey was a leader of the bluegrass, old time, and traditional country scene in Toronto in the 90's and 2000's. Joey joined Jenny Whiteley's band in 1999, and their first two albums both won Juno Awards for "Best Roots - Traditional Album." With an honors degree in music from Humber College, Joey has over 20 years of

teaching experience, including private and music workshops all over Canada.

DF – Wow! I know there is a lot more to both of your achievements but it looks like we would need to do another article in the future to find out more!

DF – One of the great things you have at the Camp is a Luthier service. Can you expand on that for our readers?

J&J – Yes. We are truly fortunate to have instructors like Ivan Rosenburg and Luke Mercier. Luke brings and sets up his workshop and work bench with a few of his basic tools and can work on any acoustic instrument that comes into the Camp. Luke is also a builder of banjos, dobros and violins - as well as an appraiser of stringed instruments. For more info check out lukemercier.com



DF – Give us the average day's activities at the Camp.

J&J – The coffee pot is always ready at the central meeting / eating location.

We start with breakfast for everyone, then we list on a whiteboard the day's activities. And then we have a group meeting to go over the day's events. We also meet at lunch and dinner times, as communication is something that we are very proud of for everyone at the Camp.

There is instruction for guitar, mandolin, bass, violin, dobro, banjo, and voice on a group and on an individual basis.

We also put campers into a group session each day to allow them to perform as a band and we showcase each group on stage during the final night. We also have jams early evening and of course an option for campers to join in a late-night jam. The instructors also put on a show each night, along with an open mic time slot during the day. So campers get individual, group by instrument and group by bandmate instruction.

DF – Let's do a recap for the events you do at the Old School Bluegrass Camp.

J&J – We put on three camps throughout the year:

Songwriting Camp

Hotel Wolfe Island, ON.
March 22-24, 2024

Old School Bluegrass Camp

Elphin, ON.
July 2-7, 2024

Intensive Bluegrass Camp

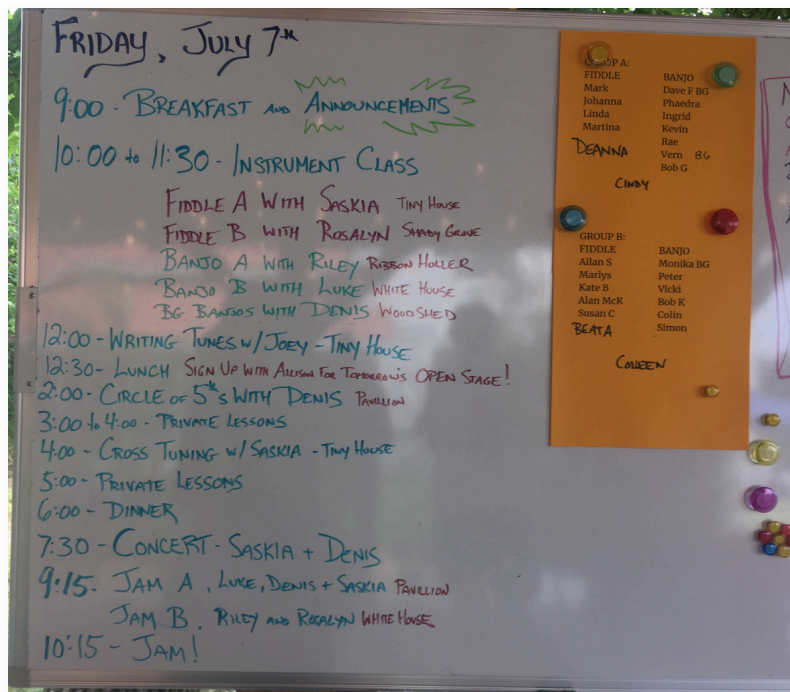
Hotel Wolfe Island, ON.
November - date TBA

We also offer, as well as the camper participant, a companion participant, and or an alumni participant for our events.

DF – As you know I attended your Bluegrass Camp at your country property in Elphin last summer, and I was extremely impressed with the organization, communication, and friendliness of not only the folks working and or volunteering at the Camp, but also with every one of the campers. This is a place, no matter

what your musical experience - from a total beginner, intermediate or advanced player, and especially if you want to begin to learn a new to you instrument - you must attend. Each and everyone is welcome with open arms!

Thank you again for this interview and for keeping up the outstanding work your organization is known for!



For more info go to:

www.oldschoolcamps.com or

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