

Music shines in Milbridge

by Wayne Smith

Friday nights in Milbridge play host to some great shows with music and different varieties of entertainment happening all summer. It's free at the Milbridge Theatre Outdoor Stage, which is located in the middle of town. "The arts are in Milbridge; we don't have to go to Ellsworth," said Jacquie Leighton of Milbridge, as she sat in her chair getting ready for some live music. "If you come to our little town, there's a traffic jam on Friday nights. It took right off last year; every single Friday night was booked. I don't know who it's not going to benefit," she said. She told me that there is a demand for this type of entertainment. The show starts at 6:30 p.m. but the doors and food are open at 5:30 p.m.

Paul Sawyer told me that The Milbridge "Friday Night Live!" Outdoor Theatre is always a good time with good folks and good food. "Come out and enjoy it. For a donation, how can you beat it? One of the best things happening Downeast on a Friday night. I went to it a couple times last year. I kind of knew what the deal was. This is the first one of this year. I guarantee I will be there next week. I think everybody they've got for a lineup this year is excellent. Folks should get out and see it, the place to be on a Friday night," said Sawyer.

Steve Hartley, member of the band The Woodshed Boys, was off to the side of the stage as music pumped softly over the speakers. His band played here last year. "The response from the crowd last year... people really paid attention – focused on the music. Vocals and instruments carried out into the street," he said. "It's a nice stage they got here. This year, I want a good show. Top of our game. Unwind up there, put music out to the public. There's

more energy that goes into a live show, more spontaneous. When you practice, you kind of run through your songs," said Hartley.

Before a show, Hartley gets ready. "I played a little bit in the morning. Get geared up and put it all away. I don't think about it [for a while]. I walk to the beat of the old time music from the 1920s and 1930s carried through today. We are an old-time string band. It's a lot more of the southern style music." Maybe the best part of it for Hartley is going home after the show. He finished, "I go home and drink a beer and pat my dog."

Before the end of the night, twelve-year-old Jacob Dorr from Milbridge danced on stage. "This was awesome," he said. "The crowd was pretty wound up. I was anxious. I was excited. I did this for the first time. It was an interesting sight to see, interesting feeling to feel. I feel like this was complete, and I want to do more." He told me that dance took coordination and balance. People were clapping and cheering the whole time Dorr was dancing.

Dale Canning brought the Dirgo Express Band into Milbridge for a live concert. He spoke about a lot of things. "It's a great little downtown area, really nice. A lot of things happening here – nice to see life in a small town. The community seems to have taken hold of it and made it their own. They tend it. It's a great thing," he said. "Interacting, having a good time; it's all about the people. Stay on the high of the people. If you do that, you know that they are going to be enjoying it. I had an idea what they wanted to hear," he said. "If people get tired of the music, we will turn [the show] into an informal dress practice," Canning said.

Margie Toussaint and her husband Paul made their way up



Jacob Dorr, 12, with the Woodshed Boys Band. Photo by Wayne Smith

into the audience and she spoke. "[The crowd] is very respectful, paying attention, not talking among themselves," she said. "The crowd really listens. I really enjoy the quality of the music. I feel excited when I leave. I want to go to every one of the shows. There was the largest crowd tonight for Cole Creek Band. Everybody was really friendly. Good variety of music. [The band] did a lot of originals. The audience was receptive – even the children liked it," she said.

Toussaint continued to talk about the other events. "The puppets were wonderful [the first week]. I haven't seen a puppet show since I was a little girl," she said. "There was a lot of kids there. It was real cute [to see them]." Toussaint said the show was done with wires, painting, cardboard and coat hangers. She went on and said that the kids liked it and were really excited to see it.

"The puppet show had a great story with it and there was a lobsterman and shark involved," she said. "The puppet show also had a map to go along with it. We didn't have anything in Augusta

that was live like this. There was more going on here in Milbridge. The whole atmosphere is better down here," said Toussaint.

Richard Bondurant, Gateway Milbridge member, mentioned that the "Friday Night Live" events run from June to September on the Milbridge Theatre Outdoor Stage. The shows are put on by Bondurant and the rest of the members of the Gateway Milbridge group. They have shown movies and hosted different types of musical events from dance, to bluegrass, jazz, blues, country, rock and Scottish style music. They also have snacks at these events. "It's family friendly. We try to provide the free entertainment to the public," he said.

He told me that it's a lot of work, but it is also rewarding. "We just want to do something for the community. It's a great town, a great place to live, but we don't have much entertainment for kids and adults," said Bondurant. "Glad to see downtown active again. Last year we were surprised; we didn't know what to expect. [It was] a

pleasant surprise – the turnout to the different shows. A lot of positive feedback. [We are] eager to have more shows this year. A way to give back to the community," he said.

The chairs that filled the lawn two hours ago were being picked up. All the lights on the stage were being slowly shut down. The magic of the music had shone into people's hearts and souls. Memories had been made this night. The stage was emptied of equipment. Blankets swept up into the air. Voices carried into the wind. Smiles gripped the community. The sounds of summer went away for another week.

With a little break for Milbridge Days, you can catch the next shows boasting some Downeast favorites: August 3 (The Machias Ukulele Club) and August 10 (Allison Ames Band) with a children's film showing August 17 (Sherlock Gnomes). Be sure to bring a chair and come to enjoy an evening in Milbridge!

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the downtown area has increased in recent years, sometimes filling riverside parking lots and backing up through storm drains.

"We're looking at a range of measures that would protect downtown... something that would be built along the shore line to protect from certain levels of flooding and also stabilize erosion that's happening right now [in order] to prevent properties from losing parts of their shoreline," said Bannon. The severity of Machias' flood events depend on factors such as rainfall and the phase of the monthly tidal cycle.

In 2017 the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) released new flood zone maps that moved more than two dozen downtown Machias properties into the 100-year floodplain, prompting the town to look for ways to protect itself.

The Machias Waterfront Resilience and Renewal Study is phase one of a three-phase project and is paid for by a Coastal Communities grant awarded to Machias in 2017.

WCCOG Executive Director Judy East said that by the end of phase

one the town will know what flood protection options are available, an economic analysis of those options, and plans for incorporating a river walk which officials hope could separate pedestrians from traffic and revitalize downtown Machias. Another public meeting to present those options and their estimated costs is going to take place in September.

Phase two would focus on securing funding and the appropriate permits, and phase three would be the actual construction. Permitting could take as much as a full year owing to the wetlands and historic preservation factors involved in working in and along the Machias River.

The proposed flood protection could be a seawall or a levy and would likely begin on the west side of the bridge over the Machias River in order to provide protection to the Wastewater Treatment Facility. The potential seawall would likely then begin again on the east side of the bridge and then wrap around the land behind the Machias River Inn, extending up toward Bad Little Falls.

The Maine Department of Transportation is also working on a

project to replace the dike contained within the same Machias Bridge. The two projects are unrelated, though the waterfront committee is in contact with the MDOT so they can coordinate their efforts.

In a 2017 interview, Tora Johnson said the incidences of severe flooding in Machias are only likely to increase. "What used to be known as the 100-year floodplain makes essentially everything on lower main street, across from the town hall and wastewater treatment plant [underwater]," she said. "Also there's vulnerability where Pat's Pizza and Dunkin' Donuts are. That's a big one, because something like that is likely to damage the dike." Johnson is the director of the University of Maine at Machias Geographic Information System (GIS) Service Center & Laboratory.

In that scenario, the floodwater would extend up Main Street, filling the basement of the Machias Hardware Co., and coming to the doorstep of the banks on Center Street.

UMM graduate David Cisneros is working on an economic analysis for the project. "He's taking the



Increased erosion along the waterfront is cause for concern, say experts working on the Machias Waterfront Resilience and Renewal Study. This picture shows deep erosion below the Irving station on Route 1 in Machias. Photo courtesy Baker Design Consultants

locations of buildings in the town that are vulnerable to flood damage and using assessment records for their value, then calculating the amount of damage that each building would incur based on the depth of the flood," said Johnson. "That includes damage to the structure and damage to the contents."

The UMM team is also creating the same analysis for the area's roads and the wastewater treatment

facility's infrastructure. The estimates should help the town make an educated decision on the project's return on investment.

Community members interested in following the progress of the project can find committee meeting agendas, minutes, recent presentations and notice of the upcoming September meeting by visiting wccog.net/machias-resilience.htm.