



WHY WE VOLUNTEER

by Phoebe Leigh-Suelflow, CBA Vice President and Treasurer

If you've never volunteered before, you may wonder, "Why would someone give up 12 or 16 hours at a bluegrass festival to volunteer? Aren't they missing something?" Yes, there are some material things you can get from volunteering—a free festival pass, a colorful T-shirt, or oatmeal-cranberry cookies. Most people do it year after year. When I ask what they liked about the volunteer experience, the results are almost uniformly "community." "My coworkers were great!" "Visiting with new friends!" "I love my bluegrass family!" "I had a great team!"

Reuniting with their "bluegrass family" is a big part of the festival for many volunteers. As one volunteer said, "it's temporarily a special place in the universe." While it's great to hear the Gibson Brothers on stage, an important part of the festival experience is sharing it with our chosen family. We're not observers at the festival—we're part of the festival. And that's as much fun as listening to the main acts on the stage.

They say, "What happens at Father's Day, stays at Father's Day." But our editor, Jason Dilg, asked me nicely, so I'll break the Code of Silence and share some volunteer stories with you.

FIND YOUR CALLING

In 1975 at the age of 15, Ed LaRue needed an Eagle Scout project. He remembered a trout-stocked stream near his home in Roanoke, Virginia, that was featured in Annie Dillard's book, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. It was then choked with trash and garbage. He organized Scouts and started a pick-up campaign with two 50-gallon trash cans, and arranged for the City of Roanoke to pick up the trash on a regular basis. It had long-term effects—when he returned to Tinker Creek in 2024, the area was clean, and the two trash cans were still there.

In 2003, Ed volunteered on the garbage and recycling crew for the Strawberry Music Festival, which he still does. He has since volunteered to clean up at many festivals, including WorldFest Music Festival and Summergrass. He came to the Father's Day Festival for the first time in 2025. On his own, he took up the task of sweeping up litter on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Although he cleaned it up on Friday, Ed counted 428 pieces of litter that he picked up in front of the stage on Saturday morning. He has earned himself a spot on the Father's Day Festival volunteer crew.

cont'd on page 8 →



Good times at the Father's Day Festival merch tent! Photo by Tim Konrad.



DIRECTOR'S WELCOME

PRICELESS

by Pete Ludé, CBA Executive Director

The California Bluegrass Association, like most similar organizations, relies on a team of dedicated volunteers to operate. The passionate commitment and support of these volunteers is our theme for this October issue. This was baked into the organization since its founding, when Carl Pagter, CBA member #1, loved to boast about our "all volunteer" culture. Now 50 years later, CBA has grown to the point where we also rely on contract professionals for some aspects, but it's our wonderful volunteers that continue to be the vital lifeblood of our existence.

I recall hearing a quote that stuck with me, attributed to Sherry Anderson: "Volunteers are unpaid, not because they're worthless, but because they're priceless." As you read this month's issue, you'll see exactly what that means. Volunteers help with virtually every aspect of CBA, including running our many events, managing membership,

cont'd on page 3 →

CBA'S PHOEBE LEIGH-SUELFLOW

by Jason Dilg, Bluegrass Breakdown Managing Editor



Phoebe Leigh-Suelflow. Robin Frenette.

On a hot afternoon at the Father's Day Festival, the real action at Volunteer Central wasn't just the hum of clipboards, radios, and walkie-talkies—it was the freezer full of popsicles. "The thing that was weird about them," recalls Phoebe Leigh-Suelflow with a laugh, "is that I put them in the ice booth cooler and they never froze! I thought for sure they would. Luckily the other freezer worked, so at least some of the popsicles were actually frozen."

It's a small story, but it says something about Phoebe, the CBA's vice president for volunteers: she is endlessly practical, deeply committed, and able to find humor in the unpredictable. Whether she's troubleshooting a 350-person volunteer schedule for Father's Day Festival, recognizing standouts with awards, or making sure the dogs welcoming guests at the gates have water and treats, Phoebe brings equal parts elbow grease, creativity, and joy.

cont'd on page 5 →



VOTE FOR CBA'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS

All current CBA members were sent an email from "Election Buddy" to electronically cast your ballot for the nine CBA board positions. If you prefer to vote by mail, see page 15 for a mail-in ballot form. Voting closes on October 18 at noon. Questions? Call 844-BLU-GRASS or email ballots@californiabluegrass.net.

BLUEGRASS BREAKDOWN

October 2025 – CBA Volunteers

The Bluegrass Breakdown is the monthly publication of the California Bluegrass Association, keeping CBA members and the world of bluegrass up-to-date with coverage of CBA events, musicians, promotions, and volunteer opportunities since April 1975. Each issue is published as both a printed and a digital newsletter and distributed to more than 7,500 readers around the world.

Pete Ludé, CBA Executive Director and Editor in Chief

Jason Dilg, Managing Editor
Gina Dilg, Layout and Art Editor
Susan Bartholomew, Copy Editor

EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTORS

Bert Daniel
Donna Hargis
Ted Kuster
Phoebe Leigh-Sueflflow

PHOTOGRAPHY CONTRIBUTORS

Alan Bond
Patrick Campbell
David Cupp
Ray Edlund
Bob Free
Robin Frenette
Tim Konrad
John Woodworth

Printed in California by
Mailing Systems, Inc.

Contact us for advertising, story ideas,
or other information at
breakdown@californiabluegrass.net

3739 Balboa St. #5090
San Francisco, CA 94121-2605
(844) BLU-GRASS (844-258-4727)

A subscription to the Bluegrass Breakdown
is a benefit of CBA membership.
Visit us online at californiabluegrass.org.

ADVERTISE
IN THE
**BLUEGRASS
BREAKDOWN**

Reserve your ad space today
breakdown@californiabluegrass.net

South State 48 presents

BAY AREA SPECIAL



by the Bluegrass Breakdown

We're excited to share that Bay Area Special is heading south to perform at South State 48 the evening of Saturday, Nov. 8, in the Windmill Food Hall at the Carlsbad-by-the-Sea Hotel! We're thrilled to have one of the hottest up-and-coming bands from Northern California's thriving bluegrass scene!

The group first met in 2024 at CBA's Great 48 Jam in Bakersfield, and shortly after formed Bay Area Special. The original lineup consisted of Ruby Davis (rhythm guitar, lead vocals), Elijah Chen (lead guitar), Phil Cornish (mandolin, vocals), and Ryan Triolo (upright bass, vocals). The group began playing shows around the San Francisco Bay Area and added Danny "Hootenanny" Clark (fiddle, vocals) in June as the band's fifth member.

Built around Ruby's powerful singing and Elijah's intricate rhythm guitar playing, the group has quickly gained attention from bluegrass audiences and promoters across California. They played their first festival last summer at NCBS's Good Old Fashioned Bluegrass Festival. This summer, they performed at their first Father's Day Festival and appeared at several others, including the Cline Country Festival, the Good Old Fashioned Bluegrass Festival, and their first out-of-state event, the Bowers Bluegrass Festival in Nevada.

In July, Bay Area Special released their debut single on all streaming platforms: "I Could Change My Mind," originally written by Earl Taylor and popularized by the Johnson Mountain Boys. With help from producer Jason Keiser, they honored the Johnson Mountain Boys' version while adding their own touch. We're anticipating the release of their debut album this spring!

South State 48, vol. V, happens November 6 to 9 at the Carlsbad by the Sea Hotel in Carlsbad. Remember, you don't have to be a guest of the hotel to enjoy this free jamming event or any of the extras—workshops, open jams, concerts,

contests, and more! There will be a band contest on Friday, Nov. 7, with the winning band opening the show on Saturday night, followed by a performance showcase from Joy Louise and Tyler Grant, and then ... Bay Area Special! 🐾

Scan here for more
event details →



SOUTH STATE 48 VOL. V



November 6-9, 2025
Carlsbad-by-the-Sea Hotel

SOUTHSTATE48.COM

Kathy Barwick

by Jason Dilg, Bluegrass Breakdown Managing Editor

Our California bluegrass community is mourning the loss of guitar, Dobro, bass, mandolin, and banjo player, singer, and celebrated music instructor Kathy Barwick, who died last week after a long bout with cancer. News of her passing on August 20 spread quickly, led by a remembrance from the Northern California Bluegrass Society and an immediate outpouring of tributes from musicians, students, and performers across social media. "There is no way I could explain the impact of Kathy on the Northern California Bluegrass community as her accomplishments are tremendous," John Green of The Fifth String music shop in Sacramento, who studied banjo with Kathy, wrote on Facebook.

Kathy's musical life spanned bluegrass, old-time, Americana, and traditional Irish music, but her playing was always in service: to songs, to bands, and to the people she encouraged. A Sacramento native who made her home in Grass Valley, she was celebrated for rare versatility and deep taste—equally at ease driving a band with crisp flatpicking, weaving counter-melodies on resonophonic guitar, anchoring on bass, or dropping banjo color in just the right spot. Profiles in *Bluegrass Today*—and these pages, back in 2019—captured that breadth, noting both her multi-instrumental fluency and her standing as one of California's most adaptable acoustic musicians.

She first drew wide attention as a founding member of the All Girl Boys, then continued to turn heads with Nine-8ths Irish and the Mike



(L-R) Keith Little, Vern Williams, and Kathy Barwick. CBA file photo.

Justis Band, and in a long-running duo with the late mandolinist Pete Siegfried that showcased her economy, tone, and ensemble sense. Those projects exposed different facets of the same core musician: one who could make a room lean in without ever making the music about herself.

Teaching was the other throughline in Kathy's musical life. She taught thousands—privately, in group settings, and at music camps—in California and far beyond. She led classes at our Summer Music Camp, the American River Acoustic Music Camp, Puget Sound Guitar Workshop, and more, and she shared music theory concepts in the pages of *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine*, where her instructional column became a touchstone for players developing crosspicking and melody-driven breaks. Her legacy as an instructor is obvious; many of the first tributes came from former students who credit her with unlocking repertoire, right-hand technique, and stage confidence. "Kathy and I met at the 5th String when she was a Jedi master and I was a young punk who basically changed strings. She always gave me her time. She was welcoming and treated me well," remembered Ross Hammond. "The last time I saw her before she moved to Grass Valley she came to one of my gigs and said she was gonna steal some of my licks. As if she needed to steal anything. Kathy was a pro," he continued. "She's a historic figure in the California folk and bluegrass scenes. Her group the All-Girl Boys is folk royalty. It does make me glad that she was able to retire and play her guitars by her kitchen table."

What set Kathy apart wasn't just chops; it was judgment. She was a deep listener and sensitive arranger. Reviews of her solo recording *In My Life* praised her artful lines and impeccable timing that elevated the material without flash. In band settings, she brought that same restraint, knitting parts together and leaving space for others. It's no surprise that her peers' memorial posts highlight her generosity more than her speed.



Kathy Barwick. Photo courtesy of Ray Edlund.

Within the CBA world, Kathy's presence was steady and constructive—on stages, in workshops, and in countless after-hours jams where she modeled inclusion as a musical practice. Younger pickers found a patient mentor; seasoned pros found a trusted collaborator. Even in her later years, as her performance calendar narrowed, she remained a musical resource and encourager. "She plugged me in with a vast musical network and my guitar and mandolin playing were refined just by being around her. She supported my family through hard times and never made a fuss about it," wrote Tom Shewmake. "Her words of encouragement to me as a person and musician were so kind and inspiring."

The measure of a musician's life is what keeps ringing after the last note. In the weeks ahead, we'll keep hearing Kathy's influence: in the clean crosspicked figures students carry forward, in the tasteful backup parts that now feel like the "right" way to do it, and in the friendships she brokered by simply saying, "Pull up a chair—let's play." 🐻

WELCOME MESSAGE

cont'd from front page

communicating through our website and other outreach, operating year-long programs and overseeing operations, finances schedules, and contracts. We don't have exact numbers, but a back of the envelope calculation shows that well over 12,000 hours per year are committed from more than 300 volunteers. We're very fortunate to have Phoebe Leigh-Suelflow as our VP of volunteers to recruit, organize, motivate, and acknowledge all this hard work. You'll learn more about her in the profile starting on page 1.

You'll also find a report on the recent Golden Old-Time Campout, and information about our upcoming events: the Fall Campout in mid-October, South State 48 in November, and the Great 48 Jam in January. As it happens—we have volunteer slots available for all these fun get-togethers. So please consider signing up to join the fun.

If you haven't yet cast your vote for the CBA board of directors, you'll find a mail-in ballot on page 15. Send it right away, so we have it in time for the election on October 18. You can also enter for a chance to win one of our amazing sweepstakes instruments—that drawing is also coming up on October 18, and you can be a lucky winner.

As you'll discover from this month's issue, a key motivation for CBA volunteers is that they become part of our friendly, close-knit community, while really making an impact in improving people's lives through music. Winston Churchill said it best: "You make a living by what you get. You make a life by what you give." 🐻





FUNDRAISING SWEEPSTAKES



DEERING WHITE LOTUS BANJO

The bluegrass-inspired White Lotus banjo, named for its lotus flower inspired inlay pattern, is centered around the patented white oak rim. Notably lacking a traditional tone ring, the natural white oak rim closely recreates a bright bluegrass punch. Other features include a white oak neck and resonator accented with white binding, an ebony fingerboard and peghead overlay, the Eagle Series style flange, and Deering's comfortable neck shape.



FIDDLE MERCANTILE THE ARTIST MODEL

Music City Fiddles is the instrument line for The Violin Shop, The Fiddle Mercantile's sister shop in Nashville, Tenn. These instruments are hand-selected, set up, and adjusted in the Nashville workshop by our esteemed luthiers to meet our high standards. Many players, beginner to professional, choose these as their primary instrument. The Artist is the highest tier in the Music City Fiddles line.



SANTA CRUZ GUITAR COMPANY D PRE-WAR MODEL

The Pre-War design package emphasizes master-grade materials, tone and workmanship. Featuring Indian rosewood sides and back with Sitka spruce top, solid square headstock and a V-neck with volute. Under the hood, the Pre-War design package honors its predecessors with an advanced X and scalloped top-bracing. It has powerful volume, overtones and rich presence. Expect the predominant bass and throaty sound of the surviving pre-WWII antiques.

LEARN MORE AND ENTER TO WIN



VISIT CALIFORNIABLUEGRASS.ORG/SWEEPSTAKES
SWEEPSTAKES DRAWING OCTOBER 18, 2025 AT 4 PM

*NO PURCHASE NECESSARY TO ENTER OR WIN

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

DEERING
The Great American Banjo Company

Santa Cruz
GUITAR COMPANY

THE FIDDLE MERCANTILE
SAN FRANCISCO, CA

PHOEBE LEIGH-SUELFLOW

cont'd from front page

Phoebe didn't start out in bluegrass—or even in the music world. She spent her career as a tax attorney and accountant, managing teams and filing what she jokes were “probably thousands, if not millions, of tax returns.” Those skills became invaluable when she stepped into CBA leadership, serving not only as the association's VP for volunteers, but as our treasurer, as well.

“There's no way you would have a volunteer do all of that,” she says firmly about the organization's financial oversight. “We've always had professional accounting and tax folks, and it will stay that way. I used to do that for a living, and there's just no way you can ask a volunteer to put in that kind of time.” Phoebe's professional eye for detail gives her a unique perspective on the necessary balance between paid and volunteer work within CBA, but never loses sight of the fact that CBA's culture, and success, was built on volunteerism.

“All of us are volunteers,” she says. “That's what makes the CBA special.”

Remarkably, Phoebe didn't hear bluegrass until midlife. Her first real memory of the music came while walking down Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley as a student: music drifted out of a record shop, drawing her inside. She bought the album on the spot—it turned out to be Seatrain, with Richard Greene on fiddle and Peter Rowan in the lineup. “I thought it was fabulous,” she recalls, “but I didn't even know what bluegrass was.”

It wasn't until decades later, after she and her husband, Gary Suelflow, retired, that the sound came back into her life. “I had an old fiddle lying around, and I decided I was going to learn it again,” she says. She hated classical lessons as a child, and was surprised to discover how much she remembered 50 years later.

Then, one day, she spotted a flyer: “Bluegrass for beginners. Saturday at the Dog Park.” She showed up, fiddle in hand. “The rest is history,” she said.

At the Dog Park Jam she met now fellow CBA board member Robin Frenette, and the two began writing down songs, looking up chords, and learning to jam together. Soon they were road-tripping to festivals—Huck Finn, Summergrass—and Phoebe and Gary even bought a new car just to haul their festival gear. “We were hooked,” Phoebe says. “And then we discovered the CBA.”

Phoebe manages the CBA's vast volunteer operation, with hundreds of people filling dozens of roles at the Father's Day Festival alone. The challenge, she says, isn't so much people flaking out. “In general, people are very good about showing up. We get a lot of the same volunteers year after year, which speaks volumes about the culture here.” It's an enormous logistical puzzle: scheduling, cancellations, late-night gate shifts nobody wants. “They say it's like herding cats,” Phoebe quips. “But I've actually seen cats herded. The hardest part is really scheduling.”

Some jobs are easier to fill than others. “Nobody wants to work the late-night gates,” she admits. “So we get creative—offering meal tickets, encouraging people to bring their dogs, even making it a jam when we can. Turning a boring job into a fun one is what we're about.” She doesn't do it alone. “I've got two really good schedulers helping me,” she explains. “One is Tess Deery, who manages Volunteer Central, and the other is my husband, Gary. He's a structural engineer and a programming whiz—he's created all sorts of strange software solutions for us. Between the two of them, they're brilliant.”

Phoebe is quick to share credit for the inspiring work the volunteer crew accomplishes at every event. “Deb Livermore single-handedly ran the festival as recently as 2022—she's amazing. Teresa Gooding has boundless energy, and she's done incredible work with the finance committee. Darby [Brandli] has been great with kids' programs. Lani [Way] runs merchandise, Robin [Frenette] keeps all our stuff on the internet running. I could name 20 more.”



Helping with concert setup at a Shutt's Fabricators concert. Photo by Robin Frenette.

That generosity of spirit, she believes, is what sets the CBA apart. “People are really willing to give their time, step back if they don't know something, and ask for help.”

If Phoebe has a soft spot, it's for the next generation. Bluegrass, she points out, is uniquely intergenerational. “You can be jamming with a 15-year-old and a 90-year-old, and nobody cares about age. We're all just having fun together. That's something you don't see anywhere else.”

“We had a group of teenagers helping out at KidFest this year, and they had a blast,” she continued. “They were earning tickets to the festival, hanging out with peers, doing fun projects like tie-dye shirts. We want more of that. Because let's face it—we're all getting older. We need the energy these kids bring.”

Dogs, too, are part of the equation. From Rich Lierly's little dog BB riding in the Bluegrass Taxi, to John Drake's seeing-eye dog Jersey—“our Dog Park Jam mascot,” she says—canines are woven into the volunteer fabric. “We

cont'd on page 6 →



Phoebe lending her fiddle to the Great 48 Jam. Photo by Robin Frenette.



Rocking the CBA merch tent at South State 48. Photo by Robin Frenette.

always keep water and treats at Volunteer Central. Some people won't volunteer without their dogs, and that's fine. Just pick a crew that allows dogs!"

And of course, there are the popsicles. "Next year I hope they'll all actually be frozen," she laughs.

Asked what she would say to someone on the fence about volunteering, Phoebe thinks for a moment. "It depends on why they're hesitant. We have jobs for everyone—people who aren't mobile, people with different abilities. You don't have to be an electrician to join the power crew; sometimes we just need people to plug things in. Everyone has a skill we can use."

More than that, she says, volunteering transforms the festival experience. "When you put on a festival, you become an insider. You're helping make the magic happen. You meet wonderful people, and you feel like you've done something important."

Some folks even find their favorite part of the festival is their assignment. "There are people who love driving the Bluegrass Taxi—that's the highlight for them. It's different for everyone, but it's always rewarding."

Living in Los Angeles, Phoebe doesn't always make it to events in the northern part of the state, but points out there's plenty of bluegrass around L.A. to keep her happy. "You just have to look for it," she insists. She even launched a website, LAbuegrass.com, to help people find jams and concerts.

She rattles off names: David Bragger, Clinton Davis, Chris Hillman, the Squirrel Barkers,



Keeping the masses fed last year at the SS48 hot dog and hot tub party. Photo by Robin Frenette.

Nickel Creek, Dennis Kaplinger. "There's a lot of history here. People forget Stuart Duncan grew up here, and Byron Berline, and Tony Rice spent time here. You just have to peel it back, and you'll see it's always been here."

Her pride in the local scene extends to events like South State 48, the southern counterpart to the Great 48 Jam in Bakersfield. "In some ways it's even more fun—it's all outdoors. We're trying to build that tradition."

And, like all music organizations, the CBA faces headwinds. "All of us are feeling the pinch right now," Phoebe says. "Sponsorships are down, grants are down. Festivals are closing. We need to be prepared."

She worries about beloved small festivals across the state, where rising costs and, increasingly, competing events put pressure on organizers. "I love a good small festival. Simple, focused on jamming and good smaller bands. I don't want to see anything happen to them, but it's a tough time."

Still, she remains optimistic about CBA's resilience. "We've got able helpers who can step in. I won't be doing this forever, but I'll be involved as long as I can."

For all the spreadsheets, schedules, and stress, Phoebe's motivation is simple: she loves seeing people enjoy themselves. "It's a dumb phrase," she says with a shrug, "but I enjoy seeing people happy."

That might mean a teenager discovering their first jam, a volunteer driving the Bluegrass Taxi with a grin, or a roomful of hard workers cooling off with popsicles.

"Bluegrass is about community," she says. "And the CBA really is a community. That's what keeps me going." 🐾

Check out LAbuegrass.com for L.A. area jams, concerts, dances, festivals and more!



Phoebe Leigh-Suelflow and Deb Livermore on the scene. Photo by Patrick Campbell.

Walker Creek MUSIC CAMP

*In the rolling hills north of San Francisco
Camping - Lodging
Delicious Meals
All ages welcome!*

Bluegrass - Old Time - Bass - Ukulele - Singers - Dancers

Thursday Oct. 23rd - Sunday Oct. 26th Register NOW!

Fall 2025 Instructors

Banjo: Greg Cahill & Molly Tenenbaum – **Bass:** Dan Eubanks
Dobro: Ivan Rosenberg – **Fiddle:** Annie Staninec & Greg Canote
Guitar: Joy Louise, Nina Gerber, Jere Canote & John Kael
Mandolin: Brian McCarty & Maddie Witter – **OT Band Ensemble:** Karen Celia Heil
Taking Breaks in Jams (ensemble): Ryan Harlin
Vocals: Greg Blake & Michaela Mae
Music & More: (kids ages 6-13) Krishna Feeney

(707) 579-1429





Cozy jam in the campground.



Keeping up the campsite aesthetics.

SCENES FROM THE GOLDEN OLD TIME CAMPOUT

Photos by Alan Bond

The 2025 GOTCO was another roaring success! Old-time enthusiasts young and old gathered for three days and nights to enjoy fellowship, food, and tunes in the beautiful Camp Russian River! The camp's grassy sites under huge, beautiful trees make this event feel like a real get-away, even though it's an easy stroll into town for supplies. Make plans to join us next year; check the CBA website for 2026 dates! We can't wait!



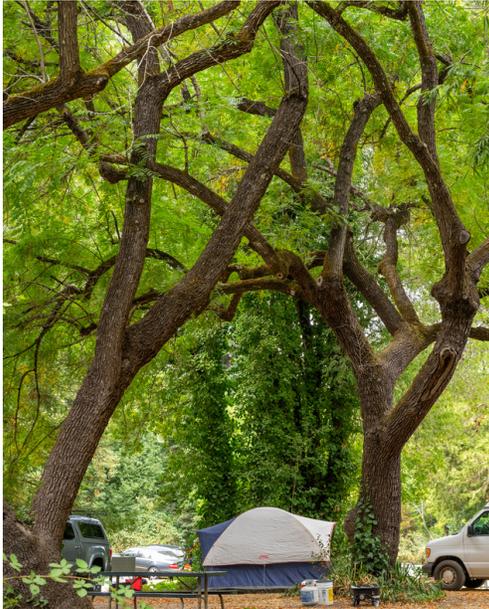
Music with friends is the best!



Mandolin and fiddle player in the moment.



Fiddle tunes rang all weekend in the campground.



Great camping spots under the shade trees!



Is that an Earl Scruggs biography shirt?



Rocking the GOTCO hat.



Fiddling for three days and nights? Priceless.



And who said manning the welcome table would be boring?

VOLUNTEERS

cont'd from front page

Ed doesn't just pick up trash at festivals. He has been a tortoise biologist on a parcel in the Mojave Desert since 1989. In March 2025, he and four other biologists picked up 320 pounds of litter from that square-mile parcel!

If trash collection isn't your bag, let us know what your superpower is! Jeremiah Johnston is a volunteer juggler. Bill Harmer greets festival-goers with hot coffee next to the Father's Day Festival information booth. We've had dog-sitters and airport picker-uppers. This year we had a team of teenagers volunteering at the FDF KidFest. Pacific Gas & Electric employees, under current coordinator Joann Drummond, have been volunteering at the festival for decades.

A RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE?

Some years ago we had a first aid booth at the festival headed by Eric Burman. The majority of cases he saw were from dehydration or people walking into rear-view mirrors while traversing the campgrounds at night. But Eric is reminded of a very different case. "Of all my 40 years of working critical care nursing, I have never had a case like this one. Sitting in my first aid tent on a Saturday afternoon, I was alerted by a woman to a man with a head injury. When he arrived, he stated that he had been hit on the head by Jesus. The man did indeed have a large lump on the top of his head, which we treated



These pages would be bland without CBA's volunteer photographers, including Patrick Campbell (l) and David Cupp (r). Photo by Robin Frenette.



Debbie Wendt (l) and Theresa Gooding (r) at Great 48. Photo by David Cupp.

by putting a glove filled with ice on it. I asked him where Jesus had come from. His wife repeated impatiently, "He has been hit on the head, by Jesus!" I couldn't believe the Lord had come out of the sky just to hit him in the head. So I told the man that he should take this as a sign and change his ways. Then I asked him to tell me where he was before he was assaulted. He said that he was up in the vendor area, admiring an object for sale. When he stepped backward, he fell against a shelf with stuff on it. It tipped over and a statue of Jesus fell off a top shelf, landing on his head—which now had a growing hematoma, soon to turn purple. We checked him for a concussion, and he passed all the tests. I gave him another bag of ice. And he and his wife left, laughing with us as they said goodbye.

TWELVE GATES TO THE CITY WELL, SIX TO THE FESTIVAL

Darby Brandli, a 2016 CBA lifetime member award recipient, remembers, "My favorite job ... was to organize a "welcome committee" assigned to welcome people into the festival. People loved being welcomed to the fairgrounds." The front gate crews are usually the first people to greet festival-goers. Cars

line up before the gates open and things can get a little restless sometimes, especially when the wife goes down and they can't look up tickets. That's when the "happiness crew" takes over. At least that's what one gate crew calls itself. Their mission is to give out presents—festival programs, stickers and wristbands—and move the festivarians along to the next step, setting up camp.

STARTING A TRADITION

Melanie Biesecker was at Gate 4, where campers pull in for FDF, when she saw a man standing beside his car waiting for the ticket booth to open. Since it was Father's Day weekend, she thought it would be appropriate to ask him whether he knew any dad jokes. Unaware that she had asked a professional dad joke comedian, in no time at all he had rattled off 20 dad and instrument jokes. In fact, he even gave the crew a list of jokes for their own use. After that, they asked every car that stopped if they wanted to trade dad or banjo jokes. If the carload didn't have one to tell, they got one from the gate crew. Here is one from Kyla Kent: why does a golfer wear two pairs of pants? In case they get a hole-in-one. And thus, a Father's Day Festival tradition was born: The Gate 4 Dad Joke Swap.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Sam Saxe-Taller was a first-time volunteer. He showed up to his gate shift with a guitar, banjo, and an expectation of boredom. He wasn't feeling ecstatic at the prospect of entertaining himself alone for four hours watching a gate with minimal foot traffic while his friends listened to their favorite bands at the fairgrounds.

He practiced by himself for the first 45 minutes, but caught a lucky break when a man walked out of the gate with a banjo case on his back. Sam flagged him down and invited him to jam. The man sat down, apologetically saying that he hadn't played in a jam all weekend because he was shy and worried that people would find him a bother. As he pulled out his banjo, he said that he had just started playing again after over a decade and felt quite rusty. Sam found that he had nothing to worry about—when they started playing, he played quite well and held his own. Pretty soon a mandolin player walked by and joined them. The rest of Sam's shift flew by, jamming with a rotating cast of passers-by. Sam was surprised: "What had started as a chore turned out to be one of my favorite memories of my first bluegrass festival."

RISING TO THE OCCASION

While he didn't solve world hunger, he did keep the Music Camp from starving! Jason Dilg hadn't intended to become a volunteer at the festival this year. Coming out early from Virginia for the Summer Music Camp, he let Camp Director Adam Roszkiewicz know that he could help put out fires if needed. Sure enough, a couple of hours into the first morning, Adam approached



The volunteer catering crew at Father's Day Festival. Photo by John Woodworth.



A young volunteer helps out at the FDF Kids Zone. Photo by Bob Free.

with a concerned look on his face and said, "We need to make sure the caterers have propane. There used to be someone from the fairgrounds who took care of it, but they're not around. That's all I know. I need you to figure it out." Jason checked in with Steven Shabry at the Blue Sun Café, who told him the same thing. He also said that he would run out of propane before long. No food for the music camp. No pressure.

Jason got to work. There is a big propane tank on the fairgrounds that sells gas to campers, but the office next to it was empty. Not knowing who to contact, he thought of Dave Gooding and his long involvement with the festival. Dave might know! Jason found him and asked who could help him get something done at the fairground. Dave said, "Find someone working on a flowerbed."

This mysterious clue turned out to be quite literal. As Jason drove a golf cart through Gate 5, he spied a couple of guys, indeed, working on a flower bed. Soon he had a name and phone number to call. When he called the fairgrounds, he learned that they did have a staff member to check on propane supplies, but they were gone and hadn't been replaced.

"So, I became that person," said Jason. "Every day during the camp and then into the festival I'd swing by Blue Sun on a golf cart, pick up their empty propane tanks, meet the maintenance man at the propane station, get the tanks refilled, pay, and deliver the tanks back to Blue Sun. I rather enjoyed it. It became a little Zen routine for me each day. Steven was so grateful that he fed us for much of the festival. Which was pretty great, because the chicken taco salad plate is my favorite dish!"

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE HUMAN TO VOLUNTEER

Some crews welcome canine companions, as well, so you will see a few well-known nonhuman volunteers at the festival. While the dogs don't earn T-shirts and festival tickets, we do keep dog treats at Volunteer Central for when they stop by and bark, "Hi!"

You can find Jersey Drake, a black lab, trained guide dog, and ultramellow snooze connoisseur at the information booth. Jersey's primary job is to help fellow-volunteer John Drake navigate the fairgrounds, but he is also the mascot and welcome



BB and Rich Lierly driving the Bluegrass Taxi. Photo by David Cupp.

committee for the Long Beach Dog Park bluegrass jam.

Screch Russinski has a post at Gate 5. Screch helps Great 48 organizer Jeff Russinski guard the gates to make sure no varmints sneak in. We haven't seen any varmints listening to bands, so as far as we know, he's been very successful.

And you know how dogs love to ride! BB Lierly rides along with Rich Lierly, who heads the Bluegrass Taxi crew. Rich keeps duck jerky at Volunteer Central for BB, although it was accidentally poached by a hungry human. We won't say who ...

Opportunities to contribute abound throughout the CBA, not just at our events! All board members, as well as the board president, are volunteers. Our six major board committees are chaired by and composed of volunteers. Regional directors are volunteers. Volunteers help produce this newsletter; volunteers run our various youth programs, which have been replicated across the country. The vast majority of the energy that sustains this amazing organization—the largest bluegrass membership organization in the world—comes from volunteers.

YEAR-ROUND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Debbie Wendt, our membership chair, put her hard-won skills to work with the CBA. "I had some skills with databases and list management and saw the CBA needed someone to manage membership. That sure kept me busy my first year of retirement as we rolled out our new membership management system! My skills were gained during 30+ years in administrative work but were often overlooked while I was employed. Not so, as a volunteer with the CBA! The CBA team is SO appreciative as are most of the members I interact with, which has made this work a real pleasure." Debbie is now sending out our email blasts in addition to her membership and Great 48 activities.

Like spiders, volunteers frequently ensnare others—especially unsuspecting family members—in the fun. Theresa Gooding is one such

cont'd on page 10 →



The rush of being the volunteer who opens the gate for the first folks at the festival at 7 a.m.! Photo by Alan Bond.



Managing the merch tent. Photo by Tim Konrad.

VOLUNTEERS

cont'd from page 9

ensnared family member. As she describes it, "My husband, Dave, and I first attended the Father's Day Festival in 1995, and our children have been coming since they were born—growing up in the CBA's incredible youth programs. In the early years, I spent most of my time under the tall pines, enjoying the music while keeping an eye on my young boys. Dave had been playing in bands and volunteering with the CBA for years, but what finally pushed me forward was Darby Brandli's strong encouragement—more like a shove! With my kids no longer little, she suggested that I help Jim Ingram, CBA's entertainment coordinator, as backstage manager. She was right. It helped Jim, and I gained a backstage 'family' that has become one of the greatest joys of my life. It may sound a little goofy, but it's absolutely true."

"Over time, I've taken on larger roles, but that's the beauty of volunteering—it meets you where you are, and it always gives back ten-fold. Whether you volunteer once a

year at the festival or contribute year-round to the CBA, you will have fun—and you'll find yourself part of a community that spans generations and brings together a rich variety of experiences. There's nothing like it!"

"Today I continue to serve as backstage manager for the Father's Day Festival, as well as CBA president and chair of the finance committee. Along the way, I've made the kind of friends who have become true family—people I never would have met without volunteering. Sometimes all it takes is a nudge. If you'd like a nudge, please reach out. You won't regret it—because volunteering always gives back more than you expect."

Many couples, and even whole families, volunteer at the festival, including Connie and Doug Jamieson, who head the catering team.

Now you know all the inside stories. You can join the bluegrass family, too. It's easy! 🐻



WAYS TO JUMP IN AND VOLUNTEER WITH CBA

Help at Father's Day Festival 2026. Scan the code, fill out the registration form and you're ready for 2026!



Join our CBA Volunteers Facebook group!



Get started early by signing up for a shift or two at South State 48. Scan to sign up!



At our next Father's Day Festival in Grass Valley, visit the big board at the information booth, where you'll see pictures of the CBA officers, board members and festival team leaders. Then find one of them, give them a big hug and a thank you!

Join in the fun and volunteer at the Great 48 Jam in Bakersfield in January!



If you're not sure yet, but want more information, get on our volunteer mailing list. Just send us a message at volunteers@californiabluegrass.net. You'll get our monthly newsletter and get the occasional pester about volunteering. It's good for you.

Top: High five with CBA's mascot G-Run. Photo by Robin Frenette.

NOVEMBER 7th-9th 2025 + BERKELEY, CA

★ ★ ★ ★ ★			
	DARE to be		
SQUARE WEST			
SUE HULSEHER	Learn to call, play for, and dance traditional old time dances	ECHO MOUNTAIN	
TONY MATES	Friday at The Starry Plough Pub Saturday & Sunday at Ashkenaz	STUMPTOWN STRINGBAND	
		★ ★ ★ ★ ★	
★ DARETOBESQUAREWEST.COM ★			



The Jimmy Touzel Bluegrass Explosion. Photo by Alan Bond.

VERN'S STAGE IS CALLING, APPLY NOW!

Bluegrass and old-time bands are encouraged to apply for a 35-45 minute concert set on Vern's Stage at Father's Day Festival in 2026. Bands are no longer required to be based in California to be considered!

BAND SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

To be considered, bands must play bluegrass or old-time music; have significant experience gigging together; and have not played Vern's Stage in the last two years (with exceptions for majority youth bands).

Bands must submit a recently-recorded audition reel with three selections representative of the music your band would play on Vern's Stage. The video must include the same members as those who would play at the festival. See web page for further details.

In addition, bands will submit a hi-res band photo, short band bio, dates and locations of most recent gigs, and times the band would be available during the festival.

SCAN TO LEARN MORE AND APPLY →



A History of CBA's Volunteer Awards

From the beginning, CBA was built by volunteers. From filing association's articles of incorporation in 1974, to finding the site of the first CBA festival, and on into today, it is volunteers who make CBA what it is today. "It is our volunteers who have built CBA into the largest and most innovative bluegrass organizations in the U.S.," CBA Cofounder and Member Number One Carl Pagter said to President Emerita Darby Brandli for our 2020 annual report. The CBA has several awards it gives out regularly to celebrate volunteer contributions.

The Bill and Faye Downs Super Volunteer Award was first awarded in 2000 to recognize the extraordinary volunteerism of the award's namesake. Since 2012 it has been awarded each year to acknowledge the efforts of those members of the CBA who have made an extraordinary contribution as volunteers over an extended period of time to our organization.

Bill & Faye Downs Super Volunteer Award

- 2025 Larry Phegley and Mikki Feeney
- 2024 Stan Allen and Russ Loop
- 2023 Mark Shutts and Patty Thorpe
- 2022 John and Loretta Hettinger, and Jennifer Kitchen
- 2021 Alberto Campos, Alex Cameron, Colleen Hogan, Deb Livermore, and PJ Thorpe
- 2020 Jill Cruvey and Lynn Quinones
- 2019 David Brace and Larry Carlin
- 2018 Bob Brown, Jim Ingram, and Mike McGar
- 2017 John Adams, Charlene Sims, and Slim Sims
- 2016 Steven de Haas and Gary Mansperger
- 2015 Paul Brewer, Loland Ellis, and Les Massman
- 2014 Pat Bockover, Tom Bockover, and Deb Livermore
- 2013 Bob McCoy, Dorothy McCoy, Don Pemberton, and Judy Pemberton
- 2012 Steve Hogle
- 2000 Faye Downs and Bill Downs

Volunteer of the Year Award

The Volunteer of the Year Award was first awarded in 2022 to recognize a volunteer who has made a strong contribution over the past year. One award is given each year to volunteers who have made a unique or especially impactful contribution to the organization, contributed special skills to a timely situation, created an ongoing project or upgraded an existing program or event, added a spark that inspired or expanded community involvement, and exceeded the expected volunteer role.

- 2025 Jeff Russinsky
- 2024 Donna Hargis
- 2023 Debbie Wendt
- 2022 Danny "Hootenanny" Clark



(L-R) Danny Clark, Debbie Wendt, Donna Hargis, and Jeff Russinsky. Photo by David Cupp.



New!

FDF Volunteer All-Star Award

This year, the CBA board created a new award, the **Father's Day Festival Volunteer All-Star Award**, which is given to festival volunteers who have gone above and beyond. This year CBA recognized four volunteer all-stars for their outstanding service. All-stars are nominated by the team leaders and nominees are considered by a selection committee. Up to four volunteers are awarded the prize, which includes a certificate, pins, and a gift certificate for CBA gear. Congratulations to our four 2025 winners!



SALLY ESSER

Sally Esser is a pro at the CBA's merchandise booth. "She provided continuity, drawing on her experience from previous seasons. She made great suggestions and donated more time than required. She was sharp with the payment software, and stuck up for her fellow worker's needs. She's a great conversationalist and helped to make the booth a friendly place to be. She is a pleasure to have as a coworker," said Jonathan Grenier, the festival merchandise coordinator.



TESS DEERY

Tess Deery was outstanding as the Volunteer Central office manager. "She took ownership of Volunteer Central and made sure that volunteers were trained. Not only did she schedule volunteers, convince them to sign up for extra shifts, run the office efficiently and put in eight hours a day, but she also looked out for the safety of others. She was always cheerful, fun to work with, and made everyone feel welcome," said Phoebe Leigh-Suelflow of her experience working with Tess at Volunteer Central this year.



KAREN LONCZAK

Connie Jamieson, the FDF catering team leader, said her standout volunteer this year was Karen Lonczak. "She was consistently present, showing up almost every day of the festival. Karen was absolutely instrumental in ensuring all the food got out on time, managing the preparation of frozen foods, fresh foods, and salads. She always had a solution for how we could maintain our schedule and ensure everything was ready when needed," Connie said. Beyond her practical skills, Karen went out of her way to make all the volunteers feel included and was incredibly helpful in teaching the kitchen flow and routine. Her giving and caring attitude made her a pleasure to work with, and she always appreciated being acknowledged for her effort. "There's no way I could have managed all the food preparation without her dedication and hard work, along with several other deserving volunteers," Connie said.



BOB GISLER

Bob Gisler attended the 2025 Summer Music Camp and the Father's Day Festival right afterward. Kathleen Rushing, the KidsFest leader, said the kids loved him: "He sang, he helped, he added humor and joy and his new best friend was little Rory, who is 3 years old," Kathleen said. "He added so much to our program." Bob spent hours removing dangerous obstacles such as pine cones, weeds, and pine needles from the KidsFest corral. Bob brought puppets, and pulled out all the stops to entertain the kids. He also put in at least two shifts a day, totalling 24 hours of service. When he wasn't at Kidfest, he could be found at one of the gates, practicing his instrument.





THE DARK SIDE OF BLUEGRASS



by Jason Dilg, Bluegrass Breakdown Managing Editor

For every foot-stomping hoedown or joyous gospel quartet in our dear bluegrass music, there is a long shadow cast by songs of woe and fear, and by tales of murder, betrayal, and mysterious things that glow in the night. Some of these accounts, either musical or historical, are backed up by court records and newspaper reports. Others come to us through the folk process: stories of Appalachian boogymen, ghost lights, and superstitions passed through generations of pickers. Some are unbelievable; others hit a little too close to home. Together, this is the dark side of bluegrass.

Our fascination with the macabre didn't begin with horror films or murder mystery podcasts. Long before listeners dissected unsolved murders or documentaries retold chilling crimes, we were already singing songs like "Omie Wise" and "Poor Ellen Smith"—stories of misfortune, violence, and retribution set to hauntingly sweet melodies. In fact, we can think of the murder ballad as oral journalism set to music. This tradition goes back as far as the 1500s in Europe, where single sheets—known as broadsides—were printed on one side with early journalistic endeavors, moral advice, ballad lyrics, and often illustrated with rough woodcut images.

Omie, or Naomi, as she's often remembered, was the subject of such a song as the victim of a murderous drowning in 1808. It is said she was an orphan taken in by the Adams family of Randolph County, North Carolina. The son of a prominent family in the area became enamored with Omie Wise, and they quickly became lovers. However, his family advised the young man to pursue a different woman, a particular one from a nearby family of higher stature. Betty Smith sang in 1975 on *Songs Traditionally Sung in North Carolina*:



Illustration inspired by the story of the Greenbrier Ghost, by Gina Dilg.

Omie Wise

Traditional, as sung by Betty Smith on *Songs Traditionally Sung in North Carolina*, 1975

I'll tell you a story about Omie Wise,
How she was deluded by John Lewis's lies.
He promised to marry her at Adams's spring;
He'd give her some money and other fine things.
He gave her no money, but flattered the case.
Says, "We will get married; there'll be no disgrace."
She got up behind him; away they did go,
They rode till they came where the Deep River flowed.
"Now Omie, little Omie, I'll tell you my mind:
My mind is to drown you and leave you behind."
"Oh, pity your poor infant and spare me my life!
Let me go rejected and not be your wife."
"No pity, no pity," the monster did cry.
"On Deep River's bottom your body will lie."
The wretch he did choke her as we understand;
He threw her in the river below the mill dam.
Now Omie is missing as we all do know,
And down to the river a-hunting we 'll go.
Two little boys were fishing just at the break of dawn;
They spied poor Omie's body come floating along.
They arrested John Lewis; they arrested him today.
They buried little Omie down in the cold clay.
"Go hang me or kill me, for I am the man
Who murdered poor Naomi below the mill-dam."

It's a familiar refrain, so to speak: a crazed, toxic male ghoul lures a helpless maiden to the river to meet her demise at his hand. It's the theme also behind "Banks of the Ohio" and "Knoxville Girl." Murder ballads are sometimes told in the voice of the assailant, as in "Long Black Veil" and "Down in the Willow Garden."

Leave it to California songwriters to flip this old formula on its head. Molly Tuttle and Melody Walker imagined a would-be murderer in this vein, whose ambush of a young woman bathing in the river doesn't go as he perhaps expected.



The River Knows

Written by Molly Tuttle and Melody Walker, appears on Molly Tuttle & Golden Highway's *Crooked Tree*, 2022

Late one night the river so bright
I was bathing in the pale moonlight
Didn't see no one looking around
Pulled that ribbon let my ringlets down
We grew up down the way
Walked to school together every day
I was so tall 'til we were sixteen
In a year he towered over me
Thought he was a friend indeed
But a woman can't trust a man in need
Down on the muddy banks where the roses grow
The river cries ooh oh
'Cause the river knows
He professed a love so fine
Said he wanted me to be his bride
His desire I didn't return
In its place he let resentment burn
He left home to live in the hills
Making moonshine in a silver still
Mama said stay away from that shine
I always did until that dark night
Thought he was a friend indeed
But a woman can't trust a man in need
Down on the muddy banks where the roses grow
The river cries ooh oh
'Cause the river knows
My best dress wrinkled and torn
Head was pounding in the early morn'
Looked at my hands all covered in red
Dug a hole down in the wild rose bed
Washed the proof out of my hair
Crimson streaming down my skin so fair
Shimmering moon staring at me
Now my secret is hers to keep

Some of the darkest tales in the bluegrass community come from real crime and tragedy. Few stories are as chilling as the murder of Grand Ole Opry regular David "Stringbean" Akeman and his wife, Estelle. On November 10, 1973, they were shot and killed in their rural Tennessee home shortly after Stringbean had performed on the Opry. Reportedly, the killers—cousins John and Marvin Brown—knew of the couple's habit of keeping cash on hand instead of in the bank, and so waited for them to

return home, then killed them both. According to accounts, the killers listened to the live Opry broadcast in the Akeman's house that night so they would know when the couple would be returning. The couple's bodies were found by neighbor and musical colleague "Grandpa" Jones. The burglars found just \$250. The murders traumatized Nashville, and changed how country music stars viewed their security forever.

Bluegrass music is also a genre that frequently pays homage to the victims of horrifying natural disasters like the collapse of the Swannanoa Tunnel during the construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad. Kevin Kehrberg and Jeffrey A. Keith wrote in *The Bitter Southerner*, "At least 120 people died while working on the tunnel. More than 300 died at other points along the line." These weren't even paid workers; they were working at gunpoint—just about all Black, and wrongfully convicted of the crimes they were doing time for.

California's AJ Lee was inspired by the tragic events of December 1907, when an explosion so powerful it was felt eight miles away tore through an underground mine in Monongah, West Virginia. At least 361 people were killed, but more likely died because the Fairmont Coal Company didn't keep good records, and employed unregistered workers and child labor. The disaster is still the deadliest mine disaster in U.S. history. From the story came AJ's "Monongah Mine," on her 2021 release, *I'll Come Back*.

Monongah Mine

Written by AJ Lee, appears on AJ Lee & Blue Summit's, *I'll Come Back*, 2021

Sailing across the sea to the mine

Didn't know what they would find

Where darkness down below is lit by wicks

There's no American dream in mine number 6

Maybe they were fine

Barely getting by

But it was on December 6

No one would return

From mine number 6

Wives and daughters and mothers gathered around

Sing to all the souls trapped underground

Broken and lost where sun doesn't shine

Hope was gone for those in the Monongah mine

Children all were crying

Miners down were dying

No one would forget the day no one returned

From mine number 6

Years gone by and if only they'd known back then

Came the U.S. Bureau of Mines in 1910

Greedy eyes were turned to glistening gold

Built from the sweat of the brave, strong, and bold.

Then, we have the Appalachian cryptids—creatures claimed, but never proven, to exist—often imbued with supernatural, mythical, or just plain strange powers. The Mothman is probably the most widely known of the numerous Appalachian cryptids found in this corner of the bluegrass

motherland's folklore. On November 15, 1966, two young couples told the Point Pleasant Register they saw a "man-sized bird ... creature ... something" with glowing red eyes that chased their car near an abandoned munitions site in West Virginia. The rash of sightings that followed lasted for just over a year, until the nearby Silver Bridge collapsed on December 15, 1967, killing 46 people. For locals, the disaster cemented Mothman's status as an omen of doom. Newspapers documented the connection in real time, and today Point Pleasant holds an annual festival in the creature's honor.

Just 14 years earlier, a different horror story unfolded 100 miles away. On September 12, 1952, three schoolboys and a group of adults reported seeing a towering, glowing-eyed figure in Flatwoods, West Virginia. The witnesses described a metallic smell in the air and a creature with "small, clawlike hands." The event was covered in the local press and quickly picked up by national news outlets and UFO enthusiasts.

The spooky lights from Scotty Wiseman's song "Brown Mountain Light" are from near Brown Mountain in Western North Carolina, where the so-called lights have been reported in newspapers since 1913. In 1913, the United States Geological Service's geologist D. B. Sterrett suggested many sightings were train headlights; after the 1916 flood stopped trains, debate flared again. In 1922, USGS geologist George R. Mansfield concluded that most displays matched distant headlights and brush fires amplified by atmospheric refraction—with no geologic or exotic cause required.

The song, covered by Tony Rice and several others, imagines the lights are from the lantern of a ghost of a slave searching for his lost master—a ghastly romantic view of slavery. The legend of the lights was also used in a 1999 episode of the television program, *The X Files*.

If bluegrass had a haunted house, it would be the Ryman Auditorium. Called the "Mother Church of Country Music," the Ryman has hosted every giant of the genre. It's also at the center of Nashville ghost lore. Staff and visitors have reported footsteps on the stage long after shows end, cold drafts in empty aisles, and even apparitions said to resemble Hank Williams. While unverifiable, the stories are so persistent they're staples of Nashville ghost tours.

Nearby, the Union Station Hotel—a former railroad terminal turned hotel—hosts its own ghost story. Guides tell of "Abigail," a young woman who leapt from the tower after her fiancé failed to return from war. Guests sometimes report flickering lights or unexplained presences. Bluegrass musicians in town for conventions have bedded down there, making the hotel part of the scene's haunted geography.

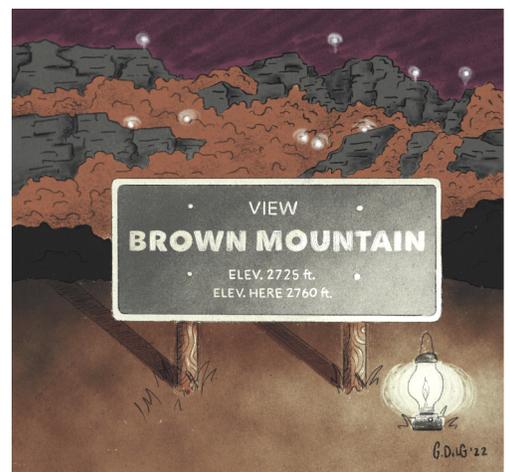
What keeps audiences leaning in when the lyrics turn murderous or the stories drift to the dark side? Part of it is honesty. Folklorists note that Appalachian ballads served as oral news reports of their day, preserving names, places, and crimes in communities where newspapers were rare.

There's also catharsis. Scholars like Patrick B. Mullen have documented how folk superstitions

and ballads gave mountain people a way to confront fear—whether of violence, bad luck, or the unknown—without being consumed by it. A chilling tale sung in harmony offers safety in numbers; dread becomes shareable in community.

And, bluegrass thrives on contrast. A set might move from "Knoxville Girl" to a soaring gospel quartet, from a ghost story to a bubbling fiddle tune. That tension—between the macabre and the celebratory, the eerie and the exultant—is part of what gives bluegrass music such a wide emotional range within the genre.

When the nights grow long in October, it feels natural to listen closely to the dark. In bluegrass, the creepy isn't just seasonal—it's part of the music's DNA. 🦋



Spooky story inspired illustrations by Gina Dilg. Top: Mothman; Middle: The Flatwoods Monster; Bottom: Brown Mountain Lights.

CBA'S GREAT 48 JAM IN BAKERSFIELD

JANUARY 15-18, 2026 • BAKERSFIELD MARRIOTT HOTEL



Jam hosted by Chad Manning. Photo by David Cupp.



Gail and Mike Thomas' class. Photo by David Cupp.



Jamming on the train! Photo by Patrick Campbell.

ALL-ACCESS PASS

The cost for the full event is \$20 for CBA members and \$25 for non-members. This will entitle you to attend ALL the hosted events, including showcase concerts, workshops, themed jams, and all-night jamming in our hotel suites. This small fee will allow the CBA to continue producing this very popular event. The pass is available on-line and on-site at the event.

WERNICK METHOD JAM CLASSES ARE BACK

Gail and Mike Thomas return with their very popular Wernick Method jamming class. This is a three-hour session, and will be offered at four separate times between Thursday and Saturday, January 15-18 for 12 participants per session. Tuition is \$60 for the class and can be purchased online in advance, or at the event (unless it's sold out). *not included in all-access pass

TAKE THE JAM TRAIN

Many folks in the northern half of the state like to catch the **San Joaquins Train** Thursday at 11:46 out of Emeryville (see Amtrak.com for other stops) and pick all the way to Bakersfield. It's not just the only civilized way to travel—it also might be cheaper than what you would spend on gas, and it's a great way to kick off the weekend with old friends and new. Email great48train@californiabluegrass.net for more info.

SCAN FOR DETAILS, TICKETS, AND HOTEL DISCOUNTS FOR CBA MEMBERS



OCT 16-20



FALL 2025



THE DEL MCCOURY BAND • JOHN CRAIGIE & THE COFFIS BROTHERS
BIG RICHARD • LAURIE LEWIS & THE RIGHT HANDS WITH SPECIAL GUEST SAM REIDER
BECKY BULLER • PAINTED MANDOLIN • ALASDAIR FRASER & NATALIE HAAS
CHATHAM RABBITS • BROKEN COMPASS BLUEGRASS • JOHN MCCUTCHEON
THE COFFIS BROTHERS • MARLEY'S GHOST • DAVID JACOBS-STRAIN & BOB BEACH
LATE FOR THE TRAIN • CAROLYN SILLS • THE BROTHERS STRONG
... AND MANY MORE!

STRAWBERRY MUSIC FESTIVAL | NEVADA COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS | GRASS VALLEY, CALIFORNIA | STRAWBERRYMUSIC.COM

FALL CAMPOUT IS UPON US!

START THE SEASON ON A HIGH NOTE IN LODI

We all know at least one person who gets so busy picking at the festival that they never make it to the stage—CBA campouts are perfect for that kind of person! A CBA campout is a special kind of thing. More than a picking party, you can wander around and join random jams, whether you know the people or not. It's not a festival; there's no stage to distract you from the picking. It's really most akin to an extended family reunion, except that there are two of them every year, one in the spring and one in the fall.

The Fall Campout happens at the Lodi Grape Festival Grounds, October 13-19! If you put down this magazine and put a fresh set of strings on your axe right now,

they should be just about broken in by the time you start picking at Lodi!

On top of all the musical fun, the Fall Campout gets especially interesting because that's where the votes for the upcoming year's board members get counted and the results announced. (You voted, right?) That happens at the annual membership meeting, which takes place onsite on the evening of Saturday, Oct. 18.

And the price is right! There's no ticket to buy, just a modest camping fee of \$15 a night if you buy your ticket before Oct. 12 (otherwise it's \$18 per campsite, not per person.) The RV hookup fee is just \$45 a night (\$50 after the 12th). It's even a little cheaper Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, so come early and save!



FALL CAMPOUT
OCTOBER 13-19, 2025
 LODI GRAPE FESTIVAL GROUNDS
 413 EAST LOCKEFORD ST, LODI

ALL-WEEKEND JAMMING
ALL-MEMBER ANNUAL MEETING
 SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18

RV CAMPING \$50/NIGHT
 ELECTRIC & WATER HOOKUPS
TENT/CAR CAMPING \$18/NIGHT
 DRY CAMPING

SCAN FOR TICKETS 



Great jamming at the Fall Campout in Lodi! Photos by Robin Frenette.

CBA BOARD ELECTIONS: MAIL-IN BALLOT

All current CBA members age 16 and older are eligible to vote for this year's CBA board of directors. If you have already provided your email address, you should have received an email ballot on Sept. 1 with instructions on how to vote. If you didn't receive your ballot and would like to vote online, or have any other questions, contact the CBA elections director at ballots@californiabluegrass.net. Balloting closes at noon on Saturday, October 18, and results will be announced at the annual membership meeting that evening.

If you are a current CBA member, and would rather vote by mail, you may complete this form (one form for each family member 16 years and older).

Name _____
 Member # (if known) _____
 Email _____

Vote for up to nine candidates for one-year terms. You may also vote to abstain, which will help us meet quorum. Candidate statements may be found online at californiabluegrass.org/board-candidates.

Mail your completed ballot, postmarked by October 10, to:

CBA Elections
 3739 Balboa St. #5090
 San Francisco, CA 94121-2605

Candidates (choose nine)

- Helen Foley
- Robin Frenette
- Karen Celia Heil
- Joel Keebler
- Ted Kuster
- Tyler Stamets
- Phoebe Leigh-Suelflow
- Lani Way
- Andrea Zelones
- Write in:
- Abstain



Please share questions, suggestions, or story ideas at breakdown@californiabluegrass.net



IN THIS ISSUE:

- Director's Welcome 1
- Why We Volunteer 1
- Phoebe Leigh-Sueflow 1
- South State 48..... 2
- Tribute to Kathy Barwick..... 3
- CBA Fundraising Sweepstakes 4
- Golden Old Time Campout Photos 7
- History of CBA Volunteer Awards 11
- The Dark Side of Bluegrass 12
- Great 48 Updates..... 14
- Fall Campout..... 15
- Board Member Voting Ballot 15

Volunteer extraordinaire Robin Frenette. Photo by John Woodworth.



<p>BLUEGRASS BREAKDOWN CALIFORNIA BLUEGRASS ASSOCIATION 3739 BALBOA STREET, #5090 SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94121-2605</p>	<p>NON-PROFIT ORG. US PSTG PAID PERMIT NO 1831 WEST SAC, CA</p>
<p>SEE DETAILS ON PAGE 14</p>	<p>CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED</p>

25 YEARS!

HAPPY HARDLY STRICTLY

OCT. 3-5

GOLDEN GATE PARK, SAN FRANCISCO
HARDLYSTRICTLYBLUEGRASS.COM

Monthly Trivia Quiz

By Bert Daniel, Breakdown Contributor

As we celebrated old-time music in our September issue, our trivia question followed suit. We asked: **“Who was the first clogging group to perform at the CBA Father’s Day Festival?”**

Members’ guesses included the Stoney Mountain Cloggers (Grand Ole Opry favorites who also appeared on the television show *Hee Haw* in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s), and the Barbary Coast Cloggers (appeared at FDF in 2005)—but **Roy Barush** and **Joel Sidney** had the answer we were looking for: the **Foggy Mountain Cloggers**.

The dance troupe appeared at the 1977 Grass Valley Bluegrass Festival (as our Father’s Day weekend festival was called then), and several years that followed, including the fall festivals CBA produced in Grass Valley. In a letter to the Bluegrass Breakdown editor reviewing the ‘80 Father’s Day fest, CBA Honorary Lifetime Member Bill White noted, “we must not forget our great Foggy Mtn. Cloggers—they add so much to our festivals.”

With two correct respondents, we resorted to the good old coin toss as our random winner generator, and **Joel Sidney** is the lucky winner of a collectable 2025 50th Anniversary Father’s Day

Festival poster: 12" x 18" and printed on high-quality coated paper stock.

OCTOBER TRIVIA

This month’s question is a nod to the approaching Halloween holiday: **“This fiddle tune was composed less than 50 years ago and, and its name has more to do with waves splashing on rocks than Halloween—yet it has a name that evokes the holiday. If you remove three letters from the first syllable of the title, you get a ghost synonym. The last half of the 12-word title is a misspelled version of a synonym for frightful. Name that tune.”**

Send your answer to:
trivia@californiabluegrass.net
 no later than September 30.

This month’s prize is a rare and relished **CBA Holiday Ornament** to light up your holiday season!

Only CBA members are eligible to win; if there is more than one correct response, the prize winner will be selected by random drawing. The winner will be announced in the November 2025 issue of the *Bluegrass Breakdown*.