

# Pop-up concerts soothed impact of festival cancellation

By **Cody Rheault**  
Correspondent

The cancellation of the annual Sisters Folk Festival dealt yet another economic blow to the community. But with the effort displayed by locals and the generosity of visiting musicians, there was hope.

Members of the Sisters Folk Festival board announced in a statement last Wednesday that the smoke was hazardous leading up to the weekend. Air quality conditions — both outside and inside — were predicted to remain at an unhealthy level throughout the weekend as well, forcing them to reach the difficult decision. The safety of attendees and artists were a priority.

The news hit the community hard. After weeks of smoke affecting our local economy, many were looking forward to a busy and entertaining weekend. An event many locals describe as their favorite.

Musicians from all over the country and Canada were invited as first-timers or encore performers to the folk festival. And at the announcement of the cancellation, many were already in town.

Chuck Cannon, a song writer from Nashville and a first-timer at the Sisters Folk Festival, expressed his reaction to the news.

“When I heard about the cancellation, it was a real spiritual bummer,” he said.

Chuck is an experienced performing artist with songs written and performed by legends such as Dolly Parton and Toby Keith. His invitation to perform at the festival was something he was looking forward to.

“I’ve always wanted to come to the Sisters Folk Festival,” he said, after describing his love for the West and how the Sisters area is his new favorite part of the country.

The musical community refused to give up hope, however, at the news of the cancellation. With many performing artists still in town and venues laying vacant, they saw an opportunity where others saw failure. That’s when a group of artists came together and pitched the idea of an impromptu performance. All they needed was a location to do it.

By Friday afternoon, The Belfry started receiving calls asking about performance space. Originally scheduled to have all-day events throughout the weekend, The Belfry now laid vacant.

With limited time, volunteers and members of the community turned The Belfry into a performance-ready space. Some moved chairs, others hung lights, and The Belfry staff changed their weekend plans to accommodate the last-minute show.

“The musician community was instrumental to making the show happen,” said Angeline Rhett, owner of The

Belfry. “I was just a small piece who helped make it happen. It was a group effort.”

Friday night included performances by Martha Scanlan, Scott Cook, Chuck Cannon, and Amy Helm. Presenting artists on Saturday night included Kristin Andreassen, Robbie Fulks, Chuck Cannon, and The East Pointers.

Each show reached max capacity and forced some to listen from outside The Belfry.

Throughout the nights, the crowd was gleeful at the entertainment. Laughter and joy echoed off the walls. The floor bounced with the tapping of their feet. Others danced to the beat. And for a couple hours, everyone forgot the Sisters Folk Festival was ever cancelled.

“I’m thankful to have offered two shows and recover from what could have been zero,” said Rhett. “To see all the musicians up there, it made me feel better.”

The Sisters community and visiting artists pulled what was left of the Sisters Folk Festival from the ashes and presented to those attending a show worthy of any folk festival. The community worked together and refused to give up, showing that even through



PHOTO BY CODY RHEAULT

Chuck Cannon performed at The Belfry in a pop-up concert that salvaged a bit of the traditional folk festival experience.

the smoke and economy, there was hope after all.

“A lot of people focus on the financial impact,”

Angeline said. “But it was emotional, too. This weekend we dealt with the emotional.”

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