

Appaloosa to pony up the tunes at Fir Street Park

By T. Lee Brown
Correspondent

A pickup truck full of used music gear. A love of the high desert landscape. A guitar class at SPRD. These three elements were crucial to the formation of Appaloosa, a lively Americana act playing a free show in Sisters this Sunday.

Dottie Ashley and her husband, Eli Ashley, retired from their careers about seven years ago. Dottie told *The Nugget*, “Eli said, ‘You know, I think we should play music,’ and I thought it was a big joke. Then he came home from Olympia, Washington with a pickup full of used gear. I realized he was serious!”

They took a beginning guitar class at Sisters Park & Recreation District, taught by Brent Allen. They found that songwriting was “easy, super fun, and wonderful for us.” One of their classmates was Katy Yoder, a local writer and singer.

One day, Yoder was talking about playing at a My Own Two Hands (MOTH) event.

“We had done quite a bit of work for Sisters Folk Festival and My Own Two Hands, as pro bono volunteers,” Dottie explained.

Both she and Eli had marketing experience; they donated their time to the festival for that along with emceeing various stages.

“So I just horned on in,” Dottie said, laughing. “Katy said, ‘Of course you can play!’ That was six or seven MOTHs ago.”

Appaloosa has been playing ever since.

Said Dottie, “Sisters was inclusive of us even though we lived down the road a ways.”

Appaloosa members call their music High Desert Americana, “harking back to a Hank Williams sound, pre-Nashville in the fifties.” Dottie said, “We grew up in the ‘60s with the folk music scene. I remember Mother bringing in Willie Nelson and Joan Baez and Bob Dylan.” Dottie came to love the California Country style of the Laurel Canyon scene in the late 1960s and early ‘70s.

Eli, meanwhile, lived in the town of Woodstock, New York. “He lived in there during Woodstock,” she said, referring to the famed festival. “And so he had a much more electric vibe. The Band lived there. He brings that element to our sound.”

Prolific songwriters, the Ashleys have penned well over 100 songs and produced several CDs. Sometimes they play as a duo. Other times a full band rounds out their sound.

The Ashleys write their songs separately, then come together to work out arrangements and harmonies.

“Because we have two songwriters in the band and

we’re really versatile in the stories we tell,” Dottie said.

She characterized some songs as “hard-driving, socially driven, and conscious.” Disheartened by the divisive political landscape, Ashley said, “We’re doing everything we can as individuals to keep everything hopeful and healthy and alive and wonderful.”

They write plenty of yarn-spinnin’ tunes of a light-hearted nature. Women who like trucks? Appaloosa has written about one. Trains? Gambling? Whisky? All accounted for. Babysitters who run away to take LSD? They’ve got that covered, too.

“We also write enduring love songs, broken-hearted love songs, best-friend love songs, everyday songs,” Dottie added.

The Ashleys consider themselves to be of the troubadour lineage.

“We’re really organic, intimate storytellers first,” Dottie said.

Both Ashleys honed their skills at the Sisters Folk Festival’s songwriting camp. Dottie described it as “an incredible, nurturing, loving, wonderful environment. Jeffrey Martin was my mentor. He made me feel like what I was doing had potential and was worthwhile. It gave me a great leg up.”

A fifth-generation Oregonian who grew up in Portland, Dottie has spent



PHOTO BY JERRY BALDOCK

Appaloosa brings their High Desert Americana music to Sisters.

time in Sisters since childhood. She went to Camp Tamarack as a camper, then worked there.

“So I always had Central Oregon in my blood,” she said.

The couple moved to land near Bend in the early 2000s.

“We’re out in the land and we can see 360 degrees around us,” Dottie said. “I don’t think these songs would have ever come into being if we still lived in Tacoma, Washington.”

Despite the pressure of population growth, she said of Central Oregon, “It still is really God’s country, the

country of Mother Nature. We’re still so fortunate and lucky to have this beauty of nature around us.”

Dottie injured her arm, thrown off her horse when he spooked recently. They’ll still play their scheduled set at the Farmers Market.

She recounts, “The first thing I said was, ‘Don’t worry, Eli, I can still hold a pick.’ I couldn’t stand up or anything, but I could still hold a pick!”

Appaloosa plays multiple sets at the Songbird Stage at Fir Street Park throughout the market day on August 4. Admission is free.





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