Robert 'Trainmaster' Hirning lays down some Smokin' Bluegrass

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The Valley was a different place in May 1971 when Robert Hirning moved here. Hirning, aka the Trainmaster, is the host of the "Smokin' Bluegrass" show on KXCJ-LP (105.7 FM), Thursday nights from 6 to 9 p.m.

The Trainmaster's love of bluegrass music goes back even further than 1971. Hirning fell in love with the iconic music when he was in high school in New York.The two stations that were broadcasting bluegrass back then were WCKY in Cincinnati, Ohio and WWVA out of Wheeling, West Virginia. Both were 5,000 watt, clear channel broadcasts that were heard far and wide. Hirning would tune in when he got home from school where the tenets of his Quaker high school and the new music went hand in hand in forming the path of what would become his adult life. Both things had a huge impact on the young man.

(Photo courtesy of Mara Lambert for the *Illinois Valley News*)

Robert Hirning in the KXCJ studio Friday, March 2.

His knowledge and passion, not to mention his collection, was reinforced by his close friendship with Bob Jones who hosted a bluegrass show in the Bay Area in the early '70s. Jones taught Hirning to "really listen" to the music and the different playing styles of a variety of musicians and instruments before Jones moved on to play with the legendary Bill Monroe for six months and Hirning moved to the Valley. Herning listened and gravitated to the banjo which he now plays.

Today, Hirning is involved in his community on many levels. He's well-known in his role as businessman, along with his partner Mark Dwyer, with Country Plumbing. When KXCJ launched their underwriting program Hirning made sure to sign up. He also plays banjo with area musicians and is a member of Lonesome Road. He played in the now defunct East Fork and String Bean bands. "I've been mesmerized by the banjo since I first heard Pete Seeger," said Hirning. He currently has three that he plays with one being reserved for the more rugged aspects of his active life. The rugged one goes on rafting trips and once accompanied the Trainmaster on a three week trip in 2011 with his son down the Colorado River, through the Grand Canyon. Several people, including Scott Taylor of Taylor's Sausage took along their instruments and played the nights away to the background of the flowing river.

So how big is Hirning's collection of music if he's been tending it since high school? "I have about 6 feet of CDs at this point," and Hirning added with a smile, "The main thing that's taken a beating since I started my show is my wallet!

"The show is the highlight of my week," Hirning explained and says he takes it seriously, spending about two hours of preparation for every hour of the live show.

When asked what he likes most about being a DJ for KXCJ, he doesn't hesitate a moment, "It's a wonderful opportunity for bringing the community together. I love the way the station teams up with the local paper to create a sense of community. This Valley is a special place."

He's looking forward to the prospect of building on the interview with Sherriff Dave Daniel that he broadcast with Gail Weller and would like to do more of that kind of informational programming in addition to Smokin' Bluegrass. Stay tuned.

The Archive Zone: by Hillary Mohr from the *Illinois Valley News* archives

This week we turn the hands of time back just a little bit to Oct. 19, 2016. Election season was well underway with debates and forums from potential presidents, all the way down to our local county commissioners. The weather was warm, and so were the words of the candidates; grab your flip-flops and get ready for a candidate forum "recap" in this week's Archive Zone.

Time to decide, Heck or DeYoung; Hunker or Morgan? Candidates for Josephine County Commissioner faced the voters Thursday, Oct. 13 at a town-hall style forum hosted by *Illinois Valley News*. Candidates for position 2 and 3 answered questions from Dan Mancuso of the *Illinois Valley News*, as well as from the public. Public safety dominated the conversation, but candidates also spoke about marijuana and economic development. The first question from Mancuso was about the candidates' attitude toward marijuana in Josephine County. DeYoung compared the cannabis industry to the wine industry 20 years ago, saying that it needs some time to mature. "We are going to end up a couple of years from now with actual cannabis businesspeople that we'll be able to sit down and talk sensibly with, that will be willing to own some of the complaints that come along with the industry," he said. When asked about proposed Planning Department changes to zoning laws in regard to cannabis, DeYoung said that as long as the county continues to allow the people to weigh in on those changes, then the process will work. Candidates were then asked what they will do if the public safety levy fails and rural patrols stop. Heck pointed out that even if the levy passes, the county would still be behind the levels of service that were offered five years ago. "The biggest problem with passing the levy, from my perspective," said Heck, "is that we do nothing different from what we have done the last 20 years, because in four years the money runs out and then we are back in the same position that we are now." DeYoung agreed. "Stable funding means that you can count on it year after year after year. We haven't had that for a long time," he said. He floated the idea of a tax district for public safety, which would provide long term funding solely for the sheriff's department. In terms of increasing county revenue, DeYoung proposed lobbying the state to receive a larger portion of state revenue from cannabis sales. According to DeYoung, Josephine and Jackson counties produce most of the cannabis sold in dispensaries in the state of Oregon. The way that Measure 91 was written, taxes from cannabis sales will be distributed to counties based on their population. DeYoung would like to lobby the state Legislature to receive more of that money based on the fact that we are more affected by the production of cannabis than other counties are. "We are the ones that need law enforcement to keep these growers from killing each other," he said. When asked what he most wanted to accomplish in the next four years, DeYoung said he would work to re-establish the public's trust in county government. He is anxious to wrap his arms around the whole county.