

No Fiddlin' Around

A happy anniversary in Cottage Grove

One year ago, when Bart Caridio took over a vacant space in downtown Cottage Grove and converted it into the Axe and Fiddle, he must have had some sense of déjà vu. Eleven years earlier, he and a business partner took over an abandoned barn in the heart of the Whiteaker neighborhood and transformed it into Sam Bond's Garage. Back then, in the mid-'90s, they saw a burgeoning artist community minus a friendly local bar and a decent live music venue. The same scenario presented itself in 2006 when Caridio looked around his own neighborhood in Cottage Grove. He says, "There was a lack of a good pub and a good music venue in town, and we [he and part-owner Brad van Appel] wanted a spot where people could be comfortable and enjoy good live music." Taking a sip from his freshly poured Guinness and talking over the strains of a slide guitar drifting from the stage, Caridio continues, "I mean look at all the young, single women at the bar. They're comfortable, and a lot of bars don't offer that."

It's this comfort that has kept Caridio's bars in business. Sam Bond's, recently named one of America's best bars by *Esquire* and voted the best bar in Eugene by *EW* readers two years running, offers a laid back, nonsmoking environment where you can take in a local or touring band,

dance to a bluegrass jam, play bingo and drink reasonably priced local brews all in the same week. Axe and Fiddle is cut from the same welcoming, something-for-everyone cloth with Monday night DJs, Tuesday night open mics, an occasional bingo night and local and regional bands most other nights. So far, Cottage Grovers have slowly but surely taken notice. Stacy Dehart, the bar's website manager and part-time booker, says, "As the year's gone by, the audiences have gotten bigger and more consistent, and more and more touring bands are stopping here on their way down the West Coast. It's a nice tour stop." She adds, "Oh, and we recently added our 1,000th MySpace friend."

So, it's been a good, if gradual, year for the Axe and Fiddle, and with goals to make the venue a stop on the Oregon Book Awards Author Tour and eventually to organize and sponsor a Cottage Grove Bluegrass and String Festival, the bar's future is looking fit as a fiddle.



Hot Club Sandwich

Axe & Fiddle Anniversary Events

Friday, Nov. 23: Jackstraw, 8:30 pm, \$5

Saturday, Nov. 24: Hal Hartzell reading, 4 pm

Michael Cunningham, piano, 5 pm

Tony Wiley, comedy, 6 pm

Souder and Guitar Recovering Project, 7 pm

Hot Club Sandwich, 9pm (\$5)

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