

By **BRENNA VISSER**  
COAST WEEKENED

**A**fter 25 years, The Trail Band has reached the end of the musical road. Known for its eclectic sound and iconic Christmas shows played around the state, the eight-person ensemble will play their final performance Wednesday, Dec. 26, at the Coaster Theatre in Cannon Beach. As of press time, the concert had sold out.

Marv Ross, the group's founder, said the reasons are typical. "We've done it for 25 years," Ross said. "We're cutting back ... trying to simplify life and have more time to travel."

But the beginning of this group's journey was anything but typical. The ensemble formed in 1991 after Rindy and Marv Ross, better known at the time for their place in the popular 1980s pop-rock band Quarterflash, were asked by the Oregon Trail Advisory Council to form a band to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Oregon Trail.

For the first two years, the project took the form of a musical, based on the diaries of those who traveled the trail, all done in the brass-band style popular in the mid-19th century.

"I had always wanted to do one, so I saw this as my chance,"

## IF YOU GO

### Winter Holiday Concert with The Trail Band

**Where:** Coaster Theatre Playhouse, 108 N. Hemlock St., Cannon Beach

**When:** 7 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 26. Doors open 6:30 p.m.

**Tickets:** SOLD OUT

he said.

Eventually, the show ran its course — but things just didn't feel finished.

"Well now, what do we do with this amazing band we've put together?" Ross remembered asking.

### A new start

In 1994, The Trail Band decided to create a new show, Christmas With The Trail Band — a holiday concert akin to the parlor orchestras and town-square brass bands of the 1800s. Originally produced as a television special for Oregon Public Broadcasting, the concert began to gain momentum, growing from a few shows in Portland to a full tour around the state 25 years later.

But the show got off to a rough start.

"I remember the first time we did the Christmas show, it was funny because it flopped," Ross said. "It was very old-fashioned, which had done well within context of Oregon Trail. But at the

Festival of Trees in Portland? It just wasn't going to work."

Over the next three days, Ross and his team rewrote the show, incorporating a gospel influence from Linda Ronstadt, a fellow Quarterflash band member, and brought it to life.

Keying into unique sounds and musical styles is a large part of the band's success, Ross said. The group features rare instruments like the flageolet or cornet, and plays a variety of genres, spanning from the 15th century to jazz.

"It absolutely is unique. It kind of fell into our laps serendipitously," he said. "I never would have guessed that 27 years later we'd still be performing."

### Laughter and tears

The Christmas concert started coming to Cannon Beach after local business owners and musicians Paul and Margo Dueber saw The Trail Band more than 20 years ago in concert. The connection was strengthened after Paul

Dueber took a songwriting class with Ross about 10 years later.

After inviting Ross and Rindy, his wife, to play a few concerts at their home, Dueber knew they were perfect for Cannon Beach's Haystack Holidays celebrations.


"Their sound is so unique, mostly because of all the different kinds of instruments they play," Dueber said. "They clearly love what they do."

The band has been capping off Haystack Holiday festivities for the last three years. Part of their success, Dueber feels, is their ability to stand out from what otherwise is a cacophony of homogeneous Christmas carols.

"People visiting here between Christmas and News Year's ... they don't want the typical Christmas concert," she said. "It's not like everything else they've heard through December."

For now, Ross and the band are trying not to think too hard about what it means to be arriving at the end of their trail together. He expects some laughs and some tears, and definitely some gratitude.

He is instead pouring his effort into making sure every detail of their last concerts is perfect.

"Because otherwise I'm sunk," Ross chuckled. "I'll save all the emotion for Cannon Beach — but God knows what will happen during that last show." 

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*MARV ROSS, FOUNDER OF THE TRAIL BAND*