

A DEDICATED GATHERING

Annual Tenor Guitar Gathering celebrates 10 years in Astoria

By **KATHERINE LACAZE**
FOR COAST WEEKEND

At the 10th annual Tenor Guitar Gathering in Astoria, taking place July 12 and 13, music lovers can indulge their interest and appreciation for this resurging instrument through a variety of workshops, concerts and open jam sessions with personable musicians from across the country.

“That’s the key, to get this emotional link with everybody,” said Harriott Balmer, a board member for the Tenor Guitar Foundation, who became a self-described “groupie” at retirement. “All these artists have a history with this group.”

On Friday and Saturday, professional musicians such as Al Hirsch, Buddy Woodward, Erich Sylvester, Jean Mann, John Lawlor, Kenneth Heikkila and Paul Robinson will lead workshops covering tenor guitar, ukulele, home concert tips, music theory and specific playing styles.

The gathering is moving from Pier 39 to the Performing Arts Center, which provides the ideal environment for the event with the stage upstairs and individual classroom spaces downstairs, Balmer said.

Concerts featuring the various artists and instructors will take place from 6 to 10 p.m. both Friday and Saturday. They are open to the public.

Individuals can also attend the jam sessions from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day. They are welcome to bring not only guitars, but also banjos, mandolins, harmonicas and other instruments.

One of the highlights of the event is the musical trolley ride, which helps kick off the gather-



Josh Reynolds

Tenor Guitar Gathering members at a jam session next to the Astoria Riverfront Trolley.



Josh Reynolds

Mark Josephs, the founder of the Tenor Guitar Foundation and Gathering, died in 2016, but the organization and event have continued on. The 10th Annual Tenor Guitar Gathering takes place Friday and Saturday.

ing Friday morning on the Astoria Trolley. Participants will meet at the Bridgewater Bistro at

If You Go

What: 10th annual Tenor Guitar Gathering

When: 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday, July 12 and 13

Where: Clatsop Community College Performing Arts Center

Details: To register for a workshop email hbalmer@comcast.net or visit tenorguitargathering.info. Concert tickets are \$35.

11:45 a.m. for a trolley ride that includes singing and guitar-playing. The short trip will be followed with a buffet lunch at the bistro, accompanied with a performance by Lawlor, who captures a unique and complex style of jazz on the tenor guitar, along with other guest artists.

Tribute to Mark Josephs

The foundation and gathering were originally founded by Mark

Josephs, who died in 2016.

In his younger years, Josephs was a professional musician who toured with several different swing groups, but later decided to pull back from touring and devote time to his own compositions, his wife, Karen Sexton-Josephs, said.

“He was just passionate about all kinds of music,” she said. “He fell in love with the tenor guitar and he just thought, ‘Boy, this is a musical instrument so few people know about now.’”

The tenor guitar – a slightly smaller, four-string relative of the steel-string acoustic guitar or electric guitar – was originally developed to help four-string banjo players easily cross over into guitar-playing without having to learn the six-string guitar. The instrument has since evolved to include alternate types of tuning.

Josephs started the inaugural Tenor Guitar Gathering with the help of Gordon “Gordo” Sty-

ler at the Astoria Guitar Company, which used to be on the Astoria Riverwalk.

Sexton-Josephs said both her late husband and Styler “were great conversationalists” who shared a love for music and deep knowledge of its history.

Josephs would take his ukulele with him when visiting medical patients, putting them at ease by playing for them, Sexton-Josephs said. He also spent all year scouring the Internet for new talent that he could incorporate into the gathering.

Each year, the organizers combine traditions Josephs’ started with alternating workshop instructors and topics in addition to adding new elements, Sexton-Josephs said.

Josephs’ death caused ripple effects throughout the organization.

“We lost our foundation,” Balmer said.

Carrying on in founder’s memory

But the event has carried on in his memory.

The gathering is taking place over two days instead of four this year as the board works to stabilize the organization and make the event financially viable.

The performers are also paying their way and staying at people’s homes, taking only a cut of the workshop fees.

According to Balmer, their devotion to the event’s success can be traced back to the ways in which Josephs impacted their lives and careers.

“I think because of Mark’s energy and passion for it, people really wanted to honor him, and they enjoy the event,” Sexton-Josephs agreed. 