

Pow wow features pageantry, competitions

By TAMMY MALGESINI
East Oregonian

Young Spirit, a champion drumming group from Frog Lake, Alberta, Canada, has been named the host drum for the 23rd annual Wildhorse Pow Wow.

Colorful regalia, drumming and dancing are featured during the 23rd annual event. It begins Friday, June 30 with a grand entry at 7 p.m. at the Pow Wow Grounds at Wildhorse Resort & Casino, located off Interstate 84 at Exit 216, Mission. There is no admission charge for spectators.

More than 300 native dancers — including youngsters, tribal elders and men and women of all ages — will compete for more than \$90,000 in cash and prizes during the event, which continues Saturday, July 1 from 1 p.m. to midnight and Sunday, July 2 from 1-9 p.m. Also, more than two dozen groups will participate in the drumming competition, which offers more than \$30,000 in cash and prizes, including a first prize of \$12,000.

Each day starts with a grand entry with participants parading into the pow wow arena with full regalia as they prepare to compete in the dancing and drumming competitions. In addition, there will be a hand drum contest Saturday and Sunday.

Young Spirit was formed in the summer of 2001 at a pow wow in Hobbema, Alberta. Their goal was to empower American Indian youth through music and language. The group placed first during the 2016 Wildhorse Pow Wow.

Their members hail from all across Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, as well as Arizona and California. Young Spirit offers exciting performances that compliments the round dance style of singing. Their music is known for getting people on the dance floor.

In addition to appearing on a number of compilation albums, the group has released several CDs. Their latest release, “Young Spirit ‘sákitohk-Love Each Other’ Pow-Wow Songs Recorded Live at Apache Gold,” is available at www.canyonrecords.com.

The Wildhorse Pow Wow also features food and American Indian arts and crafts. More than 50 vendor booths will be set up around the pow wow dance arena — offering everything from Indian fry bread and beadwork to clothing and jewelry.

For more information, contact events@wildhorseresort.com or visit www.wildhorseresort.com. For overnight accommodations at the hotel, recreational vehicle park or Tipi Village, call 800-654-9453.

BRIEFLY

Grooms brings country to park series

BOARDMAN — A familiar Pacific Northwest artist that has shared the stage with country legends will perform during the upcoming Music in the Parks.

Zac Grooms recorded his first single at age 14. Since that time, he has won several awards and has had success as both a solo artist, a band frontman and a songwriter, including with “If I Had My Way,” which went all the way to No. 1 on the Independent charts in 1999. Grooms continues to be highly recognized in the Columbia River Gorge music community.

Grooms will perform during the free summer show Monday, June 26 at 7 p.m. at Boardman Marina Park. Those planning to attend are encouraged to bring a blanket or lawn chairs. Concessions will be available for purchase from Judy’s Chuck Wagon.

The free concert series alternates between Boardman and Irrigon marina parks each Monday through Aug. 14. For more information, call Tami Sherer at 541-571-0844.



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Bluegrass festival offers music and more

FOSSIL — The tiny town of Fossil rolls out the carpet for the 17th annual Wheeler County Bluegrass Festival.

The free three-day event kicks off Friday, June 30 from 2-9 p.m. on the lawn of the Wheeler County Courthouse, 701 Adams St., Fossil. The event continues Saturday, July 1 from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Sunday, July 2 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Tent camping (\$15), dry camping (\$25) and recreational vehicle parking (\$35) is available at the fairgrounds. Also, Wheeler County parks offer tent and RV camping spots. Both locations are first-come, first-served as no reservations are accepted.

A unique and popular part of the festival is the “Fossil Song Contest,” which is Saturday at 2:30 p.m. As in traditional song contests, only original unpublished songs are allowed, but songs must be about some feature of the local area — the place, people, history or even imagined events. Also, there’s a

Gospel Open Mic Sunday at 11 a.m. Those who would like to perform during it need to register in advance.

In addition to the scheduled entertainers and jam sessions, there are free workshops and vendors will be on hand offering a variety of foods and crafts. Also, the event is held in conjunction with the 13th annual Fossil Cruz-In. Entries are accepted Saturday from, 9-11:30 a.m. and awards will be presented at 3:30 p.m.

For more information, including a full schedule and list of entertainers, visit www.wheelercountybluegrass.org. For questions, contact Anne Mitchell at amitchell@rdiinc.org or 541-256-0551.



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Fiddlers perform toe-tappin tunes

MEACHAM — The Blue Mountain Old Time Fiddlers are featured performers during the 2017 Heritage Days.

The group will perform Thursday, July 6 through Saturday, July 8 at 6 p.m. at Emigrant Springs State Heritage Area. The laid back group from throughout the Pacific Northwest present an unforgettable three-hour show. They provide toe-tappin’ music at community events throughout Eastern Oregon.

The Heritage Days activities run July 7-8 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. It features the Oregon Trail Travelers, Buck and Suzette Mining, Oregon Wild, muzzle loaders and working with wood. There is no charge for the all-ages event.

Emigrant Springs is about 20 miles east of Pendleton off Interstate 84 at Exit 234. People are invited to come up for the day or check for overnight camping accommodations, which can be reserved at www.oregonstateparks.org or by calling 800-452-5687. For more information about Heritage Days, call 541-983-2277.

Thrift store cassette tells tale of local musician’s brush with Nashville

Vintage cassette tapes have become curious cultural artifacts as of late. No doubt the resurgence of the format as a budget conscious means of analog music distribution has fueled some wider renewed public interest. The format’s ability for individuals to dub mixes and copies at home as well as inexpensively produce mass quantities of recordings for commercial purposes has led to an abundance of tapes that now populate local garage sales and thrift stores.

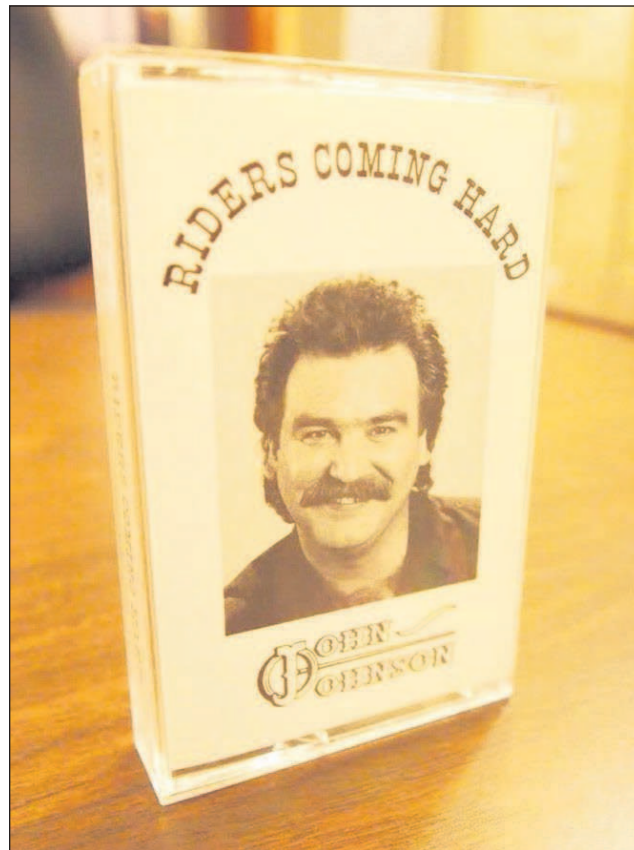
For the few people who still own tape decks or can get their hands on one, there are hours upon hours of listening pleasure just waiting to be discovered.

Take “Riders Coming Hard” by Pendletonian John Johnson as an example. This six song demo tape of neo-traditional country music dating from 1990 recently dug up at a local thrift store is a snapshot of a then aspiring country singer-songwriter. Stylistically it hits all the points that were desired from a country singer during that era: bluesy urban cowboy grooves on “Nowhere Train,”

sentimentality for simpler times in “Mama’s Quilt,” romanticization of old west outlaws in the original title track, and the two step honky tonk of “Take Your Heartache Out On Me.”

The circumstances surrounding the tape are even more fascinating than the music contained within.

Johnson had cut an earlier demo tape in Ashland while working in the logging industry out of Medford. A copy had been sent to MCA Records in Los Angeles. One day



Contributed photo by James Kindle

“Riders Coming Hard” by John Johnson was released in 1990.



J.D. KINDLE
Comment

while loading logs in his truck he received a call from his wife informing him that MCA records had called and, since they didn’t handle country music, suggested Johnson go to Nashville to record another demo.

Record industry contacts he had made through MCA suggested he work with recording engineer Bob McCracken at Room at The Top Studios.

The recording of “Riders Coming Hard” was a brief affair. Johnson played guitar and sang on all the tracks by himself with little live accompaniment before booking back home to Oregon. A series of session musicians came in to sweeten up the recordings with a rhythm section, lead electric and fiddle.

With a fresh demo tape

in hand, Johnson began trying to land a record deal. Unfortunately he was met with many dead ends, although he came awfully close.

Johnson recalled recently one meeting with an industry executive: “I got an in with a gal by the name of Linda. She was a promoter, manger, easy going type gal. I went in, played her some tapes, and she was pretty convinced that something could happen but she said, ‘Here’s the deal: I’ve got a tiger by the tail right now. I can’t do anything but this guy.’ I said, ‘Shoot, maybe you could have two tigers.’ Finally we get to talking about it and I ask, ‘Who is this guy? Have I heard of him?’ She said, ‘No you haven’t heard of him. His name is Garth Brooks.’”

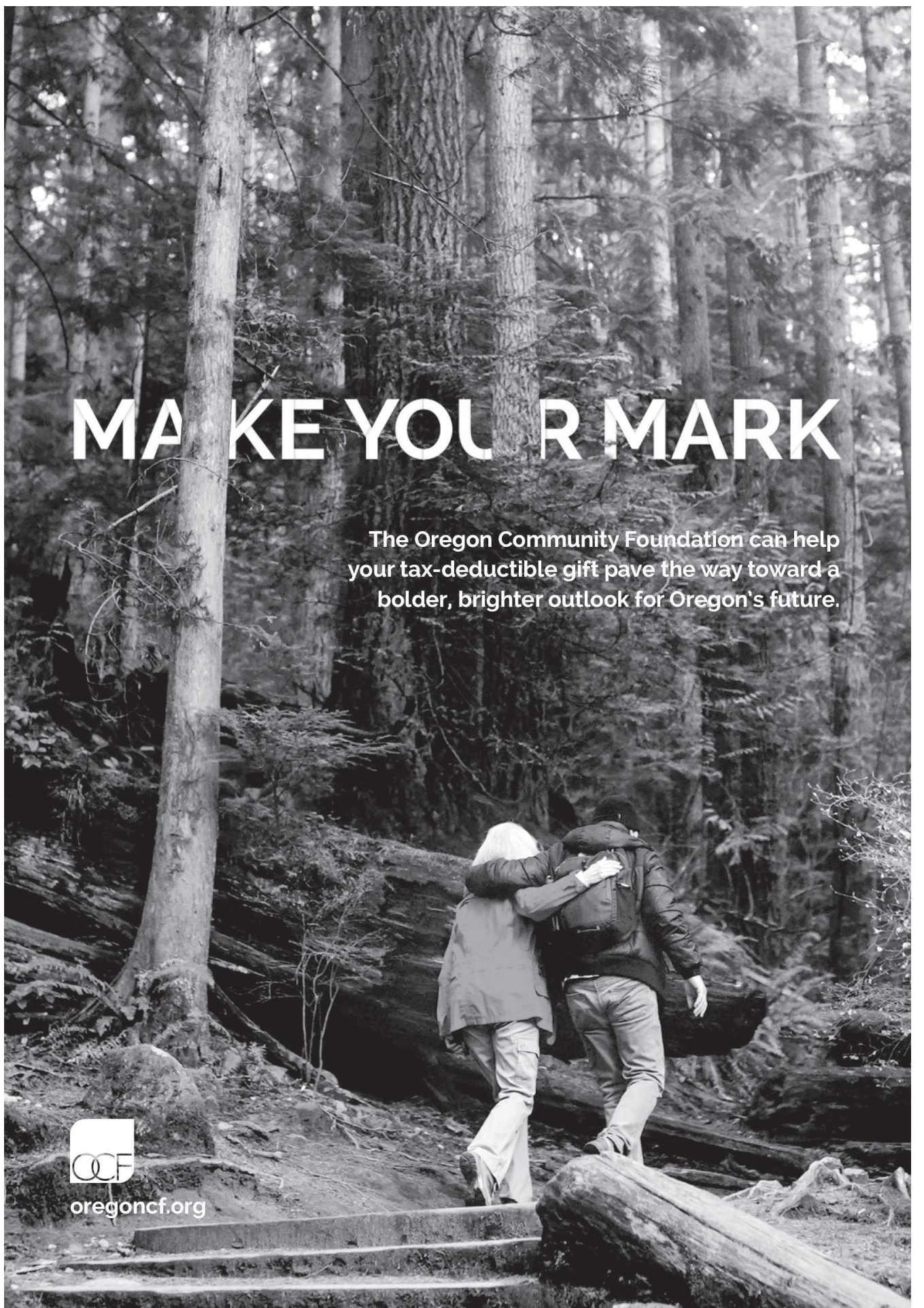
“Riders Coming Hard” did land Johnson a gig at the Bluebird Cafe, the Nashville venue reputed for helping launch

the careers of many professional songwriters like Paul Overstreet and performers like Garth Brooks and Taylor Swift. In a deviation from their normal routine of auditioning new talent before allowing them on stage, owner Amy Kurland booked Johnson on the strength of his demo alone since he couldn’t commute to Nashville for an audition.

Johnson’s further adventures in Nashville included brushes with folks behind the scenes (Michael Heeney, the songwriter and publisher behind Reba McEntire’s “Have I Got A Deal For You”), meeting up-and-coming performers who were on the brink of celebrity (Johnson chatted up Clint Black in Dallas-Fort Worth before the latter’s debut single “A Better Man” broke), and frequenting some of Nashville’s more idiosyncratic locales (Johnson spent some time hanging out at The Castle, a recording studio housed inside a castle style mansion).

Johnson eventually put aside his Nashville aspirations as it was compromising his family life and business back in Oregon although he hasn’t stopped performing altogether. Johnson still performs locally with his daughters, both singers, under the name Rowdy Fix. Although Rowdy Fix revolves around his daughters, John occasionally takes to the microphone. Perhaps he might bust out a vintage cut from the “Riders” tape.

James Dean Kindle is the East Oregonian’s entertainment columnist, the executive director of the Oregon East Symphony and a Pendleton musician. Contact him at jamesdeankindle@gmail.com.



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