

A GATHERING OF FRIENDS

Guthrie Park weekly music jams bring toe-tapping good times

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — You can hear guitars, mandolins, fiddles, accordions and voices singing before you open the door at Guthrie Park Community Center.

The sun is setting on a rare nice spring day, and the sound of the old-timey music is as soothing as the warmth in the air.

"This is the only place I think I've been that we hear this music," said Corine Fraser, who spends each Friday night at the Guthrie Park acoustic jams.

She comes with her daughter, Joan Coleman, who plays the accordion.

"I just love the music. Everybody is so nice and friendly," Fraser said. "Joan has played ever since she was in the third grade. When we went camping, we would always take the accordion with us, and we always had a group around us."

That tradition continues each Friday night at Guthrie. Coleman is part of more than a dozen musi-

cians that dropped in the circle to play.

"Jam" is the correct description for the gatherings. There are no set lists or specific acts taking the stage.

It's just people sharing a love of playing and listening to music.

Starting in the center and moving clockwise, each musician selects a song and begins playing — and sometimes —singing it.

Those who know the tune join in right away. Those who don't pick it up soon enough.

In the audience, toe tapping is contagious, and some sing or hum along with the tune.

The closeness of the players to the audience — most musicians sit in chairs in front of the stage, not on it — makes the gathering seem less like a concert and more like a group of friends having fun.

"We came out six years ago and have been here every Friday night since," said Lyle John as he worked in the kitchen Friday.

He said it isn't just the



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Each player at Guthrie Park's Friday night jams selects a song for the group to join with their instruments or voices.

music that brings him and his wife back each week.

"It's the whole package," he said.

Anyone is welcome to join the sessions — just bring your instrument and your voice.

For the audience, the jam sessions are free to attend, though the center does take donations.

Singing, dancing and all-around enjoyment of the old-fashioned music is strongly encouraged.

The jams began decades ago, part of Guthrie owner Sally Clark's vision to make the former schoolhouse a place where people could celebrate old-time folk, swing, and country music.

It's working.

"It's just enjoyable to come in and listen to them. They have such a variety," Fraser said. "You find yourself singing with all the songs."



Sharing music

What: Guthrie Park Friday night jams

When: Fridays at 6:30 p.m.

Where: 4320 Kings Valley Highway, about three miles south of Dallas.

Admission: Free, but donations are accepted.

Of note: Guthrie Park hosts gospel music jams the third Saturday of the month at 7 p.m. Admission also is free.

The last country folk dance, they will be discontinued after this season, is May 13. Admission is \$5 for those 13 and older and \$15 for families of four or more. Children younger than 12 are free.



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A long-standing Friday night tradition at Guthrie Park Community Center, the Friday night jams attract an audience young and old to listen to the old-time folk, swing and county music. Not a formal concert, the events feel more like a collection of friends who love to play music, sing and dance.



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Truman Price, right, sways to the music as he plays along with the group on Friday night. The weekly events are free, and audience participation is encouraged.

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