

Seaside Jazz Festival just can't be beat

By Andrew R. Tonry
for EO Media Group

The Seaside Jazz Festival is becoming one of the longer-running events in the city's history.

Originally dubbed the Oregon Dixieland Jubilee, it's 32 years old and draws nearly 2,000 attendees each February.

Most of those — about 98 percent — are from outside the North Coast, and at least 80 percent are repeat customers, say the festival's coordinators, Ruth Johnson and Judy Shook.

"There's quite a friendly group that just meet up at jazz festivals and share what's happened to them in the last year," Johnson said.

A sense of return and reunion permeates performers this year as well. Of the 12 groups scheduled for this year's festival Feb. 19 through 22, 11 have played the festival in years past.

The lone newcomer to the Seaside Jazz Festival is Portland's Mardi Gras All-Star Band, which is also the only act from the region (with the exception of the Seaside High School jazz band).

Led by drummer and vocalist Gary Smith, the Mardi Gras All-Stars play traditional Dixieland jazz. Another scheduled group, High Sierra, performs a similar brand.

"They're traditional jazz," said Johnson of High Sierra. "They play a lot of the Dixieland-style music, and they're very good at it. Most of the traditional bands have seven members. They have piano, banjo, tuba, a reed-man, trumpet, trombone and drums."

So, too, are acts at the Seaside Jazz Festival whose inspiration comes from outside the traditional sphere of early jazz (although only by a few decades — nothing here is sourced from the 21st century).

"Tom Ridney does some blues," said Johnson. "His band will also play a waltz. He does Cajun, zydeco. He plays an electric fiddle. His band is

Dance till you drop



Those attending the Seaside Jazz Festival in 2014 dressed up in their jazziest outfits and danced the days — and nights — away.



Photos by
Nancy McCarthy

only five members. There's guitar, bass and a piano player — and she's a boogie-woogie champion on the piano."

Johnson highlighted Dave Bennett and the Memphis Speed Kings as another group performing outside the purview of traditional jazz.

"Dave Bennett is just an awesome young man," Johnson said. "I've seen him playing in jazz bands since he was about 13 years old. He played the clarinet."

"But he not only plays the clarinet," added Johnson. "He reinvented himself as an old-time fan of Jerry Lee Lewis. So when he's playing with the Memphis Speed Kings, they do Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny

Cash, Elvis Presley. And he plays the piano like Jerry Lee Lewis. It's rock and roll!"

Bennett and the Memphis Speed Kings kick off the weekend with a special event Thursday evening at the Elks Lodge.

The festival begins in earnest Friday, with concerts scheduled concurrently on five stages — three at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center, plus the Shilo Inn Oceanfront and the Elks Lodge.

All but one of the venues will be prepared specifically with dancers in mind. "Four of our five venues



ABOVE: Dave Bennett, of Dave Bennett and the Memphis Boys, will be back again at this year's festival Feb. 19 through 22. LEFT: The Memphis Boys, of the band Dave Bennett and the Memphis Speed Kings, will kick off the festival at a special event at the Elks Lodge Feb. 19.

have dance floors, and we bring in wooden floors," said Johnson. "We don't ask people to dance on concrete all weekend."

"There are young people, and they just dance all day long," added Shook. "Some of them have a favorite band they follow from place to place."

Aside from bands simply performing their regular material, a few special sets are planned.

"Saturday, we have three bass saxes playing at the same time," said Johnson. "That is an awesome sound. If you know what a bass sax looks like or sounds like, you really should show up for that set. That's my favorite set."

Winners abound on game night

Fundraiser for Children's Center needs volunteers

Bring some good luck and good cheer to the Cannon Beach American Legion Hall for the eighth annual Casino Game Night, a fundraiser for the Cannon Beach Preschool and Children's Center.

From 7 to 10 p.m. Feb. 28, the legion building, 1216 S. Hemlock St., will be transformed into a scene from a Reno or Vegas casino, with craps, blackjack and roulette offered, said Barb Knop, the center's board president.

Scrip will be available for purchase at the door, no minimum will be required. Players could win merchandise from local businesses and gift certificates from local stores and restaurants.

No skill is necessary; the dealers (center staff, board members and volunteers) will help players learn the rules of the games, she said.

Historically, the fundraiser has brought in an average of \$2,100 every year, according to Knop.

The equipment is donated by the Seaside and Gearhart fire departments and local candy-maker Brian Taylor and his family, she said.

Community members who want to volunteer that evening can contact Annette Campbell, the center's director, at 503-436-1040.

"We particularly need volunteers who would like to be blackjack dealers," Knop said.

"It's going to be a fun night," said Christy Bispington, the center's development director. "It definitely benefits our center, and we rely very heavily on all the money that we bring in."

If you go

WHAT: Seaside Jazz Festival

WHEN: Feb. 19-22

WHERE: Seaside Civic and Convention Center, Shilo Inn Oceanfront, Elks Lodge (shuttle bus provided)

COST: \$10 to \$95

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