

Echo's Oktoberfest gives rare opportunity to local musicians

By ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

ECHO — Getting ready for Oktoberfest, a pair of local musicians dressed in lederhosen and tuned their instruments. By start time, they were ready to perform.

Proceeds from the event Saturday, Oct. 16, in Echo, benefitted St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church and a local scholarship fund.

Margaret Mayer, a Blue Mountain Community College music instructor, was one of the two performers. She said she has played at a few Oktoberfests and other local events many more times.

"It's fun," she said of Echo's Oktoberfest. As an accordion player, she does not get many chances to perform publicly. And since she enjoys the instrument, she also likes any opportunity to play.

"Everyone remembers somebody who plays the accordion, but no one seems to play it anymore," she said.

She took it up 15 years ago, because a musical needed one. She was in the pit orchestra at the time. With some lessons from a Walla Walla teacher Horrace Lazzari, and some independent study and practice, she was ready to perform for the musical.

More often than not, however, she plays the accordion for her own enjoyment, but she plays other instruments as well. She plays piano, guitar and clarinet, which are all more popular among her music students.

She said she thinks she knows why students do not gravitate toward the accordion.

"It's really hard to play," she said.

One thing that makes it harder than the piano is "you can't see what you're doing." The instrument obscures the views of a player's hands. But there are some masters of the instrument, including "Weird Al" Yankovic, Art Van Damme, Dick Contino and Lazzari.

Mayer said she likes the variety of the accordions, as well as the versatility of the instrument. Accordions are used in Cajun, Mexican and other musical traditions.

Mayer performs with Alan Feves, who also plays a rare instrument — the bass banjo, which was built for him by



Ericks Peterson/Hermiston Herald
Musicians Margaret Mayer and Alan Feves, both of Hermiston, pose for a photo Saturday, Oct. 16, 2021, at Oktoberfest in Echo.

banjo maker Verne Marr of Pendleton.

He said he and Marr saw the instrument in an old photo of country musicians, and they thought making one would be an "interesting project."

He said he has seen only a few people with bass banjos. Johnny Peppercraft is one of the few contemporary players.

Feves learned to play on his own, but it was not much of a challenge, because of its similarity to other instruments, he said. The upright bass, for example, has the same tuning as the bass banjo.

"I've been playing the upright bass since junior high school," he said.

Since then, he has played with jazz groups, symphony groups and rock bands. He also plays the electric bass, the bass fiddle and the bass guitar,

which also prepared him to play the bass banjo.

"The fingering and notes are the same on all of those instruments," he said.

In addition to bass instruments, he also plays the steel guitar and slide guitar.

He is interested in Oktoberfest not because of heritage, but because he has the skills to entertain, and this event was simply an opportunity.

Both Hermiston residents, Mayer and Feves have known each other and have performed together for more than 20 years. Theirs is a good friendship, they said.

"We don't have to think about it," Mayer said of their friendship. "We just play, and he just moans, like a good bass player."



Cathy Stolz/Contributed Photo
Bill Jennings, Vietnam vet, staffs the Veterans Yard Sale in Hermiston, Saturday, Oct. 9, 2021.

Auxiliary president surprises folks with big American Legion yard sale

By ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

The Veterans Yard Sale on Oct. 9 in Hermiston put some money into the coffers of American Legion Hermiston Post 37 and Auxiliary. This money will be used to fund Legion activities, Cathy Stolz, Hermiston's American Legion Auxiliary president, said.

Stolz added, the sale's results "surpassed everyone's expectations," except her own. "I knew our generous citizens would rally and support the needs of our veterans and their families."

Stolz, a Hermiston resident, had been pushing for this yard sale because she was confident it would be a successful fundraiser. She was sure of the success of a yard sale because the Legion did well when it joined the VFW on another sale in November 2020, she said.

People told her the Legion would make around \$600. She scoffed, knowing it would earn at least \$2,000.

The yard sale ended up making \$2,197.

"This is going to go for scholarships for veterans' children and for veterans and their spouses. It's going to go to youth programs, teaching kids flag etiquette," Stolz said.

She said she believes, if not for the winds, which picked up in the middle of

the sale, the yard sale would have made more than \$3,000, thanks to the hard work of volunteers and the sponsorship of local companies.

"We received invaluable help from Hermiston Scoutmaster Dan Greenough with Troop 654 and the 4-H group 'Kinda Cousins,'" Stolz said. "Coming to our rescue leading up to the event, Swain Motors allowed the veteran organization to stockpile on their property early donated items. Also, Rogers Toyota provided the use of a new truck with a power outlet in the bed, allowing shoppers to test electrical appliances before buying them."

In addition to selling items at the yard sale, the Legion sold 50 to 100 \$10 beef raffle tickets, which benefited the upcoming American Legion Youth Patriotic Oratorical Competition.

The raffle ticket sale amount was not even figured into the \$2,197 earned from the sale. Also, some more money, another \$100, was made from a silent auction to benefit the Legion Auxiliary.

When asked if she would bring the sale back next year, Stolz said people might not have to wait that long.

"How about next spring?" she said.

The Legion on Saturday, Oct. 23, will have a Veterans fall social with a potato bar and dessert potluck.



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