



# Bluegrassin'

Volume 18, Issue 1

Jan—Feb 2016

*The Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association is a non-profit association dedicated to promoting, preserving and sharing our love of bluegrass music in a spirit of family and friendship.*

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## Upcoming Bluegrass Events

- Jan. 8 - New South Fork Trio, Bitterroot Brewery, Hamilton, 6:00 pm
- Jan. 9— MRBA Winter Jam Series— Missoula—Ruby's Inn - Potluck at 6:00. Pickin' and grinnin' starts at 2:00 pm. Potluck at 5:30 followed by more pickin' and grinnin'
- Jan. 9 - New South Fork Trio, Top Hat, Missoula 6:00 pm
- Jan 13th — Lochwood Bluegrass, Lolo Peak Brewery, Lolo, MT, 6:00 pm
- Jan. 15—Beargrass, Imagine Nation Brewery, Missoula, 6:00 PM,
- Jan. 23—The Claire Lynch Band, Ellen Theater, Bozeman, MT
- Jan. 29 - Beargrass, Phillipsburg Brewing Co., Phillipsburg, MT, 5:00 pm
- Jan. 31—Lochwood Bluegrass, Blacksmith Brewery, Stevensville, MT 6:00 pm
- Feb. 3— Lochwood Bluegrass, Lolo Peak Brewery, Lolo, MT, 6:00 pm
- Feb. 4—Feb. 7, Big Sky Bluegrass Festival, Big Sky, MT, [www.bigskybiggrass.com](http://www.bigskybiggrass.com)
- Feb. 5—Beargrass, The Montana Distillery, Missoula, 6:00 pm,
- Feb. 6 —Lochwood Bluegrass, Top Hat, Missoula, MT 6:00 pm
- Feb. 12—Lochwood Bluegrass, Bitterroot Brewery, Hamilton, 6:00 pm
- Feb. 13— MRBA Winter Jam Series— Missoula—Ruby's Inn - Potluck at 6:00. Pickin' and grinnin' starts at 2:00 pm. Potluck at 5:30 followed by more pickin' and grinnin'
- Feb. 16— Infamous Stringdusters, Great Northern Bar, Whitefish
- Feb. 20—Lochwood Bluegrass, Top Hat, Missoula, MT 6:00 pm
- Feb. 25-Feb. 28, Wintergrass—Bellevue, WA <http://www.wintergrass.com/>

## Recurring Shows and Jams

- ◆ Missoula—Open Jam. Top Hat. Tuesdays. 6:00 pm
- ◆ Missoula—Tangled Tones Pickin class. Wednesdays 6:30 pm.  
Laurie Criger, tangledroot13@yahoo.com or call 406-552-9208
- ◆ Livingston - Open Jam. Pine Creek Café. Thursday—8:30—10:30 pm.

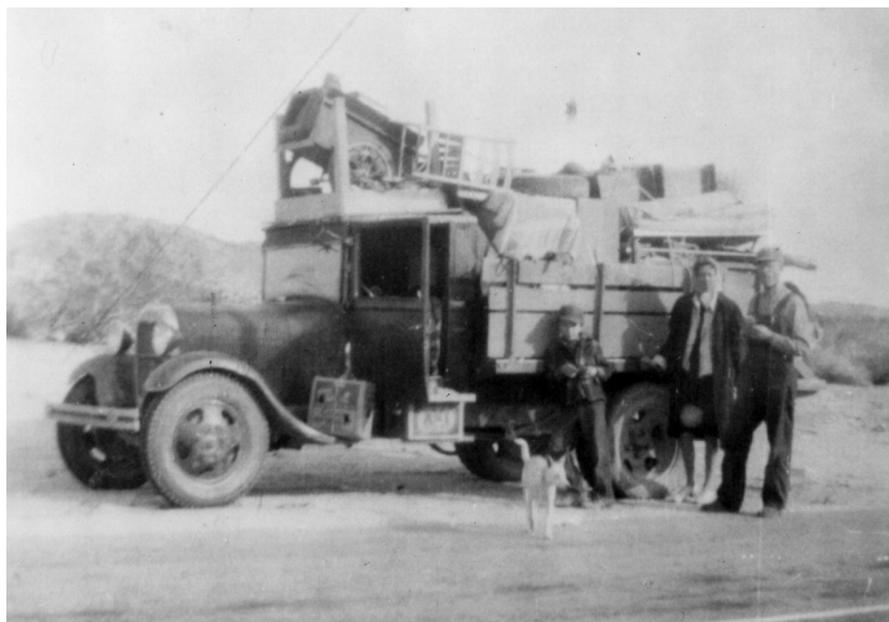
**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

Howdy all. I am truly honored to be your president again-- (I do realize you must be hard up for help) - but thanks for your vote of confidence in me.

I was sitting at our MRBA Christmas party dinner last month and thinking how great this association is. Lots of musicians and listeners, but even more important, lots of happy folks. Other organizations are full of arguing and conflict, and we have NONE of that. We just have folks that love Bluegrass music and respect each other. How wonderful is that?

I would like to thank outgoing sec- treasurer Laurie Criger for all her help last year. You da man (or woman). Our new sec-treasurer is mando pickin Anne Merrifield from Hamilton. She is such a character and just fun to be around– I think we'll have lots of fun working together. Also we would like to welcome guitar pickin Ben Essary back to the MRBA board. His years of devotion to this association are greatly appreciated.

A possible new idea this year was some bluegrass SHOWS featuring MRBA bands. I think the Hootenannys are a great way to get new individuals up on stage, but some band concerts would really let the groups show their stuff.



Answer to name of  
boy in picture is on  
pg. 5

## ***Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association***

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**Vice President** - Dallas Olson

**Secretary/Treasurer** - Anne Merrifield, [happypasture9@gmail.com](mailto:happypasture9@gmail.com), 406-360-1877

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**Merchandise Manager** - Dallas Olson

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***Bluegrassin'*** is a bi-monthly publication of the ***Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association***

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*(P.S.—It will help keep down printing & mailing cost for the association)*



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E-mail \_\_\_\_\_ Individual (\$10.00) \_\_\_ Family (\$15.00) \_\_\_

Do you want the newsletter delivered electronically? \_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

Please mail your application to: MRBA, PO Box 1306, Missoula, MT 59806

## Annual Meeting Minutes

Date: December 5, 2015 - 3:00 pm  
Location: Ruby's Inn - Missoula, MT

The meeting was called to order and the following items were discussed.

1. Spring Festival—The date for the Lone Rock Spring Festival has been set for April 16.

### 2. Financial Report

Laurie Criger, Secretary-Treasurer gave the following financial summary for FY 2015:

- 2015 Starting Balance = \$4,245.15
- Total Income—\$8,242.01
- Total Expenses— \$7,268.78
- Net Income—\$973.23
- 2015 Ending Balance = \$6,128.38
- Memberships 2015 = 230 (Increase from 221 memberships in 2014)

### 3. Old Business

- Phyllis Erck is still maintaining the MRBA website. Members can help out by posting to the website.
- It was reported that the annual MRBA campout (at Forrest Flats) was held in the last weekend in June for the first time last year and had good attendance.
- A second camp-out was added at Gibbonsville in June and they plan on doing it again in 2016.
- There was a question about activities of the education committee. It was believed that the committee was comprised of Judy, Ken, Phyllis and Kimberlee. It was agreed to check with Phyllis to get an update on the grant and scholarships.

### 3. New Business

- There was discussion regarding the MRBA camp-out at Forrest Flats. There was a motion to keep the camp-out date for the last weekend in June and all approved. The group also discussed the location for the camp-out. Tari Conroy mentioned a potential site near where they have the Memorial Day camp-out. Forrest noted that it is nice to have a camp-out closer to Missoula for people who just want to come for the day and for folks that don't live in the Bitterroot Valley. Charlene mentioned that there is a site near Garrison Junction that could potentially host the camp-out. The Lochsa Lodge was mentioned as another possibility.

After discussion there was a motion to keep the site of the MRBA camp-out in June at the Forrest Flats location. All approved. Forrest mentioned that it would helpful to have some assistance with mowing and preparing the site.

It was also agreed to check out the cost and availability of the Garrison Junction site and the Lochsa site for a potential new event.

3. New Business (cont.)

- Mike Conroy reported that the Hootenannies have been well attended and they would like to do them again next year. He asked for suggestions on how to improve the format. It was discussed that the venue should have a place where people can jam. They also discussed having a band play first and then have an open mic afterward. There was a question about how to pay the band. It was noted that the association could help sponsor the event and agreed that Mike could make a proposal to the Board and they could decide how to proceed.

4. Other Business & News

- Tari reported that due to cost, there would not be a Montana Hospitality Suite at Wintergrass this year.

5. Elections

The following were elected to the Board for 2016.

- President—Mike Conroy
- Vice-President—Dallas Olson
- Secretary/Treasurer—Anne Merrifield

*Ellie Nuño*

Musical styles on:

- ★ fiddle
- ★ violin
- ★ violectra

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*Answer*  
*Rolland Thomas*

## Getting to Know Anne Merrifield

MRBA Secretary/Treasurer

Hi, my name is Anne, and I moved to the Bitterroot Valley about four years ago from Northern California. I was introduced to bluegrass music in 1971 when I started bartending at Paul's Saloon, a bluegrass bar in San Francisco (secretary by day, bartender by night - you can DO that when you're young). It grabbed me hook, line, and sinker, and I remain to this day friends with many local musicians who picked there. However, I never played an instrument.

I was always what I called a "professional listener" among those friends until about 2014. I was now retired and had been in Montana for a couple of years. I joined MRBA and started to get to know the bluegrass community here (mainly through volunteering to help Phyllis Erck with the Ruby Jewel Jamboree), so I decided it was time to take mandolin lessons from Mike Conroy, before I turned 70. Learning to play is teaching me both patience and humility, but as Mike says, it's mainly about having fun, and it's more fun than I could have imagined.

MRBA is a wonderful organization with incredible people, and I will do my best to make a solid contribution as the new Secretary/Treasurer. I'm looking forward to meeting more of you.



## *Bluegrass Consumer*

According to Simmons Market Research, in 1995, a consumer of bluegrass music, compared to the average U.S. Consumer, was:

- More likely to paint, draw or sculpt
- More likely to water ski
- More likely to play a musical instrument
- Almost three times more likely to own a full-sized motor home

## Bluegrass Humor

Q: What do you get when you have 6 banjo players in the room?

A: A full set of teeth

# MRBA X-mas Party Photos

Great prizes at the holiday raffle this year!



This is some serious bass and mando playing



Vice President Dallas running the annual meeting



We need some female pickers in this jam circle.



Can we interest you in some MRBA Merchandise?



Crammed in the weight room doesn't deter these jammers.

## Greg Boyd's House of Fine Instruments in Missoula is world-renowned music store

DAVID ERICKSON FOR THE MONTANA STANDARD

MISSOULA -- When musicians from all over the world -- accomplished mandolinists from Norway, blues guitarists from Florida, country banjo players from Kentucky -- go looking for a certain sound and quality, they go to a nondescript home in central Missoula, aptly called Greg Boyd's House of Fine Instruments.

Inside his display studio on Knowles Street, Boyd has an impressive collection of handmade, exquisitely crafted, vintage pieces. A \$22,000 mandolin is sitting on a stool, waiting to be shipped to a customer.



A \$9,450 acoustic Martin 0-28 guitar built in 1898 hangs from the wall right near shelf full of violins in the \$10,000 range. The banjos are one-of-a-kind, as are the cellos, ukuleles, lap steels and amplifiers. Boyd won't deal with anything unless it's top-notch.

Over the past quarter-century, Boyd has built a reputation as the place to find the "best of the best," and demanding customers depend on him for brutal honesty and impeccable taste.

"We're known more in Perth, Australia than in Missoula," Boyd said. "We're known more in London and Ontario and Florida and New York than here. We've been doing the real deal for 25 years."

His customers over the years have included John Fogerty, David Grisman, members of Pearl Jam and Eric Johnson. "We can go to major shows in Nashville, the Grammy's of bluegrass called the (International Bluegrass Music Awards Show) and sit there and here's the band coming out and you go 'Oh yeah, that's Johnny. I sold him that banjo,'" Boyd said. Boyd, 59, studied wood science at the University of Montana and worked as a firefighter for many years before co-founding the iconic Stringed Instrument Division in the early '90s. He struck out on his own around '97 and hasn't looked back since.

"We survived the worst recession in a lifetime with no bank loans," he said. "It's kind of one of those things where we have such a profit margin where it could be no sweat nonprofit."

His business plan wouldn't work without an online presence.

“The crazy thing about what we’re doing here is it can’t be supported in just one town,” he explained. “It can not, it will not work. So the Internet came along and we were one of the first 20 music stores in the world to jump on the Internet. On the Internet you can either be the newest guy, or the cheapest guy, or the guy with the most Flash, Shockwave stuff going on, or you can be steady guy who has the reputation of when you say it sounds a certain way it really does.”

When he talks to customers overseas, Boyd will say things like “You know, if you’re looking for a powerhouse mandolin this isn’t the one for you.” That way, customers aren’t ever surprised by what they get. “We don’t want the mandolin going to London and coming back,” he said. “We don’t hide anything.”

Boyd said that the types of instruments he carries would normally be sold in boutique shops in New York where they handle everything with white gloves. There are customers out there who don’t associate Boyd’s shop with such beautiful-sounding products.

“There’s so little awareness, and people just think it’s a little banjo shop,” he said. “They want a violin shop with three-piece suits, seriously, with a model that has a law degree pouring their coffee. They want to overpay by \$20,000. And they’ll feel way better about that violin. I’m really not kidding.”

Boyd is picky about his wood. He can spot quartersawn Brazilian rosewood from a mile away. Quartersawn wood has a certain resonance to it that makes a guitar sing, and mass-produced guitars and other instruments just don’t have the same quality. Boyd stocks guitars from local luthiers, and he carries products from small companies around the world that sometimes only put out a few dozen instruments a year.

“Everything on these guitars was made by hand by a real human,” he explained. “Nothing was pre-done and just dropped into place. There’s not one in every store. Which is not bad. I have production rifles and production bicycles. But for instruments I feel different because I’ve seen the value of it. Just the wood and time that goes into it.”

High-quality instruments never depreciate in value, he said, and many of them could be considered investments that rival stock in Google. “I’m talking about taking that money you have in paper and putting it in wood, and then you or your children or grandchildren go ‘Holy cow, I’m glad Grandpa did that’,” he said. “You should go throw some roses on his grave.”

### **Web Site for Practicing Songs**

This web site plays backup chords for traditional bluegrass songs. Can speed up or slow down.

<http://www.fbbts.com/CandP.html>

## On the Road With MRBA

Jamming on the beach in Lake Havasu City, Arizona with J.D. Webb, Dale and Debbie Kerns, Gary and Linda McKnight and JD's wife, Judy, holding MRBA newsletter.



### Tribute to Bill Keith

The banjo world was saddened this fall by the news of Bill Keith's passing at his home in Woodstock, N.Y. at the age of 75. A pioneer throughout his career, his innovations included introducing melodic style playing to the banjo during his time with Bill Monroe, advancing banjo instruction and establishing tablature as the written language of the banjo with his seminal work on Earl Scruggs' original instruction manual. He contributed to the bluegrass style and helped popularize the music.

(Source: <https://banjonews.com/index.html> )



## Membership Challenge

Remember the membership challenge? We are asking all of our members to recruit at least one new member to MRBA this year. Here are some benefits you can tout to your friends.

- Newsletter (6-times a year)
- Free steak dinner at annual MBRA campout at the end of June.
- MRBA bluegrass jams in the winter. Spring Festival. Summer camp-outs.
- Listen to good music. Improve your playing by jammin with other musicians.
- Make Friends.
- Spiff up your wardrobe with MRBA hats, t-shirts and fleeces.
- Opportunities to volunteer and help promote bluegrass music.

## More Tips to Become a Better Bluegrass Musician

The following are tips for banjo players but can apply to all bluegrass musicians. Adapted from the web site: <http://billevansbanjo.com/blog/ten-practical-tips-to-become-a-better-banjo-player-now>

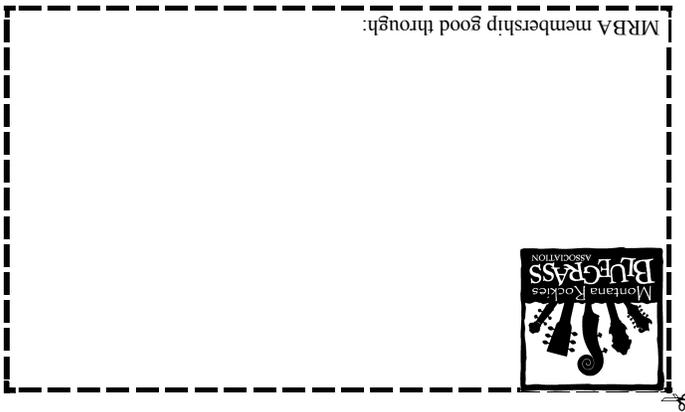
**4. Warm Up** Athletes warm up with stretching routines, and you can do the same in your practice sessions. You can devise warm-up exercises to isolate and work on specific right-hand picking patterns or left-hand techniques apart from songs. Your warm up is also the time for you to focus on your tone, your rhythm, and the clarity of your left-hand fretted notes, making adjustments when necessary. Although some players may need to warm up for only a few minutes before they're ready to move on (which is the case with some experienced players), you may want to stay in this warm-up mode for up to 30 minutes or more. Practicing "within your zone" is better than wasting time playing things that are too difficult for you.

**5. Use Tablature Sparingly** Although *tablature* (written music) is a wonderful resource that allows quick access to hundreds of tunes and also allows you to study closely the subtleties of a master player, use it in small doses. Tablature is great for showing you the left and right mechanics of how something is done, but don't confuse the ability to read and play tab with really being able to play banjo. Try to internalize the *sound* of what you're playing as quickly as possible so that you're concentrating on what you're hearing.

**6. Gradually Increase Your Speed** Playing slowly until you master a technique or song is a tough guideline for banjo players to remember, because they all want to play as fast as they can as soon as possible. However, if the song doesn't sound right when played slowly, the tune isn't going to get any better when played fast (trust me on this one!). After you're warmed up, use your practice time more efficiently (and enjoy it more in the process) by practicing at a slow enough speed where you're still in control of what you're playing. Keep in mind that this tempo could be different for each piece you're working on. After you're comfortable playing at a slower pace, you may decide that you want to crank the speed up a notch. Regular practice with a metronome can help you to play faster

***ATTENTION:***

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