

1983 - 2015

The Northwest Western Swing Music Society

Presents the

***25TH ANNUAL
HALL OF FAME
INDUCTION CEREMONY***

1:30 - 2:45 pm

August 16, 2015

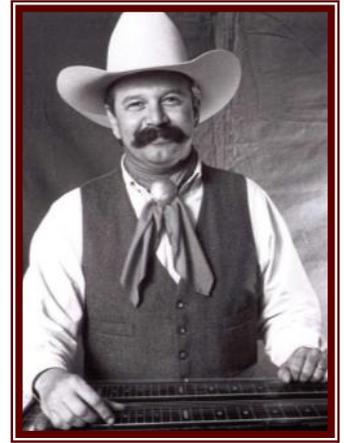
***Held at the
Auburn Eagles
Auburn, Washington***

—Celebrating Our 32nd Year—

BOB BAKER

PIONEER OF WESTERN SWING

Bob's 45 plus years as a professional musician have given him the opportunity to play with many remarkable musicians and he has played with **The Texas Playboys** on several occasions.



At the age of 13 he began studying guitar with Bob Wills' legendary guitar player, Eldon Shamblin. His relationship with Eldon continued until Eldon's death. Bob served as a pallbearer and musical director at Eldon's funeral.

Before he could drive, Bob was playing school dances. After graduating from high school Bob formed the **Green Country Western Swing Band** and played many well known Tulsa venues, including Cain's Ballroom.

Bob and his brother Scott, founded **The Baker Brothers Western Swing Band** in 1980 and for a dozen years took Western Swing music to some of the largest music venues and Western Swing festivals throughout the country. They opened for many of the top country artists of the day, including George Strait and Reba McEntire.

Bob was a member of **The New Cimarron Boys**, Leon McAuliffe's last band, and was on the bandstand when Leon played what would be his last show.

Bob was inducted into the Sacramento Western Swing Hall of Fame in 2000, the Cowtown Society of Western Music in 2007 and the Western Swing Music Society of the Southwest in 2013.

Bob has been a member of the **Cowjazz Western Swing Band** for almost 20 years. **Cowjazz** has received two Academy of Western Artists awards. Bob plays a 1953 Fender, stand-up steel guitar. The Academy of Western Artists has nominated Bob five times for 'Western Swing Instrumentalist of the Year.'

In addition to **Cowjazz**, Bob currently plays with several Western Swing bands throughout the southwest.

Bob and wife Ann have called Claremore, Oklahoma, home for the past 33 years.

RHONDA CRAIG



In 2005, Rhonda and Dick Craig went to a Hall of Fame Showcase in Yukon, OK, simply as a loving gesture to a friend whose brother was being inducted into the Western Swing Music Society of the Southwest's (WSMSS) Hall of Fame. The Craigs had no idea why he was being inducted or even what WSMSS stood for, but loved his sister and wanted to support her, hoping to get to dance a little bit as well that afternoon.

As it turned out, it became a life changing experience for Dick and Rhonda. As they entered, Western Swing music was roaring from the stage. Rhonda stopped dead in her tracks! She thought Western Swing was dead! A million memories came flooding back of her childhood years. She had cut her teeth on this music. Rhonda remembered hearing a Bob Wills recording sometime in the 60's titled *For the Last Time*, believing that was the end of Western Swing because it was certainly not being played on the radio.

She had grown up listening to the noon broadcast of Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys from the Cains Ballroom in Tulsa. Rhonda walked home every day from school (*right across the street from her house*) and her mother had the radio blasting. As she ate lunch Rhonda watched her mother dance a thousand miles across that old kitchen linoleum floor! So when Rhonda heard those musicians playing that wonderful music she began to come alive. The Craigs joined the WSMSS that very day and started going to every event they could learn about.

Not only was the music wonderful but the people they met there were incredible as well. All of them grew up in that era of loving God, Country and each other and tapping their toes to Bob Wills' unique music. Strong friendships began to develop and they could not wait to be reunited at the next event. Staying in touch was really solidified when a mutual friend had major back surgery. Daily reports surged from Rhonda's computer to their friends via email. That was the beginning of the communication network known as the Western Swing Prayer Network (WSPN), which brought their new friends together in a loving, supportive way. As the prayer network grew, Rhonda and her friends began to exchange information about where the next upcoming event was going to be and who was planning to attend. The Western Swing Dancer's Network (WSDN) was born. Over four years ago the WSDN started recognizing unsung heroes with Surprise Appreciation Awards. Today the WSDN reaches over 1000 Western Swing fans on the network and those are just friends staying in touch.

Rhonda and Dick will not hesitate to tell you that out of their love for Western Swing music very special relationships have developed. Being a part of this music circuit has been one the best things Rhonda and Dick have ever shared. They remain thankful to have been accepted into the Western Swing family and are delighted to do their part to promote and preserve this music.

TERRY CROUSON



Terry Neville Crouson was born May 14, 1941, in Cairo, Illinois, with roots in Obion, Tennessee. Early on, Terry began to teach himself how to play guitar. His parents then moved the family to Pocatello, Idaho. There, Terry began to play with some local musicians.

After high school, Terry entered the Marines. While stationed in Southern California at age eighteen, Terry began to play with musicians, mostly from Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas. That was his introduction to Western Swing. He got to play behind many performers including Rose Maddox, Roger Miller, Tex Williams, Willie Nelson, Bobby Bare, Eddie Dean and others. A Marine sergeant with whom he played music nicknamed Terry "Sugarfoot," a name some still use today.

Honorably discharged from the Marines, Terry began touring with many musicians in Southern California, Northern Nevada, Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, Yukon Territory and Alaska. In Portland, Oregon, he played lead guitar for a local star named Jimmy Patton. In Albany, Oregon, he got to play behind Joe and Rose Lee Maphis.

Returning to Pocatello, he worked the local cowboy saloons and started going to college. He met and married his lovely wife, Elizabeth "Betty" Ann Bates Crouson, a native of Butte, Montana.

Terry and Betty moved to Auburn, California, in 1968. Terry attended college but also continued to play music. He even got to play twice at the home of then Governor Ronald Reagan. Graduating from college, he became a school teacher at a rural school in Penryn, California, where he taught 7th & 8th grade for a few years. But, he was talked into becoming a teacher of convicted felons at the famous Folsom State Prison. Once, on a prison musical trip to Vacaville State Prison, he was a member of the band playing behind a convicted felon named Spade Cooley.

Terry also backed up Sheb Wooley, Tommy Collins, Tex Williams, Rose Maddox and others in the Sacramento area.

Terry eased off playing music for a few years when he was asked to join the Army Reserves to get on a shooting team. He joined and stayed in the Reserves, retiring as a Command Sergeant Major. Once he retired from his prison teaching job, he began to play music again.

In 2003, Terry was inducted into the Sacramento Western Swing Society's Hall of Fame. Taking an active part in the Society, he has served as the Master of Ceremonies for a few of their Hall of Fame ceremonies in the past.

Terry still plays lead guitar and is quite accepted as both a lead guitarist and singer. He also plays the 5-string banjo.

MIKE FAAST

Mike Faast was born January 19, 1951, in Seattle, WA, to Pat and Darlene Faast. At an early age, Mike showed an interest in music and at age 13 his parents bought him a black and white Silvertone archtop guitar from Sears & Roebuck. They paid for lessons and his teacher, Mr. Al Ball, told his mother that if Mike made it through 3 years of lessons, it would probably stick. It did, indeed, and that was the very beginning of his future in music.



Mike has performed as lead singer/guitarist/bass player and band leader with several prominent Northwest groups, beginning in the late 70s with the famed Bill Garner. Mike has produced 8 CDs. Four of these are with his bluegrass bands, **Brothers Keepers** and **The Cascade Mountain Boys**. The remaining four are with **The String Cats**, **The Archtops**, and **Jangles**. The two **Jangles** CDs, *Hick Jazz, Volumes 1 & 2* - his special Western Swing albums - have taken his music worldwide. The Western Swing charts have placed both volumes of *Hick Jazz* among the Top 10 best albums and several selections as 'best songs.'

Mike has performed at numerous concert venues in the Northwest, ranging from a Western Swing barn dance to the Seattle Center during the Seattle Folklife festival. Mike has opened for Randy Travis, western singer/songwriter Don Edwards and also Johnny Gimble. **Brush Arbor** has also invited him to open for them.

Mike's love of Western Swing music began on an elk hunting trip to Colorado. After the hunt, his brother Patrick took him to the Flying W Ranch to enjoy a steak dinner and a concert featuring the **Flying W Boys**. Mike was hooked. He came back to Seattle and started woodshedding seriously. One year later he formed the **Coyote Choir**, with fiddle player Pete Martin and bassist Rod Bachman. Later on, Mike had an invitation to do a Western Swing gig in a Duvall barn so he hired jazz violinist Paul Anastasio, guitarist Ray Wood, and bassist Mick Nickolson. **The Jangles** were born. **The Jangles** are in their 15th year and routinely feature some of the hottest pickers in the Northwest. Their repertoire has remained true to the style of Western Swing and western music. In 2014 Mike produced the CD *Hick Jazz II* and is excited to see where the future takes them.

The NWWSSMS has been privileged to have Mike and his talented group perform at monthly showcases and also at HOF events held at the Eagles Club in Auburn, WA. Local clubs have also hosted his musical group. In the 1980s, Mike was a regular at the Issaquah, WA, Foothills Restaurant with Bill Garner, Bill Brooker and others who represented the NWWSSMS at that time.

Mike most recently performed Western Swing music at the Lights of Christmas at Warm Beach. He has performed there by request for several years.

Mike continues to perform at special events, ranging from wedding celebrations, grand openings of businesses, street fairs and any other parties that request Bob Wills or Western Swing music.

KENT HARRISON

James “Kent” Harrison was born May 1, 1929. He spent his young life growing up in the Great Depression. He has a memory of picking cotton in a pillow slip at seven years old. The family farmed sixty acres of low productive land with a team of mules that poorly kept a family of five fed and clothed. One of the luxuries was a battery powered radio that they used to listen to Bob Wills on KVOO, Tulsa, OK.



Kent’s brother, Charles, was playing in a band. They were considered good musicians for kids and Kent begged his parents for an instrument so he could join them. Finally, they got him a banjo from Montgomery Ward, which Kent didn’t like. It was returned for a mandolin but Kent spent most of his teen years playing guitar. In 1947, he made a trip to California with his brother to work in the grape vineyards. Soon after arriving, his brother arranged for them to play a 15-minute spot daily on a radio station in Victorville, California.

It wasn’t until 1948 that Kent picked up the fiddle. He had moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma, to live with his uncle, Huck Harrison, a fine rhythm guitar player. At the time there was a growing demand for fiddlers to play for the square dances. Kent and his uncle stepped up to fill the need. Soon they were in demand not only in Tulsa but the surrounding towns as well.

Kent married his sweetheart, Pat, on April 8, 1949. After living and working in Oklahoma, Arizona and New Mexico, they wound up in Norman, Oklahoma, in 1951, with Kent working for the University of Oklahoma. While in Norman, he played fiddle with many bands and played twin fiddles with some great fiddlers, including Famous Amos Hendrick and Russell O’Neal.

Kent spent a career in law enforcement as an officer and homicide detective, attaining the rank of Captain. He gained backstage entrance to the dancehalls, where he met numerous country and western stars, including the great Bob Wills. After retirement from Oklahoma City Police Department, Kent played fiddle with the **Bob Woods Band** and the **Shrine Mountaineers**.

Kent is currently part of the **Shrine Country Gentlemen Band**, playing parades and helping to raise money to support care vans that transport the children to the many Shrine Hospital burn centers. He also plays in the **Oklahoma State Fiddlers Band** which performs annually at the Oklahoma State Capitol for ‘Bob Wills Day,’ the Oklahoma State Fair and semi-annually at the Oklahoma State Fiddlers Convention held at the Sequoyah Lodge on Fort Gibson Lake in the Sequoyah State Park outside of Wagoner, Oklahoma. The conventions are held in February and August.

Kent is a long-time member of the WSMSS. He is the current President of the Oklahoma State Fiddlers, having been elected to the post in 2008.

RAY HARRISON

Ray Harrison was born in San Antonio, Texas on March 2, Texas Independence Day. So, yes, he is a Real Texan.

He is the youngest of three boys in the family. Ray's dad played some guitar and sang and loved music, so he passed it on to his sons.

Ray's oldest brother, Chuck, is a fiddle player and his middle brother, Bill, played steel guitar. But the family band lacked a rhythm guitar, so that was Ray's job. Later in life, he changed over to primarily bass guitar and singer.

Ray grew up playing all kinds of music, from Bob Wills, ET and Hank to Nat King Cole and Frank Sinatra, so he developed a taste for a variety of music early in life. Naturally, since the family band had a fiddle player, they often chose Bob Wills music. Ray joined his brothers, playing his first "Paying Gig" at 8 years old. He's been at it since.

During Ray's years in the US Navy (1961 - 1981) he performed all over the world, either with a ship's band or his own band in local night clubs. With the Navy, Ray played in Guatemala, Jamaica, Italy, Philippines, Japan, Venezuela and many other interesting countries.

Ray first started his own band while stationed in Oregon, at the age of 20. Since that time, he has had the opportunity to play with some really great musicians to further his knowledge and enjoyment of music.

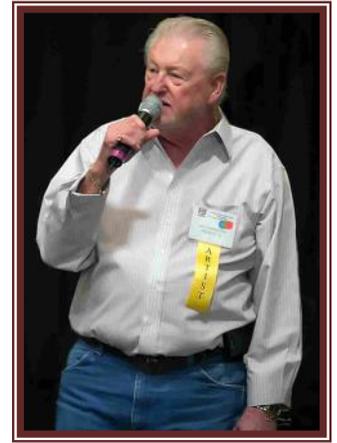
While in Hawaii, 1974-1977, he had the opportunity to expand his musical knowledge, learning from his guitar player and fiddle player. They were both very learned in their music. Once again, he had the opportunity to play some great swing music. They also had offers to back Nashville talent that came over to the Island.

Ray now has a trio that he plays with locally. In addition, he goes to a few steel guitar shows around the nation each year and this gives him a really great opportunity to sing and play with a lot of musicians that you've heard on records and CDs. He has been going to steel shows since 1990 and has had the pleasure of meeting and becoming friends with Bobby Black. Ray really enjoys singing with Bobby.

Ray considers that he has been blessed with the quality of musicians he has worked with over the years. It has been and continues to be one of the greatest joys of his life.

While in San Diego, CA, off and on from 1964-2005, Ray worked with Sam Necochea, Merv Cook, Ray Poe, Alton Simpson and other members of the Western Swing Society's Hall of Fame. Sam used to take him to Yuma for the Western Swing functions where he got to meet and play with many others.

Throughout his life Ray has always enjoyed the music that represents Western Swing.



SHARYN LEE

Always a western Washington girl, Sharyn Lee grew up listening to her dad play mandolin and fiddle and her grandpa play harmonica, singing *Buffalo Gals* and *Ol' Dan Tucker*. For more family entertainment Sharyn would get all the kids together and perform "shows."



Sharyn sang at the community hall and church. At age 16 she fell in love with a boy and his arch top guitar. Along with a drummer friend, they wrote and arranged a lot of songs.

At age 20 she left college and folk music to get married, start a new life and family, raising four wonderful children. During those family years, she always had a guitar nearby and played for community programs, weddings, funerals and church.

Sharyn was a member of the Old Time Fiddlers, Washington Bluegrass Association and the Country/Western Music Association (C/WMA). She jammed with many groups at the C/WMA. She became the jam session coordinator and it was at one of these jam sessions that Sharyn heard *San Antonio Rose* for the first time. Hearing that song was a turning point in her musical life. She didn't know what that music was called but she knew she liked it.

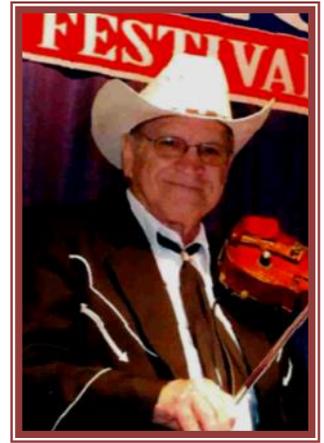
Soon after that (around 1992) she met Lew Packwood (*future husband and NWWSMS Hall of Fame Inductee*). But, it was a short time after meeting Lew, when Sharyn walked into the Seattle Western Swing Society's "Pioneers of Western Swing" festival in Tacoma, that she knew she would never be the same again. She realized that this music was her calling. And, as if it were meant to be, she was invited to join Hoot Gibson's band, **The Canyon Riders**. It has been Western Swing ever since.

After Hoot went to Hillbilly Heaven, Sharyn found gigs for the group and renamed the band **The Sundowners**. She has led this band for over 20 years. **The Sundowners** have recorded and released several CDs, two of which have been nominated in four categories for Academy of Western Artists awards in Texas in 2014 and 2015. **The Sundowners** have performed at NWWSMS showcases and during the annual festival for many years. Their music is being played by Joe Baker, Mike Gross, Billy Bowles and DJs in Spain, England, Ireland, South Africa and Australia. In April 2015, the Academy of Western Artists selected Sharyn Lee as "Western Swing Female Vocalist of the Year."

Sharyn has also been the Chairperson of the Decorating Committee for the Hall of Fame for many years. This year marks Sharyn's 15th year as Hall of Fame escort/hostess. She considers escorting some of the wonderful people that have been inducted into the Hall of Fame one of her greatest honors.

GENE “PAPPY” MERRITTS

*Biographical excerpts taken with permission from
The Bob Wills Fiddle Book, transcribed and arranged by Gene Merritts*



Gene Merritts began his musical career at the age of 7, first by playing the harmonica at school literary (P.T.A.) meetings in the country near Williamsburg, Pennsylvania. At the age of 9 he learned to play the guitar, a beginners' Stella that he bought for \$4.00 with pennies he had saved. After that, he bought a mandolin and learned to play it too. Every Saturday night Gene tuned into station WSM and the Grand Ole Opry on the family's Silvertone dry-cell battery-powered radio. Gene would listen to the likes of Roy Acuff, Bill Monroe and Ernest Tubb. In addition to listening to radio stations, he also learned from records.

In 1943 at the age of 14, Gene bought his first fiddle for \$5.00 from a close neighbor who needed money to get married. He soon learned to play it and a short time later was playing for square dances and on local radio programs. When the Korean conflict broke out he enlisted in the Air Force and was sent to San Antonio, Texas, for training. Three months later he was shipped to Korea and, while there, played for the Air Force Radio Network by way of wire recordings. He also toured with a U.S.O. Show from the States. They entertained the troops in the military hospitals in Japan. After an extended tour of duty, he was rotated back to the States and back to San Antonio, Texas. Here he served the remainder of his military term and was honorably discharged in October of 1953. During his stay in Texas, he played with several Western Swing bands, backed up Charlie Walker and others, and fell in love with swing music.

Gene played on various TV shows around the country. He played the Coast to Coast Radio Network Show every Saturday night. After a while Wilma Lee & Stoney Cooper hired him to play twin fiddles with Stoney. Gene worked with Stoney for a while and then left him to go to Denver, Colorado, where he worked on Channel 2 TV and played night clubs around town. While in Denver, he also had his own 7-piece Western Swing band that played in a huge club called the Four Seasons. While at the Four Seasons he backed up the Grand Ole Opry Stars from Nashville that needed a band. One of those stars, the late Webb Pierce, encouraged Gene to move to Nashville, Tennessee. In 1971, Opryland U.S.A. came into being. Gene got a job there after the second year it was open, playing fiddle in the Country Music Show at the Theater by the Lake. He played for that same show until Opryland closed, 24 years later.

In 1997, Gene joined the band of Jesse Lee Jones, **Brazilbilly**, playing at Roberts Western World in Nashville for 11 years. Then, 12 years ago, Gene joined **John England & the Western Swingers**. They play most Monday nights, from 6 to 10 at Roberts Western World and, for the last year, on Friday and Saturday nights at the Nashville Palace. Gene is proud to say he has been a member of AFM Local 257, the Nashville Musicians' Association, for the past 50 years.

BILL MITCHELL



Born into a musical family in West Texas, Bill was exposed to music from the crib. Fiddles, guitars, upright basses were a fixture almost in every house. Uncle, aunts, and his dad played together until Bill “came of age.” Being invited to play along in the house bands sparked Bill’s desire to learn the guitar. Exposed mainly to Texas breakdown fiddling and Western Swing, Bill and his guitar took their place in the rhythm section of the family band.

Not having time to play professionally, he spent his years playing for and with musicians such as Johnny Gimble, Randy “Snuffy” Elmore, Chuck Hayes, Jimmy Burson, Wes Westmoreland and Ricky Boen. Randy, Wes, and Ricky were all Branson musicians (at different times). Randy and Wes played for Mel Tillis.

Bill’s biggest inspiration and fan, came from Bill Gilbert, one of the founders of the Western Swing Music Society of the Southwest. Wanting to keep his special guitar player a good rhythm man, Gilbert caught Bill trying to play lead at the insistence of other members. “Stop that,” he said. “I don’t want to ruin a good rhythm man.” So, Bill continues to accompany, not lead.

Bill played with many fiddlers at the Texas Old Time Fiddlers Association contests. He even won the State Accompanist Contest in 1983 and was runner up the next year. During this time he was in great demand by many of the fiddlers who wanted him to join them on their records, then tapes, then CDs.

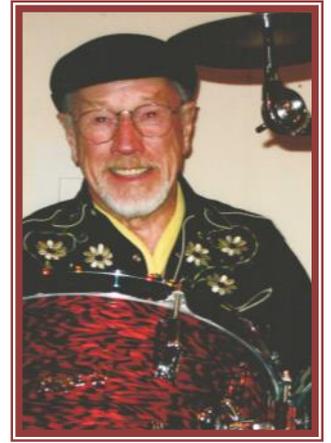
Bill was inducted into the Western Swing Society of the Southwest Hall of Fame in 2004 and as a Hero in the Cowtown Society of Western Music in 2010. He still plays regularly with bands from both of these societies.

Married to his wife, Jill, for 54 years has been his major achievement in life. Now he is blessed with three daughters, two sons-in-law, and five grandchildren. One daughter plays the fiddle and all of the grandchildren have been involved in music and dance through their respective schools.

Bill’s “barn” is the place for music for everyone. Jams are still held monthly in honor of Bill Gilbert and for the love of the music. Many people drop by just to jam a little and Bill is always ready and willing. Western Swing still holds a special place in his heart, but he is always willing to stray into Big Band, and early Pop.

DENNIS WALL

Dennis Wall was born in Portland, Oregon, on March 19, 1944. When he was three or four years old, Dennis would watch his dad play rhythm on a foot stool with a pair of brushes as they watched the Lawrence Welk Show on TV. Dennis started playing along with him, using his tinker toys as drumsticks. One Christmas Eve, his dad told him to get the round present from under the Christmas tree and play on that. The next morning, Dennis opened that round present and found his first snare drum.



Dennis began to teach himself to play drums when, at the age of 8, his mother bought him his first drum set. He would turn on the radio, tune it to a station that was playing big band swing and start playing. He likes to say he cut his teeth playing with the 'big boys.'

His first public performance was with the rock n' roll band, **The Kingsmen** (*before they became famous*), at a father/daughter dance held at David Douglas High School.

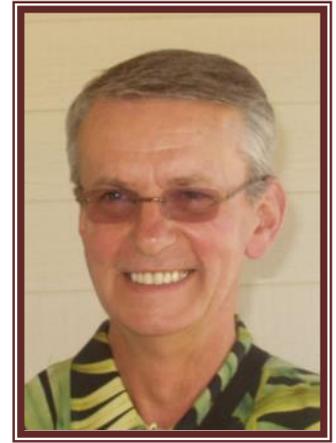
By 1965, he was playing professionally. Around 1968 he traded in the drums he had been using for a new set of Rogers drums. It seemed to be a perfect match. At this time Dennis owns three Rogers drum sets: blue onyx, black onyx and red onyx. But playing and collecting Rogers drums are not his only passions. Radio-controlled airplanes and motorcycles are right up there on his list. Dennis loves taking his bike off-road, exploring old mountain trails or touring with a group of riders (*not an official motorcycle club*) that call themselves 'Old Coots on Scoots.' He is also a member of the group's Patriot Guard.

Over the years Dennis has played with too many bands to remember, sharing the bandstand with musicians such as Eddie Weed, Bus Boyk, Keith Holter, James Mason, Jack Wohl, Dean Rankin, Darrell McKee, Bob Cobb, Chuck Hayes, Gary Howe, Joe Settlemyres and Nokie Edwards. He did three shows with Ferlin Husky, Hank Snow and Tex Williams. And the list goes on.

For the last twenty-some years, Dennis has been playing with a band called **Steel & Velvet**. They hold a public dance every Wednesday night at the Eagles Club in downtown Vancouver, Washington. Everyone is invited to come on down and join in the fun!

JAMES WALLACE

Jim Wallace was born January 8, 1943, in Oregon City, Oregon. His grandfather gave him a guitar when he was 11 years old. Jim formed a band in high school, playing mostly country music he learned from 45 rpm records.



After high school in 1961, Jim joined the Army and served his time stationed in Germany. While in Pirmasens, Germany, he sat in almost every evening with a trio at the Enlisted Members Club on base.

Completing his military obligation, Jim took a European discharge and played with several bands in several countries. Upon returning to the US in 1969, he formed a trio playing in Sitka, Alaska; Oregon; Washington; Colorado and Montana. He joined the **Judy Lynn Show** out of Las Vegas in 1972. Tanya Tucker was with the show for a short time before her eventual stardom. During this time, Judy performed several times at Harrah's in Reno and Lake Tahoe as well as The Flamingo and Stardust clubs in Las Vegas. Also while with Judy, Jim played the Milwaukee Summer Fest, the World Championship Rodeo in Madison Square Garden and several state fairs.

In 1988 he was the guest of Don and Sue Christenson at Scotty's International Steel Guitar Convention in St. Louis, Missouri, where he met Buddy Emmons, Jimmy Day, Herby Wallace, Brent Mason, Paul Franklin, and Wade Ray. Jim was invited to sit in with the house band, which included Tommy Williams of **Hee Haw** fame (*and an ex-member of **The Judy Lynn Show***) along with Bobby Caldwell.

Jim is presently retired from Fed Ex after many years and plays occasionally with friends in the Portland, Oregon area. In 2006 he sat in with his friends of many years, Keith Holter and Dean Rankin, playing with their group, **Longhorn**, for the NWWSMS festival in Auburn, Washington.

Jim thanks his wife, Kathleen, for all of her support through his musical journey. They reside in Vancouver, Washington, with the boss of the house, their Jack Russell, Misha.

VIRGIL WATTS

Sixty-Eight Years Playing Western Swing Music

Virgil Watts was born in Ripley, Oklahoma, in 1934 to Leslie and Nadine Watts. Virgil began playing music when he was 12 years old. He was inspired by Bob Wills' music and would run home every day from school during lunch to listen to the Western Swing music on the radio.



As a teenager, Virgil started playing in his first band with friends, Chris Craig, Don Sessions, RJ McBride and the 'Durango Kid,' Ted McMarnner. The boys played frequently around the Ripley, Oklahoma area. Later on, Virgil left Oklahoma for Wichita, Kansas, where he played country western and Western Swing music in various clubs and with many musicians.

Virgil left Wichita, Kansas, with Don Sessions and traveled to Kermit, Texas, where they played such clubs as Weaver's Bar, Hoss Ivey's West End Club and The Blue Room in Wink, Texas. While there, Virgil worked with Tony Capri, Troy Passmore, Durwood Haddock, Jerry Haddock, Eddie Miller, Larry Eduy and many others. From Texas, Virgil headed to Chicago, playing country western and Western Swing at various venues, including the Knickerbocker Inn, where he played with Bobby Braden, Don Erwin, Bobby Barnett, Judy Walker and Eddy Starr. While in Chicago, he also played with 'Buffalo' Johnson, Don Sessions and Milton Mounce. The owners of the Knickerbocker Inn were friends with Ernest Tubb and Don Session's song, *Thanks A Lot*, became a hit song for Tubb.

Virgil is known by fellow steel guitarists for playing with a smaller bar than normal, which is the result of Virgil playing a jam with Tiny Murphy in Chicago. Tiny left his bar, which was a small bar, on Virgil's steel. Tiny left with Virgil's bar. Virgil had to finish out the night with the little bar and has used a smaller bar since because he found he can move faster around the neck of the steel.

Virgil found his way to Missouri from Chicago, where he met his lovely bride, June. Virgil played on the Possum Holler Opry television show which aired in three states. He also played various clubs, fairs, festivals and opry shows throughout Northeast Missouri, where he had the opportunity to play behind some stars as they traveled through the area.

Virgil still plays dances and Opry Shows in Northeast Missouri, where he is featured playing traditional Western Swing songs. He has also appeared on other regional television shows. He has played the International Steel Guitar Convention for several years and has had the opportunity to play behind Johnny Bush, Leona Williams and others. The most pressure he ever played under was having Speedy West on stage watching him play but was relieved when Speedy told him he did a great job.

Virgil has been an inspiration to so many, including his daughter, Starla (Watts) Queen, and has spent a lifetime playing Western Swing, introducing some to this genre. He has a passion for the music and is known as one of the best steel guitar players in the area.