

The Severn Journal

Marathon Jam session raises \$26K for Fisher House

By Karen Sampson Hoffman

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Bluegrass musician join together to make music during the marathon jam. (Photo By Karen Sampson Hoffman)



A trio play during the 4th Annual "Mostly Bluegrass" Marathon Jam for Our Troops. (Photo By Karen Sampson Hoffman)



Some of the many items included in raffles and the silent auction during the marathon jam. (Photo By Karen Sampson Hoffman)



"Mr. Beardy" of York, Penn., performs during the marathon jam. (Photo By Karen Sampson Hoffman)

The room was packed and the bluegrass music did not stop for 12 hours on Saturday, Feb. 23. The 4th Annual "Mostly Bluegrass" Marathon Jam for Our Troops filled the hall at the Howard L. Turner American Legion Post No. 276 in Donaldson from noon until midnight. The result: More than \$26,000 was raised for Fisher House, the most of any of the four years.

"It went awesome," said organizer Neil Hamrick of the Wednesday Night Garage Jammers, one of the marathon jam sponsors. "We had a good crowd. We had 25 musicians at midnight. That's probably the largest group at the end that we've had."

The marathon jam benefits Fisher House, a temporary residence for the families of service members recovering from injuries sustained during the course of their duties. Many families have soldiers who served in Afghanistan or Iraq recovering from injuries or rehabilitating and learning basic skills again. In Maryland, there are three Fisher Houses: Malcolm Grow Medical Center at Andrews Air Force Base, Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in

Bethesda and Walter Reed – Forest Glen in Silver Spring.

"This is very similar to a Ronald McDonald House for military families," Hamrick explained. "They're trying to run the whole gambit to try to bring families out (to be with their service member). Fisher House always makes us feel like whatever we donate is a really big deal for them. They are very appreciative."

The marathon jam began four years ago, as the members of Wednesday Night Garage Jammers were looking for a way to use their musical talents in bluegrass music to help the community. The American Legion and Fisher House were natural fits, Hamrick said.

"It's a small group of us," he said. "It's been going on for about six years. About four years ago someone said, 'Let's try this for Fisher House.'"

The marathon jam was sponsored by various local companies and individuals, with several well-known corporations sponsoring from their local offices. The music drew in crowds throughout the 12-hour jam session, featuring local bluegrass bands and individual musicians all playing together. The legion hall was packed for most of the marathon jam. Pit-beef and picnic foods were served hot, along with cold drinks. In addition to the jam, there were raffles, 50/50 drawings and an on-going silent auction. The food and drink services were staffed by members of the American Legion who then donated all of the tips they were offered to the fundraiser. Hamrick said it was "heartwarming" to witness their generosity.

"We had a lot of musicians and a lot of good music," Hamrick said. "It's not often in a genre of music you can get 20 musicians together and it still sounds like music."

Among the musicians were the "iron pickers" – musicians who played all 12 hours of the marathon jam.

"We had seven people attempt it and six who followed through," Hamrick said. The iron pickers received shirts for their accomplishment; iron pickers from the previous three years wore their shirts to this year's jam.

"It gets bigger every year," said committee member Nila Caulder, who has been involved since the beginning. "We have such a good time putting it on. We have so many people who pour their hearts into this."

Caulder said there was an “abundance” of volunteers for this year’s marathon jam, noting Legion members were quick to offer to help for this year’s activities.

Committee member Denise Honey agreed with Hamrick and Caudler that this was one of the largest turnouts for the jam.

“We had a pretty good awesome crowd,” she said. “Everyone’s been pretty generous.”

There were more than 80 items for the silent auction; committee members collect items for the auction throughout the year.

“We start hot and heavy in September (with the planning),” Honey said. “We try to get corporate sponsors.”

This year Honey said the marathon jam was able to have GEICO and NCI Inc. as corporate sponsors.

Attending the marathon jam was County Councilman Peter Smith of Severn, who served in the United States Marine Corp for 14 years. Smith took the opportunity to thank the Wednesday Night Garage Jammers, American Legion and the many people who came out to play and listen for their generosity and support for Fisher House.

“On behalf of the soldiers at Fort Meade, I want to say thank you for your efforts,” he said to the crowd. “They could not have their loved ones near them during their recovery time if not for your efforts.”

The marathon jam topped last year’s record and collected \$26,472 as of Sunday for Fisher House. Hamrick said that donations are still expected to trickle in through March as other supporters submit their donations. Last year’s marathon jam raised \$24,293.

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