

Bringing bluegrass to the Senior Center

By Charlene Arsenault

July 12, 2010 - Like a lot of great bands, the Blackstone Valley Bluegrass Band erupted largely by accident. In 1998, a spot opened up for the Whitinsville Summer Concert Series and Bob and Dave Dick, Dan Nowlan and Ken Taylor stepped up to fill it.



Photo by Nancy Runkle.

"It was so much fun for us that we decided to continue playing occasionally as we could find gigs," said Dave, who play banjo, mandolin, guitar and sings. "The first several years we only played a few times a year due to other commitments. Eventually, we decided to pursue the band more seriously." Joining Dave are his brother Bob, who plays guitar, dobro, bass and sings, Taylor on bass, guitar and vocals, and Nowlan, who plays mandolin, guitar and also sings.

With four strong singers, the Blackstone Valley Bluegrass Band's sound relies heavily on thick, lush harmonies to complement the intricate stringwork.

In 2007, the Blackstone Valley Bluegrass Band released its first CD, "Debut," in 2007, and now hit venues about 30 times per year. The band will play Thursday, July 15, from 6-8 p.m. at the Millbury Senior Center, 1 River St. The show is free, and burgers, dogs, chips and soda will be for sale.

The band enjoys performing at different types of venues such as the Senior Center, because often, it is the audience's first exposure to the genre of music.

"Many times people comment that they really enjoy bluegrass after they have seen us perform," Dave said. "We present a very entertaining show. Even if you are unsure about bluegrass music, you can still have an enjoyable experience watching us."

Considering itself a mainstream bluegrass group, the band puts its own spin on the material, as any group worth its salt will do.

"As we grow musically we are bringing in more diverse sounds," Dave said. "Some tunes are from the pop-rock genre, as well as from the folk idiom. Our goal is to stay loosely in a traditional bluegrass form, but always trying to find outside material, and also standard songs and arrange them our own, distinctive way."

In this economy, all types of music have taken a hit. Fewer venues are open, outdoor festivals have cut their budgets, and people are spending less to go out. And bluegrass, Dave admits, is feeling the brunt of that, as well. Still, he has hope, and sees many musicians gathering around New England - particularly younger players - and thinks the style will become even stronger over the next few years.

With a second CD in the works, the band has a collection of new material it has been performing at shows this year and will be hitting the studio again very soon. "There are a lot of new sounds," Dave said. "We have a Byrds song, 'Full Circle,' a Dwight Yoakam song, 'Stayin' Up Late' and a Warren Haynes song, 'Soulshine,' in addition to some standards, and one new original instrumental."