

# Quarterly Newsletter

## Announcing the Big Thaw lineup!

In case you haven't seen our flyers yet, we're delighted to inform you of our lineup for our 29th annual "Big Thaw" Badgerland Bluegrass Music Association Spring Festival.

We are blessed with a remarkable group of bands this year. Sawdust Symphony will start the festivities off at 1 p.m. followed by Heartland Howlers, Pickin' Up Speed and Barred Owl String Band. Closing it all out will be Sugar Bush, a bluegrass supergroup of sorts comprising members of Chicken Wire Empire, The MilBillies and other local groups.

It all take place on April 6 at the Unitarian Church North, 13800 N. Port Washington Road in Mequon. Tickets will be \$12 for members and \$15 for non-members. And as a special sign-on bonus, we'll let anyone who decides to join that day in for \$10.

Of course there's more to the annual Big Thaw than great bands. There will also be a "jam room" with plenty of space to meet musician friends and have a run through a few tunes on your own. So if you're coming, remember to bring your instrument.

And of course, there will be food. Rumor has it that we may even have beer for sale (although the application for the alcohol license is still awaiting approval.)

If you've ever been to one of the events, you know that they are a wonderful time to bring out your whole family and expose them to the joys of live bluegrass music. We're hoping to build on past successes with an even bigger turnout this year. See you on April 6!

— Dan Shaw, BBMA vice president



*Sugar Bush plays the BBMA's Big Thaw annual concert in October 2021. The band featuring members of Chicken Wire Empire and The MilBillies is headlining this year's event.*

# Jam tunes for you

## by Linda Sandersen

When you go to a bluegrass jam, it is important to have your instrument tuned before you arrive. It may need a little tweaking when you take it out of the case in winter weather, as it's really cold outside and is much warmer indoors. It's a major shock to the strings!

If you can't keep up with the strumming tempo, you should sit on the sidelines until you are up to speed. A jam is a great place to learn by watching and listening. Be sure to bring along a capo for your guitar or banjo, as keys that are often used need a capo. I don't play in B or Bb without a capo as those chords are difficult to play on their own and don't sound very good in the bluegrass genre. They may work well in folk music, but that's not what we're doing here.

By playing out of a G or C chord pattern you can get a lot of good bass runs that are fun to play. Those keep the music moving and are exciting on their own. The majority of songs that you'll hear at a jam only use 3 chords, I, IV, V, always annotated in Roman numerals. Some minor chords are added from time to time, depending on the song. Put a song in your own best singing key.

Here is a good one to learn:

Keep on the Sunny Side – D or A  
A.P Carter

1. There's a dark and a troubled side of  
life.

There's a bright and a sunny side, too.

Tho' we meet with the darkness and strife,

The sunny side we also may view.



*Linda Sandersen is board member emeritus*

CHORUS:

I IV I

Keep on the sunny side, always on the  
sunny side,

I V

Keep on the sunny side of life.

I IV

It will help us every day; it will brighten  
all the

I

way,

I V I

If we'll keep on the sunny side of life.

- The storm and its fury broke today,  
Crushing hopes that we cherish so  
dear;  
Clouds and storms will in time pass  
away,  
The sun again will shine bright and  
clear.

CHORUS

- Let us greet with a song of hope  
each day,

Tho' the moment be cloudy or fair,  
Let us trust in our Savior away,  
To keep us, every one, in His care.

# Get to know your BBMA member band

# Sawdust Symphony

Sawdust Symphony has the double distinction of being not only the busiest but also the longest-running bluegrass band in Southeast Wisconsin.

The band played 121 dates in 2023 alone. Mike Mueller, the band leader and banjo player, has a goal of slowing down a bit this year. In 2024, he wants to keep it to 100.

The band was founded in 1999 with Mike on banjo; Al Brundage, who played with the group for 14 years, on mandolin; Al's son, Greg, who came up with the band name, on guitar; and Kurt Lang on bass. John Lozienecki succeeded Kurt in the bass spot and remained with the group for 13 years.

Sawdust Symphony's story would not be complete without some of the personal story of Mike Mueller, who has been the band's driving force for the past 25 years. Mike's love for the banjo began when he was a student at Nicolet High School and saw the movie *Deliverance*, with its famous "Duelin' Banjos" scene, for the first time. Following two weeks of harassment, his mother agreed to buy him a banjo and pay for a few lessons.

The next several years would find Mike often practicing his banjo anywhere from four to eight hours a day, a regimen he has since relaxed only slightly.

While he was studying at UW-Stevens Point, a neighbor heard him picking outside one day and came over to ask if he knew how to play Cripple Creek. Mueller and that neighbor, Don Bren, quickly became friends and, with Bren both singing and playing guitar, were off to making music together.

Two weeks later, Don had them trying out for Ed McMahon's *Star Search*. They passed the audition and were invited to a regional contest in South Dakota, which they ultimately could not attend because of the time commitment and travel expenses.

After graduating from UW-Stevens Point with degrees in both business and history, Mike returned to Milwaukee and began working in his family's food-service business. Following its sale to Kraft Foods in 1989, Mike was hired on as a sales representative. He remains employed at Kraft to this day.

Mike was bitten by the banjo bug again in 1999. Sawdust Symphony saw its first gig at what is now The Brick in Glendale.

The band's current lineup also includes Greg Brundage on guitar, Mark Vitkus on mandolin and Max Winkel on bass.

*Continued from Page 3*

John Steinman, a veteran Bluegrass player who recently moved here from North Carolina, will sit in for select gigs.

All the members sing and share a common desire to make Bluegrass Music as often as possible. Sawdust Symphony has released three CDs and is in the midst of recording a fourth, which will have a couple of original tunes from Greg. The band has had a spot at many a prominent festival, including Badgerland Bluegrass Music Association's The Big Thaw, Flatrock, Ladies of Bluegrass and the East Troy Bluegrass Festival.

Mike is the proud owner of two 1929 Gibson Granada banjos. His favorite was acquired from a collector in New York who had lent it to J.D. Crowe. Crowe had it for three years and is on record as calling it, "The best banjo I ever played." (It's practically a consensus among people who've been lucky to have it in their hands.)

Sawdust Symphony plays a great number of traditional bluegrass tunes but also includes plenty of classic country and rock tunes by bands like The Beatles, The Grateful Dead and The Rolling Stones.

You can of course see and hear them on Spotify and Facebook. But the best way to enjoy this splendid bluegrass band is to catch them at a live performance. The good news is that's not difficult.

As mentioned at the beginning, they're planning to play more than one hundred shows this year alone.

— Drew Horn, BBMA president



*Sawdust Symphony consists of Mike Mueller on banjo, Max Winkels on bass, Greg Brundage on guitar and Mark Vitkus on mandolin.*

# COMING SHOWS

## MARCH

- Sawdust Symphony, March 13, 7 p.m., The Brick Pub & Grill, 6343 N. Green Bay Ave., Glendale, [www.thebrickpubandgrill.com](http://www.thebrickpubandgrill.com)
- Sawdust Symphony, March 16, 9 p.m., Thurman's 15, 1731 N. Arlington Place, Milwaukee
- The MilBillies, March 16, 6:30 p.m., Black Lung Brewing Company Fox Lake, 115 Nippersink Boulevard, Fox Lake, Illinois, [www.blacklungbrewing.com](http://www.blacklungbrewing.com)
- Heartland Bluegrass, March 17, 1:30 p.m., Cork 'N Barrel, 503 W. Main St., Newburg, [corknbarrelnewburg.com](http://corknbarrelnewburg.com)
- Sawdust Symphony, March 23, 8 p.m., Pioneer Bowl Sports Center, 1801 State Highway 175, Richfield, [pioneerbowlsports.com](http://pioneerbowlsports.com)
- Sawdust Symphony, Highland House, March 28, 6 p.m., 12741 N. Port Washington Road, Mequon, [highlandhouse.com](http://highlandhouse.com)

## APRIL

- The MilBillies, April 5, 6 p.m., The Harmony Bar and Grill, 2201 Atwood Ave., Madison, [harmonybarandgrill.com](http://harmonybarandgrill.com)
- Sawdust Symphony, Heartland Howlers, Pickin' Up Speed, Barred Owl String Band and Sugar Bush, April 6, 1 p.m. to 6 p.m., BBMA's Big Thaw, Unitarian Church North Mequon, 13800 N. Port Washington Road, Mequon
- Sawdust Symphony, April 6, 8 p.m., Pioneer Bowl Sports Center, 1801 State Highway 175, Richfield, [pioneerbowlsports.com](http://pioneerbowlsports.com)
- Sawdust Symphony, April 13, 7 p.m., Archives Bar and Grill, 356 N. Pine St., Burlington, [www.archivesbarandgrill.com](http://www.archivesbarandgrill.com)
- Flat Creek Highway, April 19, 7 p.m., Main Street Outfitter, 513 S. Main St., Wauconda, Illinois, [www.msopub.com](http://www.msopub.com)
- Sawdust Symphony, April 19, 7 p.m., The Watering Hole, 2107 Velp Ave, Green Bay, [www.wateringholegb.com](http://www.wateringholegb.com)

## MAY

- Sawdust Symphony, May 10, 5 p.m., Grassway Organics, W. 2716 Friemoth Road, East Troy, [www.grasswayorganics.com](http://www.grasswayorganics.com)
- Sawdust Symphony, May 11, 7 p.m., Frets and Friends, 2105 University Ave., Green Bay
- Sawdust Symphony, May 15, 7 p.m., The Brick Pub & Grill, 6343 N. Green Bay Ave., Glendale, [www.thebrickpubandgrill.com](http://www.thebrickpubandgrill.com)
- Sawdust Symphony, May 18, 6 p.m., Petrifying Springs Biergarten, 5555 7th St. Pavilion #1, Kenosha, [www.travelwisconsin.com/pubs-taverns/petrifying-springs-biergarten-307249](http://www.travelwisconsin.com/pubs-taverns/petrifying-springs-biergarten-307249)
- Sawdust Symphony, May 26, 3 p.m., Hagemeister Park, 325 N. Washington St., Green Bay, [hagemeisterpark.com](http://hagemeisterpark.com)
- The MilBillies, May 30, 7 p.m., High Noon Saloon, 701 E. Washington Ave., Madison, [www.highnoon.com](http://www.highnoon.com)
- Sawdust Symphony, May 31, 5 p.m., Grassway Organics, W. 2716 Friemoth Road, East Troy, [www.grasswayorganics.com](http://www.grasswayorganics.com)

# OPEN JAMS

- October through May, the second Sunday of every month, 1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m., Dr. Dawg, 6969 N. Port Washington Rd. Glendale, 1:30 - 4 pm
  - Sundays from 1 through 4 at the Gig in Riverwest
  - First and third Thursday of the month at 6 p.m. at Old Germantown Brewery, W148 N12696 Pleasant View Drive, Germantown
- 

## JOIN THE BADGERLAND BLUEGRASS MUSIC ASSOCIATION

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Bluegrass instrument(s) you play:

Banjo  Guitar  Fiddle  Bass  Mandolin  Dobro  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Membership preference (All memberships are due July of each year)

New  Renewal

Individual - \$15  Family \$20  Corporate - \$30  Band \$40

**Mail your check or cash to: BBMA 11641 N. Lake Shore Dr., Mequon, WI 53092**