

# Born to be Wild

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by Stephen Pitalo

Wildwood Farms, with over 600 varieties of blooming daylilies, has been a landmark in Virginia's Floyd County since 2000. And although the botanical name for daylily is "Hemerocallis" which is Greek for "beautiful for a day," Judy Bowman and her family deliver beautiful bluegrass performances to the locals for *many* days courtesy of the concert stage they erected in 2013.

*"I guess the biggest bluegrass fans would be me and my sister, Sue," said Wildwood owner Judy Bowman, "who is our music coordinator and has her own gospel CD. Our love of music came from our Mom. We were a poor family and it was a wonderful way to learn about life. I will admit we really never knew how poor we were because our Mom gave us so much love."*





They grew up with bluegrass and old-time bluegrass music. “Our Mom loved to play and sing and we used to have music “jams” at our house all the time- we just called it getting together and “making music”. We also all learned to “flatfoot” when we were young. Other family members played too. My grandfather played the banjo and my uncle played the fiddle and taught my sister to play the guitar. There are six of us kids and we all love music.”

Bowman knew when the family started the store that there had to be a stage, and music dedicated to Judy and Sue’s mother, who passed away in February 2012.

*“She knew we had plans to build the store, but she never got to see it,” said Bowman.*

When the store opened on April 13, 2013, the first Wildwood bluegrass concert was underway, provided by local bluegrass group Too Young Too Old. Bowman said the event stage was also designed to be a community gathering place for local people to have some good clean fun on a Saturday night.

“We offered bluegrass or old-time music every Saturday for eight years and we also have music jams every 1st and 3rd Sunday since we opened. We loved the jams because we built it slowly over time and would regularly have 20 or more people playing and singing and we all became friends and it was just like going home.



“The most memorable events so far are the two benefits we did for two dear friends with health crises. The first was for

Brien Fain whom I consider to be one of the best old-time banjo players ever. His style was so unique and amazing. He passed away at age 44 the week we were to have the benefit and it turned out to be the most amazing memorial services. We had over 50 musicians come that day to 'play a song' for Brien. This included Larry Sigmon and many other musicians. The other benefit was for Timmy Mills, another friend who had cancer and was able to attend his benefit. This was also an amazing event with incredible numbers of people supporting this event. Timmy also was a very special bluegrass banjo player and we loved hearing him play. He had amazing talent. We had several bands play that day including Martha Spencer from The Whitetop Mountain Band. Both of these events raised a lot of money for medical expenses for them and their family but even more was what it did for their spirit and morale was amazing. We thought Brien was getting better but passed away suddenly the week before the event. Timmy was overwhelmed by the response at his benefit and all the people who came and supported him. This was when we knew that this place could do so much good and it was very humbling. We try to give back to the community and we're very fortunate to be in such a wonderful area. Every Saturday night show was memorable and special."



Among the reputable acts that have graced the Wildwood stage are Sammy Shelor, Carson Peters, and Iron Mountain, Presley Barker, The Slate Mountain Ramblers and Eddie Bond as well as local acts like The Country Boys, The Comptons, The Marshall Brothers and High Road, Steve Marshall and High Road, Too Young Too Old, Hubert Lawson and the Bluegrass Country Boys, The Southern Gentlemen, and Jus' Cauz Bluegrass.

Although they haven't attempted any online events during the pandemic because they have been focused on their business, Bowman said she misses it and hopes it will be revived soon.

“A night at Wildwood is about friendship, fellowship, dancing, listening to fine, quality music, and getting to share your time with others who care about each other,” she said. “Most of us here never meet a stranger. Even people who were traveling would repeatedly tell us that they’d never been anywhere like this and how much they loved it. It’s almost something palpable that’s so incredibly special and every week you knew how special it was but now because we haven’t been able to have music, it’s like losing a part of yourself and it’s painful to know how much life here has been changed. I’ll give you an example- We just found out that one of our lifelong friends passed away. She came to the music with her husband every week and had great friends here. We can’t go to her funeral and we can’t mourn for her with our friends here at the store.”



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