



Artwork by Emily Isbell

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Jon Lundbom (right)

Well, 2024 is a wrap, and I want to personally thank each and every member of the Central Texas Bluegrass for a fantastic year indeed.

The Annual Meeting was an absolute blast (more on that below), and we're already working hard to make sure next year's events are just as wonderful. In the meantime, though, we're doing our best to keep warm, keep dry, and keep pickin'.

Here's to a wonderful Holiday Season and a glorious New Year. I'll see y'all out there in 2025!

CTBA 2024 ANNUAL MEETING & SHOW RECAP

Huge thanks to all the CTBA members and friends who came out to **Sagebrush** on November 9th and made the **2024 Annual Meeting & Show** such a fun day!

We had some fine pickin'...



And of course we had our special guests...



Frank Evans (of the **Slocan Ramblers**) flew down from Nashville to lead a banjo workshop and perform with CTBA members **Scott Stegall** and **Dom Fisher**.

Frank played some solo banjo (he's won so many competitions it's hard to believe he's still allowed to compete) followed by some rip-roaring bluegrass with the local boys.





And then banjo legend **Greg Cahill** led a spectacular set of bluegrass from Chicago's own **Special Consensus**.

Greg was joined by **Dan Eubanks** on bass, **Brian McCarty** on mandolin, and 2023 IBMA Male Vocalist of the Year **Greg Blake** on guitar and lead vocals. Highlights (for me, at least) included "Carolina in the Pines" and Robbie Fulks's "Long I Ride."

Big, big thanks to everybody who made the long journey (and, of course, the long journey home) to play for us down here in Austin! The

2024 Annual Meeting & Show was so much fun and a perfect cap to a glorious year of Bluegrass here in Central Texas.

Photographs of Frank Evans, The Special Consensus, and Greg Cahill by Ken Brown

CTBA WILLA BEACH-PORTER SCHOLARSHIP UPDATE

The CTBA is thrilled to announce we awarded one final **ArtistWorks** scholarship for 2024! Congratulations to CTBA member **Phillip Brush**.



If you are interested in applying for any scholarship, head on over to CentralTexasBluegrass.org/Scholarship and apply today!

CTBA MERCH UPDATE



As y'all surely saw at the Annual Meeting, we have some new merch! We have **custom tie-dyed** shirts and our **1996 retro** shirts, both in **standard tees** and **ladies' racerback tanks**. And we have **new trucker hats!** The corduroy hats sold out IMMEDIATELY (need to get some more of those...), but we still have trucker hats available in all three colors. **Only \$20!** What a steal! Head on over to CentralTexasBluegrass.org/Store and grab one today.

CTBA BOARD ELECTION RESULTS



The CTBA membership has spoken, and I'd like to congratulate **John Downing**, **Hannah Giardino**, and **Roam Gunn** on their election to the CTBA Board of Directors. They have generously donated their time to the continued success of our organization, and we thank them for it. **Congrats!**

MEET YOUR NEW CTBA BOARD MEMBERS



"I'm **John Downing**, I play guitar, fiddle, and sing with **The Black Diamond Band**. I love going to bluegrass jams and shows, and have been doing so in Austin since 1983. I'm branching out to swing music and have been taking some lessons. My goal with CTBA Board is to promote bands, venues, and jams in Austin."

Hannah Giardino is one of our new board members and co-founder of the old-timey band **Strawberry Flats!** With a lifelong passion for music and professional social media experience, Hannah brings a unique blend of skills to the CTBA. She's eager to



help our community flourish by connecting with new audiences and ensuring the bluegrass community thrives in Austin and beyond.



"Hey, I'm **Roam Gunn** from Oak Hill. Lately I've been enjoying holiday time with family and friends and picking as much as possible. I'm excited to be joining the board and figuring out how I can best help the CTBA. Thanks for your support and Happy New Year!"

THANK YOU TO OUR EXITING BOARD MEMBERS



I'd personally like to thank **Cody Mabe**, **Celebrindal Roberts**, and **Natalie Turner** for their years of service on the CTBA Board of Directors. It has been a truly crazy run navigating leadership lurches, COVID lockdown, and oh little things like Oskar Blues suddenly and permanently shuttering ten days before the Annual Meeting last year. I would never call the work thankless, but neither would I call it easy. As they say, if it was easy, everybody would do it. Again, thank you all for serving. Your work is done, please don't be a stranger, we'll see you out there!

LOSSES

BY EDDIE COLLINS

Former CTBA President, **Stacy Holt**, passed away in November, following a brief bout with pancreatic cancer. Beyond his love for all genres of music, Stacy worked for IBM for



30+ years and was in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves. Stacy, along with wife Becky, moved to Austin in 1988 where they raised two daughters. Stacy dabbled in fiddle and drums and hooked up with Eddie Collins for banjo and mandolin lessons. From there he began frequenting the local jams and music festivals. He answered the call when asked to join the CTBA board, eventually becoming President and leading us through some challenging times. There are plans to share

some tunes in Stacy's honor at the monthly Bluegrass Open Mic to be held on Thursday, January 9th, 7-9 PM at the New World Deli, 4101 N. Guadalupe, Austin. CTBA owes a debt of thanks to Stacy for his tireless help in promoting the music we love that touches so many lives.

And **Spencer Drake**, founder of the San Antonio-based **Ledbetter Bluegrass Band**, passed away this past December. Playing primarily banjo, but also fiddle and guitar, Spencer formed the band in the late 1980's along with his wife, Kathy Connolly Drake, on rhythm guitar and vocal. They often played as a trio in the early days with Dave Reiff on bass. Others pickers who frequently joined them include Larry Miller on Fiddle, Jeff Long on mandolin, Christopher Teague on lead guitar, Christopher Borchers on bass and Katy Rose Cox on fiddle.



Kathy passed away in January of 2022. In addition to performing throughout Central Texas, the couple actively helped promote bluegrass events, first through the San Antonio Bluegrass Club in the early 1990s and later as members of CTBA. They both will be remembered as wonderful entertainers and all around great folks that always had a good word to say about their fellow musicians.

PEARL BLUEGRASS 2025

BY JEFFREY KING

The long tradition of the **Pearl Bluegrass Jam** is continuing for 2025 with new energy! We would like to invite all musicians and fans to come out and enjoy music in our peaceful country setting on the **first Saturday of the month**, except for September, when we do it on the second Saturday. The **Pearl Community Center** has four indodor jam rooms for all levels of players. The Community Center **opens on Friday afternoon for jam sessions** and **reopens Saturday morning**. The kitchen opens Saturday for **lunch at 11AM** and **Stage Shows begin at 1PM**. Jams will run Saturday evening until...?!? We even offer convenient **RV parking** with full hookups at

the location for only \$25 per night. **Admission is FREE** to musicians and spectators.



Like many live venues the Pearl Community Center took a major hit during 2020 and has struggled to get back to pre-2020 attendance. Our goal is to use 2025 as a springboard to get back moving in the right direction. If you have been to Pearl in the past you will remember the rustic setting, the friendly folks, and the great food prepared in the kitchen by the ladies in the local community (love those homemade pies!!) If you have never been, well here is your chance. If you would like to book a spot to be part of the Stage Show or just need more info please contact our **Board President Garrett Dickey** at (254) 595-1095 or **Jam Coordinator Jeffrey King** at (832) 514-1909.

DONKEYGRASS

Cabin 10 Presents

DONKEY GRASS

March 28 - 30, 2025

Fischer, Texas*

Friday 3/28/25



Katie Shore Band



Saturday 3/29/25



Billy Bright Band

*with Noah Jeffries
Trevor Smith
& Jesse Dalton*



The Cody Sisters



Righteous Intonation



Steve Smith with Tim May



Advance tix thru 3/24/25 - \$150

Friday only: \$65 Saturday only: \$110

Tickets @ www.cabin10.org

Kaylee Ludiker



* Solis Campground across from Fischer Hall

**Free camping on a first-ticketed first-served basis.
150 cap car/ trailer/ coach. Tent camping no limit.**

Our old friends (and CTBA Business Members) over at **Cabin 10** are back in business with **Donkeygrass 2025!** Advanced tickets are on sale right now, and camping is free but it's first-ticketed/first-served. So head on over to **Cabin10.org** and grab your tickets today!

NEW STRAWBERRY FLATS ALBUM



CTBA Member-Band **Strawberry Flats** released their sophomore album, "**Same Old Story**," this past October. This self-produced 12-track album features six original tracks, each thoughtfully paired with a hymn. You can see them perform the song "Ain't Necessarily So" from the album on **Fox 7 News**.



The band celebrated the release with a party at **Texas Keeper Cider**, kicking off the day with a jam field trip followed by live music with friends (and CTBA Member-Band) **Valley Flower**.

You can **find the album** wherever you stream your music.

Strawberry Flats is working on their first full-band studio album, slated for release in 2025. Stay tuned!

SPINNING WAX

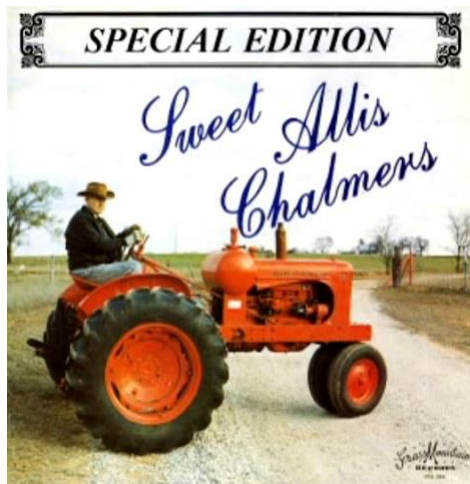
BY SIMON WAXMAN

You're a Nashville luminary. A bona fide country star. If this were 1963, you'd wear golden gabardine drenched in purple rhinestones and drive a car as long as your swimming pool. Your swimming pool would be long. But it's 2025, or some other relatively recent year. Sure, you've got hits in the bank and platinum framed on the wall. No doubt you've got money, and a Belle Meade estate to prove it - not to mention that "historic" winery you shouldn't have invested in, or the children's reality TV channel your cousin called a "sure bet," certain to "avoid any serious legal blowback." And the thrills? The swagger? The godlike command of the stage? "Come on," you tell yourself, "I'm a professional." As for the music - well, you remember how it used to put a smile on your face.

You're yearning for something more. You're *burning* for something more.

That something, late-career country headliner, is bluegrass. Nothing else replenishes the well of quote-unquote authenticity you drank dry in the licentious saloons of the demon city. Yes, bluegrass is what's needed. It is the dragon breathing soulfire back into your leaden heart. Just ask Alan Jackson and Dolly Parton. Patty Loveless and Willie Nelson and Sturgill Simpson. Try to ignore Robert Earl Keen's regrettable attempt.

The late Joe Diffie had his own bluegrass homecoming. He even called it that. About fifteen years ago, after charting five #1 country hits, the "Pickup Man" artist put out "Homecoming: The Bluegrass Album." It's got a few decent swings on it. It's also a reminder that Diffie did in fact have a bluegrass diet in his youth. Good bluegrass. So let's have a listen.



In the early 1980s, while scrabbling in factories and oil fields, Diffie performed and recorded with Special Edition, a collection of mostly-Oklahomans who cut an album on Grass Mountain Records, one of the labels under the aegis of Fort Worth-based bluegrass visionary Slim Richey. The resulting disc, entitled "Sweet Allis Chalmers," may be the best thing with Diffie's name on it. The album foreshadows Opry days to come with satisfying bluegrass offerings of the country-hued variety. These include an

ornate and appropriately energetic rendition of the George Jones chestnut "The Race Is On," which has Diffie taking the lead in the verses and the tenor in the chorus. There's also a somewhat-too-assured "When the Grass Grows over Me," a song credited to Don Chapel but maybe actually penned by his temporary wife Tammy Wynette. Diffie might have handled the vocals weepily, but instead he does so acrobatically, as is often his way during the thirty or so minutes of "Sweet Allis Chalmers." Canonical bluegrass singing tends toward the forthright, which can make Diffie's stunts and summersaults feel a little fussy. But he had A&R execs to impress.

Another estimable performer here is Billy Joe Foster, who would go on to gigs with Ricky Skaggs and arch Texas grassers Country Gazette. Foster was even a Blue Grass Boy, for a time. Hailing from the musical Mecca of Duncan, Oklahoma, hometown of Hoyt Axton and Ralph Mooney, Foster makes for a stark contrast beside Diffie. There's an ease and friendliness to Foster's delivery, even while he's picking the petunias out of the banjo and fiddle. His original song "Blue Memories of Mississippi" is harmonically and melodically creative, notwithstanding clear stylistic debts to the Osborne Brothers. (Both bands also recorded Jimmie Helms's "Searching for Yesterday," with Diffie warbling the lead vocals on behalf of Special Edition.) Another Foster original, "Hey Baby (You've Lost Your Hold On Me)," feels like a Country Gazette track in waiting. It moves nicely, by virtue more of pep than of speed. On the banjo, Foster mostly follows the Scruggs template, with a few of his own evolutions and flourishes. For the group's adaptation of the Creedence smash "Up around the Bend," however, Foster goes full-on Scruggs, an unexpected approach given that the rock 'n' roll

source material might lend itself to exploratory treatment. Foster fiddles that one too.

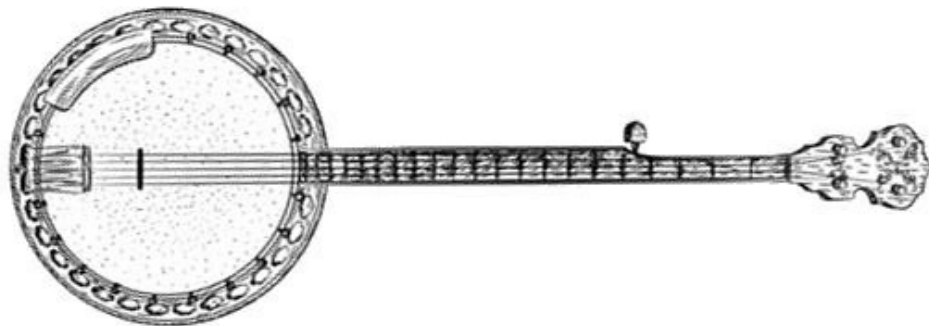
Guitarist Marc Keller and mandolinist Craig Fletcher get plenty of work throughout, and there is no effort to hide Terry Fletcher's electric bass, with its cottony swell and fuzz. Not that the band is ever other than tight. And the possible friction between Foster, who is all cocoa and campfires, and the diva-to-be Diffie never materializes. Quite to the contrary, Special Edition sounds cohesive and, indeed, distinctive. When these divergent musical creatures found common ground, it turned out to be new territory.

The title track of "Sweet Allis Chalmers," on which Country Gazette also left its mark, comes courtesy of the revered songwriter Bill Caswell. Though born in Austin, he grew up in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, which I'm told is "the primary city of the Bartlesville Micropolitan area." So he must have known his way around a fetchingly orange tractor of the Allis Chalmers brand—or, more likely, he'd seen one from the window of a passing automobile. Or in a magazine. Caswell was an adman, not a farmer, and his Madison Avenue legerdemain came in handy when writing a song. "Sweet Allis Chalmers" is about being lonesome, of course. But, like a sneaker ad or a country star's bluegrass homecoming, it's also a self-conscious mobilization of fantasy. Rural fantasy, in this case. Chess pie at a yankee Thanksgiving. Special Edition's recipe goes down just fine.

You can hear "Sweet Allis Chalmers" (1983), in its entirety, on [YouTube](#).

CTBA MEMBER-BANDS

The CTBA is proud to have the following **bands** as members and wholeheartedly recommend them for all of your Central Texas bluegrass needs!



Bird Calls
Black Diamond
Bobby Giles & Texas Gales
Dalton Harper Band
Four Fights Per Pint
The Greenlawn Rangers
The Hillsiders
Hot Pickin 57s
Long Prairie

Lost Patterns
The McKinleys
MoPac Traffic Jams
Randy Collier & Grassland
The Sieker Band
Strawberry Flats
Valley Flower
Wayside Bluegrass

If your band is interested in becoming a CTBA member, please visit CentralTexasBluegrass.org/Join or contact us at CTBA@CentralTexasBluegrass.org to learn more.

CTBA BUSINESS MEMBERS

The CTBA is proud to have the following **businesses** as members, please consider supporting them as they support Bluegrass in Central Texas!



Barton Springs Mill
Batch Craft Beer & Kolaches
Country Guitar Online
DonkeyGrass
Fiddler's Green Music Shop

Old Settlers Music Fest
Shades of Bluegrass
St. Elmo Brewing Co.
Texas Bluegrass Music
Vista Brewing

If you and your business are interested in becoming a part of the CTBA, please head on over to CentralTexasBluegrass.org/Join or reach out at CTBA@CentralTexasBluegrass.org.



' Possum with the WiFi Password

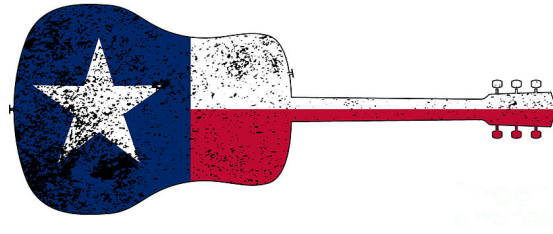
By your editor, Julian Root

About a year ago, this possum opined that Earl Scruggs - with notable challenge from Django Reinhardt - the world's most imitated musician. I have not changed my view. While there are surely millions more students of rock guitar than bluegrass banjo, their sources are varied. Page,

Beck, Hendrix, Blackmore, Clapton...icons and masters vary. Not so with bluegrass banjo. No matter who the student's preferred player, they MUST study Earl.

In the interim, I have discovered footage of Earl playing with his Revue on Season 2 (Episode 3) of Austin City Limits in 1977. While many bluegrassers both Texan and International have graced the stage, it is my belief that Earl was the first banjoist to play the storied show (albeit not with any sort of traditional outfit - Earl's shirt notwithstanding!). [Check it out](#). Looks like

Earl may have been out late with the Armadillo...
So, on this 101st birth anniversary, this possum rolls
over to you, Earl!



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