



Bluegrass Express

Interview: Giving Back, Paying Forward

By Claire Levine
Jayson Bowerman believes in music and community

This interview with Jayson Bowerman came out of a conversation about national electoral politics. Jayson said he felt he could be most effective working locally outside the political process. He then noted off a list of volunteer activities and projects that address fundamental needs in his Central Oregon community.

Jayson got his hands full even before dedicating hours to his community. But he practices everything he does with optimism, good cheer and gratitude. At 45, Jayson is a model for those of us at all ages.

All in the Family

Jayson inherited a legacy of helping, involvement and community participation going back generations.

His great-grandfather served a stint as Oregon's acting governor. His grandfather was legendary University of Oregon track coach and Nike co-founder Bill Bowerman. As a coach, Bill was known for the help and encouragement he gave young athletes and for supporting U of O track and scholarship programs.

Jayson's father, too, is noted for his energy and community-based activities—including establishing the annual Wheeler County Bluegrass Festival. A dedicated naturalist, he devotes his time to the Siuslaw National Forest.

Jayson grew up in Oregon's equivalent of a little cabin home



on the hill. It actually was an 800 square foot A-frame with a hand-dug foundation, because the young Bowermans parents couldn't afford to pay an excavator.

Enter bluegrass!

It had been determined that Jayson would learn a musical instrument. So when the little boy opened guitar, father and son took violin classes together. The fiddle led Jayson to Irish music and eventually to the mandolin. But it was Jay's dedication to community events that led to a bad case of the bluegrass bug.

Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote to elect them once a year, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to be in.

—Miguel Marín

"Throughout my life, dad would produce concerts and festivities for different nonprofits, including the Siuslaw Music Festival and his environmental projects," Jayson said.

Misty River played at one of these concerts, and it was there that Jay and Jayson learned about bluegrass at the beach from Carol Smith. ("One of you who know her can imagine Carol saying, 'You have to go!' You can't ignore Carol.")

In both Bowermans attended the five-day bluegrass workshop at Nulatoon, Oregon. There Jayson, who had been playing around with the mandolin under the influence of Tom Doherty, was introduced to the roots of bluegrass and to mandolin as played by the Father of Bluegrass.

"I studied with Tom Rouson, and David Gerson was there too." Especially to these experts gave Jayson a new sense of music. "It was a turning point, for sure."

The camp also fueled Jay's passion for music and turned him into a bluegrass addict. He now plays and performs on guitar, fiddle, Dobro and Waterbury-style fiddle guitar.

Woodworking as a way of life

Jayson had always been a tinkerer. As a teenager, he started building bicycle parts and frames.

Early on in his college career, Jayson realized that a career

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