

## AGES

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### Eclectic musicians

Sounds of Yesterday band mates either played instruments in their younger years, or grew up with musically inclined parents.

James, 66, sings and plays the Multi-Kord Hawaiian steel guitar and bass guitar. He first took lessons as a 10-year-old and played in a few different bands before retiring his guitar for 23 years.

"I really enjoy doing it," he said. "It keeps our minds active and gives us something to look forward to doing. It beats sitting around in the rocking chair."

Thompson, 72, is the group's lead and bass guitarist. He started playing in 1949, but "took a break" for 30 years.

"I like to play music, and it's a fellowship," he said. "We have a lot of fun when we're here playing together and when we're out."

Fitzpatrick, the group's lone woman, used to attend practices and shows with her husband and former band member, Bill. When he died three years ago, the remaining members encouraged her to take up an instrument.

"I didn't have to play because my husband was the musician," she said. "My thing was dancing. I took piano lessons in my 30s with the kids, but I just did it to have something to do."

A bass player and singer

in her youth, she now plays keyboard and helps with vocals. At 64, she's also the youngest.

"I like it and it keeps me out of trouble," she said. "I think they're a bunch of nuts."

Burton, who plays rhythm guitar and sings, filled in for a scheduled gig after Bill's death and has been with the band ever since. Although Burton's dad played guitar and his mother sang, he didn't take up music until he joined the service.

### Passionate hobby

Tagged the bluegrass of the outfit, Burton played in a bluegrass band in the 1960s. But, with a family to raise, he slid his guitar under the bed for 25 years.

Now, the 73-year-old can't get enough.

"I enjoy the camaraderie, and when I can look on people's faces and see the enjoyment," he said. "I love music. I would play if I never earned a penny."

"Bands are funny. You can get with the best musicians in the world, but certain groups don't jive together. We just kind of fit together."

They all split singing duties, except for Handt, who steers clear of the microphone.

"I'm the only one they won't let sing," he joked.

Handt jammed around with the group before starting

to play shows about a year ago.

"Norm's been a good friend, and he would fill in for Keith sometimes," James said. "Finally, we were like 'you might as well play.'"

An experienced rhythm and electric guitarist, 72-year-old Handt also picked up guitar in the military and performed with bands in taverns and lodges until 1970. After a 20-year hiatus, he started pickin' again for amusement.

"It's something to do," he said. "It's like fishing and hunting or whatever."

The band continues to fine-tune its play list, which includes about 200 well-known country, bluegrass and gospel classics spanning three decades.

"I think we could sit down and play for a solid eight hours," James said.

The group schedules between one and three shows per month, which is just fine with members.

"We don't go out and hunt places, we don't have to," Fitzpatrick said.

Most gigs are paid, but money is not the motivating factor, they said.

"We're good friends and we have a lot of fun," James said.

"We do it as much for our own entertainment as we do for other people," Burton said.

JOBS

## 2004-02-28 Keith Thompson Band part 2

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Fri, Mar 3, 2017