



Singing and playing in the new Union Alley Coffeehouse in downtown Washington are (seated, from left) Linda Boyer, Bob Carr, (standing, from left) Devon Mish, Rob Cuthrell, Duane Harris and Don Skinner. (WDN Photo/Kevin Scott Cutler)

BCTMA venture opens tonight

By **KEVIN SCOTT CUTLER**
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The Beaufort County Traditional Music Association is expanding its base and providing a new venue for those who appreciate live entertainment.

The grand opening of Union Alley Coffeehouse will be celebrated today from 6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., with music provided by Linda Boyer and the Thursday Night Jam Group. The coffeehouse is located in the rear of the new Inner Banks Artisans' Center on Main Street in downtown Washington.

A nonprofit venture staffed by volunteers, the coffeehouse will serve as a venue for established and emerging artists to perform. Although BCTMA is presenting the programs, the music will reach beyond the "traditional" music genre.

"The performances will reflect a wide variety of acoustic-roots based styles befitting the flavor of a small, intimate venue where folks of all ages are welcome," said Rob Cuthrell, a BCTMA founding member.

The venue draws inspiration from the 1950s and 1960s, when coffeehouses served as gathering places

for folk musicians and social activities, according to Cuthrell. Nonalcoholic beverages, including soft drinks and hot coffee, and snacks will be available for purchase.

The Union Alley Coffeehouse plans to host "showcase" performances with auditorium-style reserved seating, as well as BCTMA performances with a more informal seating arrangement.

"I encourage everyone that enjoys live music to come visit the Union Alley Coffeehouse to see a show," Cuthrell said. "A lot of work by

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BCTMA supporters and volunteers has gone in to making this project happen. Bob Henkel and the Inner Banks Artisans' Center deserve a big "Thank you" for sharing this vision and making this performance space available. The BCTMA hopes that the Union Alley Coffeehouse will attract folks to downtown Washington who are looking for good, live, fun entertainment."

After tonight's open house, the entertainment continues Friday at 7:30 p.m. with a "showcase opening performance" by Beaufort County's own Carolina Still. Reserved tickets are \$12 in advance; tickets at the door are \$10 each, if any are available.

On Saturday, mandolin virtuoso Michael "Barney" Pilgrim will present a BCTMA concert. Tickets for that event are \$5 a person for BCTMA members and \$6 a person for non-members.

The schedule for the remainder of March includes performances by The Moore Family Band (March 19), Lightnin' Wells (March 20), Nathan and Hayden Drake (March 26) and Amelia's Mechanics (March 27). According to Cuthrell, additional performances are being scheduled for April. Performance schedules will be available on the venue's Web site (unionalleycoffee.com) and in the Washington Daily News.



Linda Boyer (left) and Sylvia Mish rehearse for tonight's open house at the Union Alley Coffeehouse in Washington. (WDN Photo/Kevin Scott Cutler)

The venue has limited seating, so reservations for a particular show are always encouraged and recommended, Cuthrell said. General admission is available at the door until the performance sells out. Ticket sales are by cash or check only; for reservations, call 252-945-5515 or e-mail unionalleycoffee@gmail.com.

Cuthrell expects the new venture to be ongoing and throughout the year.

"We'll continue doing it as long as it's successful, as long as people will come to play and hear it and as long as we can get people to volunteer to do it," he said. "We're committed to it for at least the rest of this year."

BCTMA is a nonprofit, performing-arts association that receives advisory and administrative support from the Beaufort County Arts Council. Joey Toler, BCAC executive director, is enthusiastic about the new venue.

"If you haven't seen what the BCTMA has done here, it is truly amazing," he said. "Another great presenting venue for Beaufort County! They have an impressive schedule of programming planned. What they're doing is really making a difference in the arts community."

For information about becoming a member of the Beaufort County Traditional Music Association, visit bctma.org.