



EAST TENNESSEE STATE  
UNIVERSITY



# MUSIC FOR THE HEART

*An ETSU Bluegrass, Old-Time, and Roots Music  
Studies Publication*

Fall 2023



In a word: “thankful.”

How often we find ourselves moving full speed ahead and paying attention only to that which lies in our narrow field of view. This seems to be especially true for musicians, whose sights are always focused on the next tour, city, interview, research project, collaboration, single release, etc. But every now and then, it’s important to catch our breath, turn our eyes beyond the periphery, and look back on that which stands in our wake.

This brand-new newsletter highlights the incredible work going on in our program and is a way of showing thanks to all who are part of our ETSU family. After all, it is you – our students, faculty, staff, alumni, friends, and supporters – who continue to make ETSU the “Home of Bluegrass, Old-Time, and Roots Music in Higher Education.”

We wish you a restful holiday season and prosperous New Year ahead.

Dan Boner, Program Director

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## Big Wins at IBMA!

ETSU was recently represented by over 38 faculty, alumni, and students at the 2023 International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA) World of Bluegrass Conference in Raleigh, North Carolina. Ten faculty and alumni from the ETSU Bluegrass, Old Time, and Roots Music Studies program were honored with nominations for IBMA Awards. Four took home awards in their respective categories.

Artist in Residence and GRAMMY winning artist Tim Stafford was awarded Songwriter of the Year. Stafford's band Blue Highway took home Event of the Year for their annual Blue Highway Fest.

Guitar Player of the Year was presented to faculty member and GRAMMY nominated musician, Trey Hensley. Alumna Grace van't Hof received an IBMA Industry Award for Graphic Designer of the Year. ETSU Bluegrass, Old-Time, and Roots Music Studies program director Dan Boner received the Momentum Award for Mentor of the Year.

Nominees also included alumna Becky Buller for Gospel Recording of the Year; alumnus Adam Miller with the Lonesome River Band for Song of the Year; alumni Tim Stafford and Gary Hultman of Blue Highway for Vocal Group of the Year; alumnus Lincoln Hensley and alumnae/faculty

members Aynsley Porchak and Anissa Burnett with the Tennessee Bluegrass Band for New Artist of the Year; alumni Tray Wellington, Katelynn Bohn, and Josiah Nelson with the Tray Wellington Band for New Artist of the Year; ETSU Appalachian Studies professor Ted Olson for Liner Notes of the Year and Event of the Year for his collaboration on Doc at 100. Momentum Award Nominees included alumnus Josiah Nelson and alumnus/adjunct instructor Alex Genova for Instrumentalist of the Year. Industry Songwriter of the Year nominees included Becky Buller and Appalachian Studies alumnus Thomm Jutz.

The winners were announced at the 2023 IBMA Conference Sept. 26-30. For more information on IBMA, visit <http://www.ibma.org/>.

Over 38 ETSU alumni and faculty members appeared in bands at the IBMA World of Bluegrass street festival, including the ETSU Bluegrass Pride Band, Bluegrass Pythagoras, the U.S. Navy Band Country Current, the Thomas Cassell Band, the Tray Wellington Band, the Burnett Sisters Band, Trey Hensley, Prairie Wildflower, Mike Compton, Becky Buller, Seth Mulder and Midnight Run, Darin & Brooke Aldridge, Ryn Riley and Appalachian Roots, Tim Stafford, and the Tennessee Bluegrass Band, to name a few.

# New Artist in Residence

By John Lawless/*Bluegrass Today!*

**Tim Stafford  
(pictured with Dan  
Boner) returns  
home.**



The Bluegrass, Old-Time, and Roots Music Studies program at East Tennessee State University has announced that Tim Stafford will serve as their Artist in Residence for the 2023-24 academic year. This recurring one-year position was created to give students in the program the opportunity to study directly under recognized professionals in the industry, and gain from their wisdom and experience.

Stafford, guitarist with Blue Highway for nearly 30 years, and a noted songwriter and recording artist on his own, is also a graduate of ETSU's bluegrass program, and says that he can't wait to

get started in this new role.

"I'm really looking forward to working with students at ETSU this year as the Artist in Residence. I feel there are great opportunities to showcase the program and its students in a variety of ways. I look forward to teaching guitar, bluegrass bands, and unique songwriting classes and performances with our students. I was there when Jack Tottle started the ETSU program, and it's amazing how far it's come and how far it can go. It's gonna be fun being part of that!"

*(continued on next page).*

Prior to his time with Blue Highway, Stafford was a member of Alison Krauss & Union Station and was featured on their Every Time You Say Goodbye album in 1992. More than 250 of his original or co-written songs have been recorded by roughly 75 different artists.

Also announced today are two new faculty members in the Bluegrass, Old Time, and Roots Music program for the coming year. Holger Olesen, also an ETSU alum, will come onboard to teach the Instrument Building and Maintenance class. Recently graduated with his degree in Engineering Technology, he taught guitar building at ETSU as part of his graduate project. Holger is currently the bass player with the Little Roy and Lizzy Show.

He is likewise psyched to get started.

"I'm excited to become a part of the ETSU Bluegrass, Old-Time, and Roots Music program as an instructor in the guitar building and instrument repair classes. Since previously being a student myself, I have always felt that the program has given students a wide knowledge of many different aspects of the music business, and I'm glad to be a part these new instrument focused classes that will expand that knowledge even more."

Also new this fall at ETSU is guitar whiz Trey Hensley who will teach acoustic guitar and electric guitar, and lead country bands in the program. Now well established within the Nashville scene, Trey currently performs in a genre-busting duo with reso-guitar ace Rob Ickes where he shows off his impressive vocal chops as well as his blistering guitar playing.

Like Tim and Holger, Trey is honored to begin at ETSU.

"I'm immensely proud to be an instructor in the ETSU Bluegrass, Old Time, and Roots Music Studies program. ETSU is such an amazingly bright spot within the music community, and to get to share my experiences with the students is an incredible honor."

## ***Keep the Music Alive!***

**Loyal donors to the ETSU Bluegrass, Old-Time, and Roots Music Program Studies at ETSU sustain the program in many ways, such as supporting scholarships, equipment purchases, and other program needs.**

**Your year-end gift today will ensure greater horizons for this program. To make a gift, visit [etsu.edu/give](https://etsu.edu/give) and designate your gift to the "ETSU Bluegrass, Old-Time, and Roots Music Studies program." Or, to discuss a gift with one of our staff members, send an email to John King at [kingjw2@etsu.edu](mailto:kingjw2@etsu.edu).**

***Thank you!***

**ETSU BLUEGRASS, OLD-TIME, AND ROOTS MUSIC STUDIES**

# **DOWN HOME TAKEOVER**

**\$15**  
AT THE DOOR  
\*FREE WITH STUDENT ID

**DEC. 3-6**

**6PM DOORS OPEN  
7PM SHOWTIME**

**300 W MAIN ST, JOHNSON CITY**

**WATCH VIA FACEBOOK LIVESTREAM  
@ETSUBLUEGRASS! 7PM EDT**



ETSU BLUEGRASS, OLD-TIME, AND ROOTS MUSIC STUDIES PRESENTS



JULY 8th - 12th

# ETSU BLUEGRASS 2024 SUMMER CAMP

AGES 11-19

instructors & faculty



Kalia Yeagle



Trey Hensley



Ben Bateson



Camp Director  
Aynsley Porchak



Jeremy Fritts



Angelica Branum



Dan Boner

+ more!



A deep dive into Bluegrass music!

\$550 OFF CAMPUS | \$750 ON CAMPUS

MEALS & LODGING INCLUDED

SPECIAL EVENTS & GUEST ARTISTS

SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE



EAST TENNESSEE STATE  
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Bluegrass, Old-Time, and  
Roots Music Studies

VISIT [ETSU.EDU/BUEGRASS](https://etsu.edu/bluegrass) FOR MORE INFORMATION

# See you in Florida!

**ETSU Bluegrass Pride Band**  
**Saturday, December 2**  
**Honeymoon Island Bluegrass Festival**  
**Dunedin, Florida**





# Jim and Kathy Kortge

## *From a Chance Meeting Comes a New Legacy.*

*Jim and Kathy Kortge, taken shortly after Jim completed chemotherapy treatment for lymphoma. To celebrate finishing chemo, Jim treated himself to this new banjo.*



It's a story of chance encounters, dreams being realized, and a love for bluegrass music, one that extends from Michigan to the mountains of Tennessee.

For Jim Kortge, his college preparation led him into a career in engineering physics, but he always loved music. He played violin, then viola, through high school and big band/jazz guitar for years. When he heard Earl Scruggs' "Foggy Mountain Breakdown" he had to learn banjo.

He and his wife Kathy (who plays Dobro) would often travel from their Fenton, Michigan home to various bluegrass events, including one at Silver Dollar City in Branson, Missouri.

There, the first of several fortuitous meetings

took place.

The Kortges met singer-songwriter Becky Buller, an ETSU graduate and later recipient of 10 International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA) awards. They chatted about bluegrass and Jim inquired about taking fiddle lessons from her. Buller told them she would be teaching at Steve Kaufman's Acoustic Kamp in Maryville, Tennessee the following year.

It was the beginning of a friendship between Buller and the Kortges. Through the years that followed, they stayed in touch and would reconnect at bluegrass camps and festivals."

*(continued on next page).*

And it was in those discussions that the Kortges learned about the Bluegrass, Old-Time and Roots Music Studies program at Buller's alma mater, ETSU.

And then another chance meeting happened – this time at a bluegrass festival in Marshall, Michigan.

It was after an evening jam session when the Kortges struck up a conversation with a young bass player, Katelynn Lowe. She had perhaps stopped by to jam with them because one of her friends was there. Katelynn shared with the Kortges her desire to finish college and study bluegrass music.

"We asked her if she had heard of ETSU," recalls Kathy, who had become familiar with the Buccaneers' program from contacts with professor Dan Boner and Becky Buller.

"Turns out, she knew all about ETSU and, in fact, it was her dream school," Kathy added.

Knowing that Michigan was home to many people who had a deep love for bluegrass and old-time music, the Kortges created a scholarship designed to pave the pathway for a student from Michigan to attend ETSU. And for Katelynn, who was from Michigan, this meant that she would be able to attend ETSU.

The Kortges stayed in touch with Katelynn and followed her success in the bluegrass program. They even traveled to Johnson City to attend her ETSU graduation ceremony. Today, Katelynn (now Katelynn Bohn) travels the country playing bass with the Tray Wellington band.

"We saw how much that scholarship program did for Katelynn and the success she is now enjoying, and we knew we wanted to do more, and help other students," Jim said.

The Kortges made a second gift to the ETSU Bluegrass, Old-Time, and Roots Music Studies program to create more scholarship opportunities for students.

They also donated three instruments – a Blueridge BR180 guitar, a Weber F9 mandolin, and a Gibson A9 mandolin – to the ETSU program, for use by students as they learned different instruments.

"It is so gratifying for us to see how our gifts are being used to enrich and impact the lives of so many other students," Jim said.

**Bluegrass, Old-Time, and Roots Music Studies is part of the Department of Appalachian Studies at ETSU, which offers a bachelor's degree with concentrations in the bluegrass profession, old-time music studies, Scottish and Irish traditional music studies, and audio production. The department also offers a graduate certificate and Master of Arts in Appalachian Studies, with online classes available. ETSU's Creative Arts Scholarship is available for out-of-state and international students to attend at an affordable tuition rate. For more information, email [bluegrass@etsu.edu](mailto:bluegrass@etsu.edu) or call 423-439-7072.**