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The 1937 Flood performs at 4 p.m. Saturday, June 9, at Jim's Steak & Spaghetti House in downtown Huntington.

1937 Flood about friendship, camaraderie, string band music

1937 Flood Band to play at Jim's Steak & Spaghetti House's 80th Anniversary

By **DEREK HALSEY**
For The Herald-Dispatch

HUNTINGTON — The 1937 Flood band has been performing its version of diverse and fun string band music in Huntington and around the Tri-State since the early 1970s. The group has had a few different lineups over the past four decades, but the theme of playing a wide variety of great tunes persists.

The current roster of the 1937 Flood Band includes founding member Charles Bowen, Doug Chaffin, Sam St. Clair, Randy Hamilton, Michelle Lewis and Paul Martin. Past members include Dave Peyton, Chuck Romine, Roger Samples, Dave Ball, Jacob Scarr, Stewart Schneider, Bill Hoke and Joe Dobbs. Dobbs was the owner of the Fret and Fiddle Music Store and taught hundreds of local musicians how to play an instrument before his death in 2015.

The 1937 Flood will perform at 4 p.m. Saturday, June 9, as part of the 80th anniversary celebration of Jim's Steak & Spaghetti House. A local institution that features the "President John F. Kennedy Ate Here" booth, the restaurant has been serving food in Huntington since Jim Tweel started the eatery in 1938.

Jim's Steak & Spaghetti House is located 920 5th Ave., Huntington.

"We started the band in 1973, and I have been a member for 44 years," Bowen said. "Dave Peyton, Rog Samples and I started the 1937 Flood band, and then I met Joe Dobbs in 1975 at the Dogwood Festival. As a matter of fact, Dave and I used to

play at the Dogwood Festival on the lot that the Civic Center (now the Big Sandy Superstore Arena) would be built on. The first Dogwood Festivals were held there in a muddy field under a tent. Peyton and I walked around then and serenaded the crafters, and Joe Dobbs and his wife were there as crafters. Our version of the story is that Joe said Dave could use some help, so he went home and got his fiddle and we all played together until Joe died three years ago."

Bowen was born in Charleston, grew up in Ashland, went to school at the University of Kentucky then moved to Huntington when he got married. Bowen and his wife Pam both worked at the two local newspapers here in Huntington back in the day — The Herald-Dispatch and the now-defunct afternoon paper The Advertiser.

Bowen and the 1937 Flood play string band music that is not necessarily bluegrass music. The group is rarely confined to one genre.

"There is a difference between what we play and bluegrass music," Bowen said. "People that do not know much about Appalachian music will think everything is bluegrass. We call ourselves 'West Virginia's Most Eclectic String Band.' The string band tradition is much older than the bluegrass tradition. We tell people that we can give you an evening of swing tunes, an evening of old folk songs or we can give you an evening of Appalachian folk songs or jug band tunes. Really, the tradition of the string band was that they came to the

party and tried to play whatever anybody asked for, and that is our tradition as well. If folks back in the day heard something on the radio and asked the band, 'Do you know this?' they would try it."

The 1937 Flood band has had a long history with Jim's Steak & Spaghetti House.

"We played at their 65th anniversary," Bowen said. "On our website, 1937flood.com, there is a video of WSAZ-TV talking to us and the people at the restaurant back then. The restaurant's founder, Jim Tweel, played the bass, and his brother Bill Tweel had an orchestra. So, Jim would go out and play with the orchestra and then come in the next morning and open up the restaurant."

The 1937 Flood and its members still enjoy playing live music after all of these years.

"This band is like family to me," Bowen said. "We have a different plan than a lot of bands. Our whole idea was to play the music and enjoy it. I always leave it to the other members of the group whether we get out and play in public a lot or not. I'm all for just getting together and learning how to play the songs. If we spend the whole year sitting in a room together playing music, I am happy. If we get out and do shows, that is fine, too. It is really all about the music and all about friendship with us. I have friends in other bands who say that music is what they play between fights with each other. We hardly ever argue, and there are just no fights in 1937 Flood. It is about friendship and camaraderie, and there is not a whole lot of ego in the band. I think this group is very special, and I'm fortunate to be a part of it. It is family that you choose to spend your time with, and it is pretty deep."