

Annual Bluegrass Festival draws fans from all over

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THE DAILY NEWS

BULLHEAD CITY — Pickers and grinners alike gathered on Saturday for the Colorado River Bluegrass Festival at Davis Camp.

Some reminisced about growing up in West Virginia, while others boasted of their son's skills on a mandolin. Some were "hard-core bluegrassers" who think if it's not bluegrass, it's not music. Others were drawn into the genre when they saw George Clooney in "O

Brother, Where Art Thou? "

The three-day festival — currently in its seventh year — featured about a dozen bands from Arizona to South Carolina, and booths selling anything from banjos or lemonade to T-shirts and CDs.

More devoted fans who travel from festival to festival say they're drawn to the scene for its family atmosphere. And they're drawn to bluegrass for the authenticity and purity

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DEADLY SONG: Cliff Wagner of Cliff Wagner and the Old #7 Band laughs as he sings a song about a country boy being killed by a transvestite at the 7th Annual Colorado River Bluegrass Festival Friday afternoon at Davis Camp.

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The Daily News



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NO CLAMBAKE HERE: Amelia Sloan, left, and her sister Klarryssa, from Pismo Beach, Calif., dance to the sounds of the bluegrass band Lost Highway Saturday afternoon at the bluegrass festival at Davis Camp.

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that sets is apart from slickly marketed commercial hits.

"It's family oriented," said Hope Reed, board member of the Southwest Bluegrass Association, which lists 1,700 members. "Everyone knows everyone else when you go from festival to festival."

"You have to experience it to have that feeling. The music is honest. It started way back when," said association president Lloyd Morris. "It's the heritage of America. It's the foundation. ... It's just something that gets in your blood."

Inspired by the music of the Scots-Irish immigrants of Appalachia, bluegrass is distinctively acoustic and characterized by mournful lyrics and a lightning-fast banjo. It was fathered by a Kentucky native in the 1940s and has enjoyed several revivals.

And although it doesn't attract crowds of young people, Morris said one of his association's aims is to preserve the bluegrass tradition for future generations.

Alan Mills, who plays bass for Lost & Found, says bluegrass embodies many values not found in today's commercial music.

"The music I grew up listening to — the singer had identity and the musicians were competent," he said. "One of the nice things about bluegrass music is there's

still a chance for a younger person to gain identity, where country music you're a slave to the dollar.

"One of the neat things this type of music offers is a fan can participate in it. They can gather around the campfire and socialize. We don't run and hide because there's not too many people trying to tear our clothes off."

Mills says bluegrass is more genuine because musicians draw their inspiration from the pains and joys of real life.

A song he wrote called "Wild Mountain Flowers," for example, tells the story of a couple he knew from attending church in Virginia. They never married, Mills said, and the woman died of a tumor in her 40s while the man stayed single the rest of his life.

On his way back from North Carolina, Mills saw a patch of wildflowers on the side of the road and pulled over to scribble down the song's lyrics.

"It was just something I wanted to sing about. I just wanted to tell a story," Mills said. "You're thankful your fans accept what you sing about and you just keep on singing."



The 7th annual Colorado River Bluegrass Festival continues from 9 a.m. to approximately 5 p.m. today at Davis Camp, north of the Laughlin bridge.

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