



BANJO BOB AND THE RIVER ROAD RAMBLERS

By Sally Smid

Retirement usually holds a variety of adjustments and often complex challenges. With the increased numbers of area seniors, perhaps such concerns are becoming more evident. There are many who have a myriad of hobbies and interests and many retirees wait to enjoy and cultivate such pass times knowing they would have more time after leaving the work force. However, there are many who struggle to decide what they really enjoy doing or how they would like to spend their golden years. Some can even feel undervalued, isolated or fretful.

In that regard, there is a group of seniors in the Mallorytown area that seems to have found a very rewarding outlet. The River Road Ramblers began as an informal group that enjoys music, but the group has become an important opportunity for fun and fellowship as well. They started meeting at Bob Covey's house with three or four musicians. Bob is an accomplished guitar and banjo player who received much of his training on line. Eventually he even gave guitar lessons. It would definitely seem that he is much of the group's inspiration and momentum. Bob was employed at a variety of plants in Brockville and has been playing for over 45 years. He and his wife Elaine, retired clerk of Front of Yonge Township, began singing and playing together shortly after they met. Their music became part of Christmas celebrations, family events and music nights. They have also been part of musical contributions to local church services. Bob

began playing the banjo probably out of his love for bluegrass music. Bob and Elaine are the parents of three sons and have seven grandchildren. It is clear that their talents and love for music have influenced their family as their PHD son Richard is a composer and professor of music in PEI. Another son, Ben, is a trained opera singer living in New York City.

The band got their name from the fact that most of the members live along the St. Lawrence River. "Banjo Bob Covey" and a few others however live further inland. The group is now in its third year of getting together and has lots of good times playing all kinds of music from bluegrass, older country, gospel, and even some rock n' roll. Members have varied music preferences but they have learned to have some "give and take" with their music repertoire. Several members of the group received their guitars as gifts. As member Dave Wells explains, "The guitar I received wasn't totally foreign to me as I had played in a couple of bands in high school and was part of a group from Mallorytown called the Village Squires where I played piano and organ at local teen dances for a few years." Other "Ramblers" include Bev McKerracher, John Cowan, Dale Senecal, Dave Warner, Jack Turner, Dave Rowan, and Ron Morrison. The group gets together on Tuesday evenings at the Community Centre in Mallorytown for a couple of hours. They invite others to join in. Some listen or sing along and a few have even received help in learning to play an instrument.



"There were those who were terrified to play in public at first," explained Bob. The "Ramblers" have entertained at senior's homes, boat cruises, concerts and "kitchen parties" which have totalled about a dozen "gigs". Many are familiar with their appearances in the garden gazebo behind the Mallory Coach House in the summer. Banjo Bob and the River Road Ramblers are booked for more appearances in 2018.

What began as an enjoyable hobby and love for music has become a wonderful social outlet and gratifying pass time that also brings much joy to others, many of whom are seniors similar to themselves. The River Road Ramblers demonstrate that getting older does not have to be a time of slowing down or feeling less valued. It can be a time of learning new skills, developing new interests and making special new friends in the process. With our growing senior population, it is vital that our older citizens stay engaged and active. In so many ways they have so much to give to our local communities! **LH**