

Polkas, waltzes, schottisches

Staff report | Posted: Thursday, September 9, 2010 12:00 am

Gemutlichkeit is the German word for hospitality, geniality, the sense of welcome you can only find at home, and the Auf Gehts German Band has been bringing that to its audiences in the Palouse region for many years.

The name, which roughly translates as "Let's go!" is taking on new meaning as the group prepares to perform at the Moscow Farmer's Market at 10:30 a.m. on Saturday, and the 40th anniversary of the Odessa Deutschefest on Sept. 18. It will be the band's first appearance at the Odessa festival, which also will feature Moscow's own Fabulous Kingpins.

Longtime member Dave Seamans, hornist in the group, recalled the beginnings of the group. In the 1960s, a band had played before the Summer Palace theatre performances when they took place at the livestock pavilion, east of WSU's French Administration Building. When the theatre department moved to Daggy Hall, the band no longer played, however, Seamans saved the music, and augmented the library with music from the former Sampson-Ayres music store in Spokane.

Around 1986, his daughter, Ruth, was a student musician at Pullman High School, and she and several other players thought it would be fun to play German band music for the Kiwanis pancake breakfast. Not long thereafter, then-superior court judge Wallis Friel invited the German band to play at his campaign events. Friel cited the Endicott German dinner as a huge success and the beginning of the German band being in demand at local fairs and other such events. It has been in existence ever since.

This year Auf Gehts has 12 scheduled performances, including the Palouse Empire Fair, Latah County Fair, Moscow Farmer's Market, Uniontown Sausage Feed, Palouse Ice Cream Social, the Oktoberfest for the Lewiston Homebrewers and at the Banyan's Restaurant at Palouse Ridge golf course.

A core of eight to 10 regular members keeps the group active. The music the band plays is traditional German, Austrian, Scandinavian music, featuring tunes that have their origins in the singing and dancing festivities of Western Europe. In their local performances it is not unusual for people to dance to the polkas, waltzes, schottisches, and even the Chicken Dance.

This year's appearance at the Lentil Festival Pancake Breakfast featured Butch the Cougar as guest conductor and the WSU Women's Volleyball team dancing to the Chicken Dance. The idea to perform in Odessa started last year at the Latah County Fair. Trombonist Denise Snider overheard Esther Brelsford and Seamans say they thought it would be fun to go perform there, and she decided to see if it could be arranged.

"It was only natural that we should play at the Deutschefest, and I thought the loyalty of players like Dave and Esther deserved making a special effort to do something out of the ordinary," Snider said.

Current members include Becky Behre, Mary Ullrich and Rob Ronald on clarinet; Peggy Flaherty on tenor saxophone; Seamans and Brelsford on horn; Mike Sohns on tuba; Nancy Phelps, Jan Simonsen,

Patrick Behre, Joseph Behre on trumpet. More recent additions to the group include Tim and Sandy Price on saxophone and bass clarinet, respectively; Doug Torrance on clarinet; Nathan Schubkegel on tuba; and Snider on trombone. The members of the band also are part of the Pullman Concert Band.

Perhaps it is *gemutlichkeit* that has helped keep the group together for all these years. The events where the band plays usually feature good food and people who are ready to relax and have a good time.

"We thought it was so much fun we just kept doing it until now," Seamans said.

If you go

n WHAT: Auf Gehts German Band

n WHEN: 10:30-11:30 a.m. Saturday

n WHERE: Moscow Farmers Market, Friendship Square, Moscow

n COST: Free