

Band History:

Long before the Knuckle Dusters were a concert band entertaining audiences from the nation's capitol to New York City they were a modest guitar duo from humble beginnings. Founders Scott Spearly and Tim Mitchell met through Spearly's wife, Traci, who worked with Tim in a residential facility serving individuals with severe head injuries and disabilities. At that time, in 1994, Scott was unemployed and a stay-at-home dad for their newly born son, Matthew. While waiting to return to a construction job over a long cold winter, Spearly learned to play bluegrass banjo on an instrument his father bought him. This was Scott's first time learning a stringed instrument on his own after playing strictly blues harmonica in an all originals band for four years prior. Tim, who was a fluid flat picker schooled in the styles of Doc Watson and Norman Blake, would eventually meet Scott and form a lasting friendship centered on playing music. Spearly would took up guitar under Tim's tutelage and by 1997 they were seeking opportunities to play in public.

After knocking on some doors and getting the word out, the duo picked up some work at local bars and small gatherings in Pennsylvania and Maryland. By the time 1999 had rolled around the two had asked Paul Mackrell to join them, who was a friend of Tim's and a champion claw-hammer banjo player. Paul regularly took 1st place every other year at the Deer Creek Fiddler's Convention, the rule being winners from the previous year could not compete in the next. Tim and Paul had experience playing together and an already deep repertoire of old-time fiddle tunes from their years of playing civil war reenactments together. Paul was also developing his own unique rock & roll, boogie-woogie, chicken pickin' style of guitar.

The three began playing more regularly in the tri-state area of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, the geographically unique hub where they lived. They became regulars at The Market Cross Pub, The Red Bat's Nest and Casey's in Pennsylvania, The Broad Axe and Bentz Street Raw Bar in Maryland, and for private functions, corporate picnics and the like in West Virginia. By the time 2001 rolled around they were showing up in newspapers regularly: The Herald Mail, Public Opinion, Patriot News all ran various spots and features about the band highlighting their musical styles and deep repertoire, as well as original music Spearly was writing. Additionally, in 2001 the trio also began to court their good friend and fishing buddy Richard Pryor to play fiddle on some gigs. Richard would come and play at Rue's, the longtime staple dive bar and honky tonk in Mercersburg, Pa., the town in which Spearly lives, but it would take until 2009 when he retired from the postal service to get Rich to play regularly with the band.

In the meantime, the Knuckle Dusters would start utilizing Evan Price, a resident and music educator in Smithsburg, Md., and Robbie Caruthers a longtime area fiddler and woodworker from Boonsboro, Md. in their line-up. At times when neither were available they invited area fiddle greats Alexander Mitchell and Steve Hickman on gigs. But for many years Evan and Robbie were the regulars, each offering their unique styles and friendships as they traveled the highways. At the height of their gigging Evan would play with the band for a multimillion dollar fundraiser at the Central Park Zoo for the Wildlife Conservation Society, while Robbie would fiddle at a number of national museums with the band including The Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Adding talents was also a focus of the Knuckle Dusters for a number of years in the early 2000's. Mindy Morris joined the group from 2001-2003 adding vocal styles and harmonies she developed at Shenandoah's music conservatory. When Mindy married and moved away Spearly asked his longtime friend and guitarist/vocalist Gary Peck (from McConnellsburg Pa.) to join on with the group. Gary sang for audiences on select gigs from 2003 to 2007. By 2008 things took a great turn for the Knuckle Dusters with the addition of Spearly's son, Matthew, on upright bass. Matt had been in Tuscarora School District's music programs since the 4th grade playing violin, and when he was ready to quit in middle school his dad asked him to consider switching to bass. Matt took to that like a duck to water, benefiting from the instruction of several great music educators, including Keith Smith, who coached Matt to county and district performances and related awards. Matt would begin gigging with the Knuckle Dusters by his 9th grade year, and continues to do so today whenever he is home visiting from Ohio, where he took up residence and employment after earning his PhD from Ohio State University.

Since those years, Tim Mitchell retired from playing with the Knuckle Dusters, and Paul Mackrell suffered a stroke in 2019 paralyzing the right side of his body. Both men continue to influence the repertoire and musical spirit of the band despite their absence from playing. Bringing the past to a close and helping to write new

chapters with the Knuckle Dusters modern day, James Calhoun has been playing bass with the Knuckle Dusters since 2023, logging in performances at local festivals, weddings, church concerts, and most recently for congressmen and business leaders from North Carolina and South Carolina at the Capitol Hill Club in Washington D.C.

For over 25 years Scott Spearly has stayed true to the American roots music he longed to learn so long ago. Over that time he has also released a number of albums of original songs, many of them influenced by the music of the Knuckle Dusters. The band continues to take on select event bookings in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia. Below is a list of venues the band has played in over their nearly three decades of musicianship and performance:

NATIONAL & LOCAL MUSEUMS:

The Smithsonian American Art Museum, the B&O Railroad Museum, the National Sporting Library & Museum, the Textile Museum, the Calvert Marine Museum, the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley, and the Carroll County Farm Museum.

CIVIC & COMMUNITY: *Nationals Park, The Capitol Hill Club, National Harbor, Glen Echo Park, the National Parks Service, Center for the Performing Arts - Luray, the Cosmos Club, the Sulgrave Womens Club, the Kentucky Business Council, Veterans Administration Hospital, Winchester Hospital, American Red Cross, Toys for Tots, the Midwest Alliance of Sovereign Tribes, Wildlife Conservation Society, the Central Park Zoo, Easter Seals, ABATE, the National Conservation Training Center, the Pen-Mar Club, the Elks Club, the Hamilton Club, the Quincy Ox Roast, the Ohr Hamizrach Congregation, Holy Transfiguration Church, Thurmont Public Library, the Alexandria Virginia Public Library, The Drum Point Club, The Willowsford Conservancy, Board of Child Care WV.*

UNIVERSITIES & SCHOOLS: *American University, University of Maryland, James Madison University, Georgetown University, the Jemicy School, the Stone Ridge School, Evergreen Elementary School, James Buchanan Middle & High Schools.*

HOTELS, CASINOS, RESORTS & CORPORATE CLIENTS: *Maryland Live Casinos, the Ritz Carlton, the Crystal Gateway Marriott, the Inner Harbor International Hotel, Old Line Distillery, the Gettysburg Hotel, the Washington/Dulles Marriott, the Hublersburg Hotel, Edward Jones Investments, Penn National Golf Course, Borders Books & Music, McKnight Cycle, Quad Graphics, Phoenixville Hospital, the Jackson Clinics, Tranquility at Fredericktowne, the Village at Sunrise, Emergent Bio-Solutions, the Waynesboro Country Club, Lansdowne Resort, Heider Real Estate D.C., Truckin' America, the Snowy Owl Farm*

RESTAURANTS, TAVERNS, WINERIES, BREWERIES:

Big Cork Winery, Hershey Vineyards, Liganore Wine Cellars, Old Line Distillery, the Canary Grill, In-Like-Flynn Tavern, the Gingerbread Man, the Market Cross Pub, the Black Horse Tavern, the Bullfrog Brewery, Bombay Blues, The Bats Nest, Rue's Food & Spirits, Casey's, Franco's Music Lounge, the Bentz Street Raw Bar, the Broad Axe, the Stray Cat Cafe, Rococco, the Wolf's Den, Port City Java, the Shamrock, Miguel's Cocina & Cantina, Dewey's Pub, Black Eyed Susans, Mr. Henry's, the Mountain House, the Lakeview, Red Heifer Winery, B&T's Unique Bar.

FESTIVALS & WEDDINGS:

The Henrico County Harvest Festival, the Mayfair Festival of the Arts, the Bellefonte Festival of the Arts, Smithsburg Pride Days, the Homecoming Day Festival, Upper Providence Community Fair, Avalon Music & Arts Festival, Western Maryland Blues Fest Weekend at Rococo, Bluemont Concert Series, Market Days, and the Smithsburg Peach Festival, Arts in Action.