



Dedicated to the preservation of folk, traditional and acoustic music.

Quarter Notes

Spring Issue, March 2009

Plank Road's Regular Events



SING-AROUND

Two Way Street Coffee House
1st and 3rd Saturdays - 2:00-4:00pm

BLUEGRASS JAM

Two Way Street Coffee House
4th Saturday - 2:00-4:00pm
- **except 3-28-2009**, look for us at the Naperville Bluegrass Festival instead, <http://www.bluegrassmidwest.com/details.php?id=2>

Plank Road All Volunteer String Band Practice

Jones Family Music School
630-916-1356
2nd Saturday - 2:00-4:00pm

LAST THURSDAY: "It's Our Turn!"

Two Way Street Coffee House
7:00 - 9:30pm
Last Thursday of every month.
A monthly unplugged open mic for high school and college age students only.

Go to www.plankroad.org and/or www.twowaystreet.org for full details!

Upcoming Events



Old Time Barn Dance Party

April 4, 2009
8:00pm

See page 3 for details.

The Third Annual University of Chicago Dance Weekend

April 10-11, 2009

Band: Great Bear Trio; Caller: Beth Molaro
<http://fac.uchicago.edu/danceweekend.html>
More info: Cheryl Joyal at clmjoyal@aol.com
630-357-6905

Quarter Notes

Vicki Ingle | Editor

Jennifer Shilt | Graphic Design

We welcome ideas for articles or photos you'd like to share, please send them to vingle@comcast.net

President's Message



Bob O'Hanlon

President, Cheryl Joyal, presided over her last meeting and turned the reins over to new President, Bob O'Hanlon.

Once the members arrived, we started with some music, then took a break from that to conduct our annual meeting. Cheryl gave a "state of the organization" summary, then some Awards of Appreciation were presented to people who have contributed a great deal to Plank Road and to folk music in general, over the course of many years. Those award winners were:

Marianne Mohrhussen, a long time member of Plank Road, served as President several times, and in many other capacities throughout the years. She is currently the caller at our barn dance parties.

Carol and John Sommer have been stalwarts of our organization for many years; they volunteer at events, serve on the board, sponsor concerts and, in general, provide leadership.

The Jones family for their unbelievable contribution to our kind of music over the years, and their constant support of Plank Road. It was pointed out that many, if not most, of our members have learned or sharpened their musical skills from the Joneses.

Juel Ulven of the Fox Valley Folklore Society has been one of the leading folk music advocates in the Chicago area for many years.

Cheryl Joyal was recognized, as our outgoing President of two years, for her efforts in keeping Plank Road going. Her warm personality and tremendous enthusiasm made her a joy to work with and lifted the spirits of the entire organization.

I was then introduced as the new President of Plank Road and addressed the members briefly before the music started up again. As we move into 2009, I hope to build on the current foundation which has been put in place by past presidents and members. We will continue with the popular activities and look for new ways to involve our members in events and activities which are consistent with the

Continued on page 2



Carol and Cheryl



Marianne and Vicki

Sustaining Artist Feature February Sky

By Vicki Ingle

Traditional singer and Celtic guitarist Phil Cooper and songwriter and singer Susan Urban have been fixtures of the Chicago area Folk scene for about a quarter century each. In addition to performing in various combinations, Phil has been continually active in the various activities of the Fox Valley Folklore Society and, from 1986 through 2002, Susan was the manager of Chicago's late lamented None of the Above Coffeehouse, along with booking a number of other Folk venues over the years. They have each also served a term on the Board of Folk Alliance Region Midwest ("FARM").

Although Phil and Susan became an "item" in 1989, there are still many folks who are astonished to hear that they are life partners at all, let alone for that long! The logistics of Phil and Susan's lives are such that they still live 50 miles apart, but they're looking forward to the time when they'll be able to live full time in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, where they presently spend as much time as they can. They've been in different bands over the years, while occasionally appearing together for an on-stage song swap. Although they always appreciated each other's music, until recently they never thought of doing it together - it seemed that Phil's traditional orientation would contrast too jarringly with Susan's songwriting. But in 2007, with the time rapidly approaching when they will move to the U.P., they decided to try arranging their songs, and formed the duo "February Sky."

In "February Sky," Phil sings and plays his own arrangements of traditional songs and tunes on six string guitar and cittern, and he also interprets a number of carefully chosen songs from the best of modern Folk song writers such as Dave Carter and Jez Lowe. Susan is a writer of Trad-influenced story ballads and humorous "slice of life" songs. She accompanies her singing on guitar, six string banjo, mountain dulcimer, and hand percussion instruments.

Much to Phil and Susan's surprise and delight, they've found that a combination of carefully arranged old and new songs addressing the widest possible range of experiences - joy, sorrow, humor, tragedy - complete with vocal harmony, intricate instrumentation and thoughtful stagecraft, is very appealing to



Susan Urban and Phil Cooper

Folk audiences. Phil and Susan believe that Folk Music is a continuum, and whether the songs are self-penned or have a history hundreds of years old, as long as they speak to the human condition and the human heart, they carry on the Folk Music tradition.

February Sky is currently touring around the Midwest and over the next few years they plan to expand their range across the U.S., and maybe even to the British Isles. In Fall 2008, they released their first full-length CD, self-titled "February Sky," a collection of 18 songs and tunes, to which the response so far has been overwhelmingly positive.

You can hear samples of February Sky's music, and find out when they'll be playing at a venue near you, at their website, www.februarysky.com, or at their MySpace page: www.myspace.com/februaryskyfolk.



Joke From Susan

How do you make a small fortune in folk music?
Start with a large one.

President's Message - Continued from page 1

overall goals of the Plank Road organization. I would welcome comments and suggestions from any and all members.

The slate of officers for 2009 are: Bob O'Hanlon - President, Charley Smart - Vice President, Cathy Jones - Treasurer and Cheryl Joyal - Secretary.

Board members: Jeanne Halama, Dave Humphreys, Vicki Ingle, Chris Kuhn, Jennifer Shilt, Kristen Shilt and Carol Sommer

The annual meeting was great and I look forward to an exciting 2009. **-Bob**



Cathy, Anne and Tom Jones



Cheryl



Juel

MUSIC INSTRUCTION

Songwriting

By Bruce Holmes

The most common question I get asked about songwriting is, where do you start? The answer is, anywhere. You take something and you start adding. It can be a phrase that pops into your head, or a melody, or an interesting thought, a guitar riff, or a feeling you get listening to somebody else's song.

The most common misunderstanding about songwriting is that it comes easily. I think this is because once in a blue moon one of our fraternity will have a song handed to them. They're plinking at the piano and suddenly a song comes out. It takes ten minutes and it's finished. If that ever happens to me, I'll tell the story too. Because it's a much better story than, "Well, I sat there at the table and struggled for hours, day after day, and finally I pieced this together." Mostly, songwriting is a whole ton of hard work. And the more effortless a song appears, the more hard work went into it.

And yet inspiration is also important. I think what distinguishes songwriters from most folk is the capturing and nurturing of inspiration. We all have interesting ideas. Songwriters do something about it. I have a rule: write it down, record it, do some-



Bruce Holmes

thing. I've got pads of paper all over the house and in the car. I've got a little dictation device I can hum into if I've got a melody in my head. If I'm lying in bed at 3 a.m. (and unfortunately a lot of good ideas don't show up until then), and something pops into my head, I'll drag myself out of bed and capture it. It's the price you pay if you're in this line of work. So you accumulate ideas. And sometimes when I get up the next morning I'll look at what I scribbled in the middle of the night, and wonder, "What on earth made me think that was worth remembering." But sometimes I'll have something inspired. So then I sit down and write. Most that comes out is garbage but, I don't worry about that because sometimes that line of garbage will lead to an even better phrase that I rather like. This goes on for days. For every song I've ever written I can show you ten or twenty pages of scribbles. Slowly a song takes shape. I find little nuggets amidst what I've written

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Dancing!

By Juel Ulven

You should try to come out some time! To me, Barn Dances are the best example of why I do this stuff (and why someone needs to). Great traditional music and dance shared with friends and neighbors from our "intentional community" (based on shared love and interests and not geographic proximity) are what has kept this Folk-life stuff going...Old-time music was made to dance to. When we confirmed that at the first Fox Valley Folk Festival in 1977, we knew we had strengthened our connection with past traditions and needed to continue the dances as part of our mission. That was also when we started to realize that Folk Music is just one spoke on the Folk-life wheel that includes Folk Music, Dance, Storytelling, Folk Arts and Folklore. They all influence, support and enhance each other.

Take Care,
Juel Ulven
juelu@aol.com | www.foxvalleyfolk.com



Barn Dance Demo at Lombard Prairie Days



Spring Old Time Barn Dance Party

Saturday, April 4, 2008 at 8:00 PM

Doors open at 7:30 PM - Musicians arrive at 7:00 PM to warm-up

Two Way Street Coffee House, 1047 Curtiss St., Downers Grove, IL (Across from the Public Library)

Enjoy a fun-filled evening of music and dancing for the entire family. Dance the night away and/or play with the Plank Road All Volunteer String Band. Caller Marianne Mohrhusen will walk and talk you through all the dances at our No Experience Necessary Dance. Dances are informal,

with no costumes needed. In fact, you don't even need to bring a partner! Refreshments available.

*\$5.00 admission for everyone 5 years of age and older



"If you like to dance, don't miss the Third Annual University of Chicago Dance Weekend, April 10 - 11. See "Upcoming Events" box on page 1.

Band Behavior - Part 2

By Colby Maddox

Ok, so you have come to terms with some of basic issues of differing ability levels and time versus money constraints and now it is time to set an agenda and get to work. When it comes to work, bands will often cycle between periods of stagnation and periods of activity, and both cycles have progressive and regressive elements. Lets take a look at some natural, recurring evolutions that crop up in both the musical and organizational development of a band.

Through hard work a band can move from sounding unprepared to sounding tight. It is natural for players to get used to each other's rhythm and phrasing over time, and the best bands will make this the primary goal that they are always chasing. Factors like new membership, long periods of time off, or improved bookings will ensure that any band will have to "get used to each other" many times over. It is rare that even the best players achieve instant agreement on rhythm and phrasing, and it is common for bands to constantly re-assess the musical elements that hold their sound together.

Once a band has had time to gel the music will often progress from sounding "tight" to sounding "stale," and as the music begins to sound stale, more work is needed to make things sound loose and musical again. This is the cycle of life for any band, and just like the weather it is much more comfortable if you are prepared for all the seasons. A healthy combination of rehearsals and performances will allow material to develop, fall apart and get put back together again. Too many rehearsals without performances and a band will forget how to let go of their collective expectations and just perform. Too many performances without rehearsals and band will just default to a lower common denominator by doing only material that is safe.

Now you may ask, is there a way to drive this musical cycle or should band musicians just prepare for periods of bad weather and be sure to enjoy the good weather? To answer this question the very important but tricky topic of band leadership must be explored. Any group of human beings wants and needs a leader to set the pace for establishing group goals, and successful leadership is an art form that requires attention to short term and long term goals, lots of work and a flexible

Colby Maddox

Colby has been teaching for the Old Town School since 1996 where he is currently the dean of the mandolin department, co-chair of the bluegrass ensemble department, and a visiting lecturer for the fiddle department. He is also a principle member of the bluegrass group Sunnyside Up.



Upcoming Performances:

Sunnyside Up

Elastic Arts Emerging Artist Series

*\$10 suggested donation

Saturday, April 4th 8PM

2830 N. Milwaukee, 2nd Fl., Chicago

Sing for your Supper Sessions at

Uncommon Ground on Devon

www.uncommonground.com

Sunday 4-6 PM

1401 W. Devon Ave. Chicago, IL

FEATURING:

Sunday, March 8th, **Young Bluegrass Pickers**

Sunday, March 15, **Honkey Grass**

Sunday, March 22nd, **Dvorak, Maddox and Tyler**

Sunday, March 29th **Americana and Gospel**

ego. While there are many models to look at for band management, booking gigs and being the contact person is a difficult fit with a committee process. Often someone has to be the one to just stick their neck out and go after the work. In our next installment we will compare and contrast some different styles of leadership and look at different ways that band members can get the most out of their leader.



Fantastic kitchen crew! Bob, Mimi and Carol.



Annual Meeting Jam



To view pictures from the 2009 Annual Membership Meeting & Jam, festivals and other Plank Road events, go to www.plankroad.org and click on "Gallery."

Michael Peter Smith Writes About Steve Goodman

Minnette Goodman, Steve Goodman's mom, asked me if I'd contribute to a term paper a high school freshman was writing about Steve. This is what I e-mailed to the young lady:

My name is Michael Smith. I am a singer/songwriter and at the moment (December, 2008) I am performing in a musical which I adapted from Hans Christian Andersen's "The Snow Queen", which is now playing at Victory Gardens Theater in Chicago. I am 67 years old, and have made my living as a musician pretty much all my life, with little timeouts where I have had to get a non-musical job (we call them "straight" jobs) to keep body and soul together. However my last straight job was more than twenty years ago and things seem to go along well enough for me these days. I am not and have never been famous nor do I live a life of luxury, but everyday I am grateful to have been allowed to live the life of a musician. I can't imagine wanting to do anything else, other than lying about on a South Sea island somewhere. When it comes to music I can be quite industrious, intense, and opinionated, but I've never been that way about anything else. I have been fired a lot.

I met Steve Goodman in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1969, when I was twenty-seven years old, and traveling with my wife Barbara in a rock and roll band called Juarez. (We called ourselves Juarez not because any of us were Latin but because we loved the first line of Bob Dylan's song "Tom Thumb's Blues" that goes: "When you're lost in the rain in Juarez and it's Eastertime too...") Barbara and I had met in Miami where we had worked at one club called The Flick (they showed movies sometimes). I had started writing songs at the Flick and when Steve worked there later he learned some of my songs and by the time we met he had been singing my songs, along with his own, for some time with much success. He was a personable young man with a tremendous amount of vitality, a kind of speedy quality, easily bored and quick to catch the drift of things and move on. He was also immediately likeable and you could tell he was going places, so I was happy that he was singing my songs to big crowds.

Steve started doing my songs in Chicago and I can't tell you how helpful that was to our careers, because suddenly folks in Chicago were familiar with my songs. Barbara and I moved to Chicago because we had essentially been presented to Chicago audiences by Steve, who had become very prominent and influential in the Chicago (and national) music scene, and we were getting so much work here. In the course of time Steve recorded about ten of my songs, the most prominent being "The Dutchman" and "Spoon River". (I had written "Spoon River" as a kind of theme song for the Edgar Lee Masters book called "Spoon River Anthology", a beautiful book if you don't mind crying a lot while you read it.) Steve and I later wrote some songs together, one of which was recorded by Jimmy Buffett and bought me a new car.

Though Steve has been gone for almost twenty-five years I still receive yearly royalty checks in the mail from songs we wrote together, or songs of mine that he recorded, or suggested that others record. In my more fanciful moments I think of these as "letters from Steve". He has taken care of me awfully well though out my life and I feel grateful to him and to his spirit. He had the kind of personality that to this day I can see and feel in my mind's eye. He was so alive, and in some big ways for me he continues to be. I still talk to him sometimes...and continue to thank him for his benevolent effect on my life.

— Michael Peter Smith

"Nothing is more beautiful than a guitar...except, possibly, two."
-Frederic Chopin

THANKS

A special thanks to those who donated CDs for the drawing at the Annual Meeting:

- Mark Dvorak
- Natural Bob and Mickey Holdsworth
- Bruce Holmes
- Comfort Food (Rich and Vicki Ingle),
- Cheryl Joyal
- February Sky (Phil Cooper and Susan Urban)

ON THE RADIO

90.9 FM, WDCB, PUBLIC RADIO
from College of DuPage

Online Streaming - www.WDCB.org

For a program guide, call (630) 942-4200

Folk Festival with Lilli Kuzma,
Tuesdays 7 to 9 PM

A WORLD OF NEW FOLK MUSIC EXPERIENCES
AT THE TOUCH OF A DIAL.

Folk Festival is an eclectic mix of folk styles and artists, traditional to contemporary, and also including folk-related and folk-influenced music.

Strictly Bluegrass with Larry Robinson,
Wednesdays 7 to 9 PM



Check out the articles written by our members in

Readers Write!

- > "More on Songwriting," by Bruce Holmes
- > "Right Hand Technique for Guitar," by Bruce Holmes

Go To:

- > www.plankroad.org
- > click on Favorites

Article submissions: vingle@comcast.net

Thank You to our Sustaining Artists

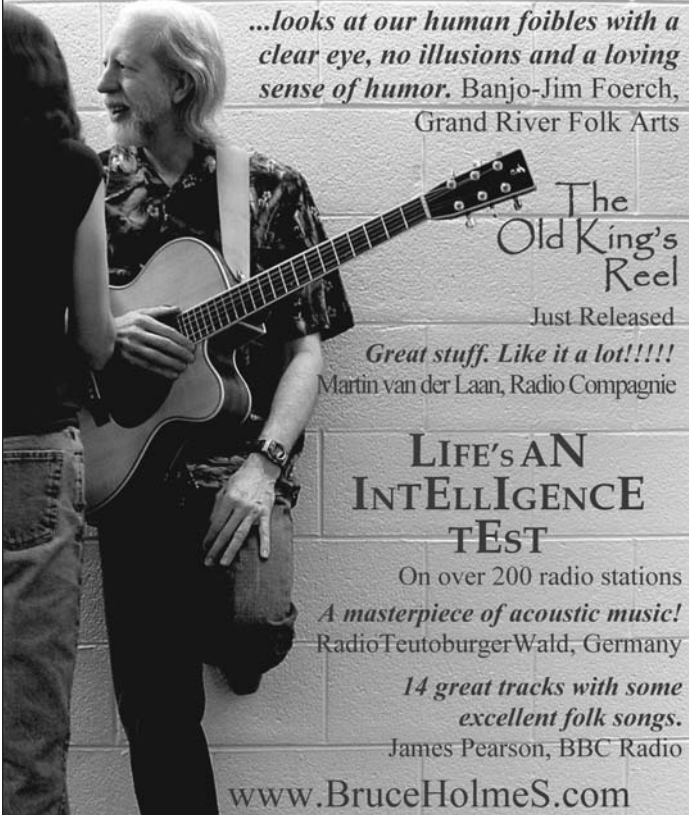
BruceHolmeS

...looks at our human foibles with a clear eye, no illusions and a loving sense of humor. Banjo-Jim Foerch, Grand River Folk Arts

The Old King's Reel
Just Released
Great stuff. Like it a lot!!!!
Martin van der Laan, Radio Compagnie

LIFE'S AN INTELLIGENCE TEST
On over 200 radio stations
A masterpiece of acoustic music!
RadioTeutoburgerWald, Germany
14 great tracks with some excellent folk songs.
James Pearson, BBC Radio

www.BruceHolmeS.com



A Special Thanks to our Membership Contributors!!

Sustaining Artists (\$200 - \$399)

Benefits: Feature article and picture in one newsletter; 1/4 page reserved space in four newsletters for name(s), contact information and upcoming performances; individual membership(s) in PRFMS.

- **Bruce Holmes**
www.bruceholmes.com
- **February Sky**
Phil Cooper and Susan Urban
www.februarysky.com or
www.myspace.com/februaryskyfolk

Supporting Artists (\$50 - \$199)

Benefits: Line listing in four issues with name of group, name(s) of member(s), contact information; individual membership(s) in PRFMS.

- **Comfort Food**
Vicki and Rich Ingle
708-795-0695
- **Rick Neeley**
Rickety Music - Rick Neeley, Chris McNamara
McNamara & Neeley and, "The Songs of Bob Gibson,"
www.ricketymusic.com

Supporting Members (\$50 - \$199)

John J. Allan
Robert & Lilli Kuzma
Gregg & Elizabeth Morton
Elizabeth Weir

February Sky

Phil Cooper & Susan Urban

Traditional, Modern and Original Folk & Celtic Music with Guitar, Cittern, Mountain Dulcimer, Banjo & Percussion



For details and touring schedule, see:
www.februarysky.com or
www.myspace.com/februaryskyfolk

And the first 2009 "Music By The Yard" will be...when???

You say you'd like a large group of enthusiastic musicians playing acoustic music in your yard for a few hours some lovely summer evening? If you want to host a Music By the Yard (MBTY) event, email Cheryl Joyal at clmjoyal.aol.com with any questions and/or the date you'd like to host.



Bob



Barb and Ron

See what's happening! Visit www.plankroad.org



Would you like to help?

Already a member?

How about volunteering for the PRFMS Board?

Or can you help at one of our events?

Please contact **Bob O'Hanlon** at mimioh@hotmail.com for more information.



Saturday Sing-Around crew at the Two Way Street Coffee House



Jammin' at the Cabin '09

"I'm nuts about music," he said.
"Music makes me forget I'm Al Capone
and lifts me up until I think I'm only a
block or two from heaven."

Have any jokes, quotes or short anecdotes you'd like to share?
Send them along to Vicki: vingle@comcast.net

Songwriting - Continued from page 3

that seem to hold up under repeated scrutiny. I find a line I love and try and rhyme with it. I mold the song into a shape: verse, chorus, verse, chorus, bridge, chorus. Then I sit at the piano and spend hours trying out melodic possibilities.

If no inspiration is available, there are all sorts of ways to let the inspiration of others get you going. I once got a song in my head and found myself writing new lyrics. I completely replaced all the lyrics, then came up with a new melody and new chords. The new song had the same structure as the old song, but it was brand new in every other way. Or you can borrow a chord sequence from an existing song, maybe change it up in some way, make it happen twice as fast perhaps. Write a new melody. Now get to work on the lyrics. With enough hard work you've got yourself a song. If you someday find yourself playing some cool riff on the guitar, find a melody you can sing along with it. What kind of song would fit the feel of what you're doing? Is it gritty? Maybe an urban Romeo and Juliet. Is it light-hearted? Maybe something funny. Write out the story that's cooking in your head and then turn it into lyrics.

Sometimes I just admire somebody else's song so much, I want to do something like it. Michael Smith has this wonderful song called "The Princess and the Frog." I wanted to have written a song that was that much fun: something vaguely Celtic, lot's of fast lyrics, hopefully funny. A month later I had a song called "Wishes." I'm not sure it's as good as Michael's song, but it's not bad. There are all sorts of ways to take somebody else's song and use it as a template for your own efforts.

If you work at your song long enough, sooner or later it will come together. And then the moment arrives when you'll get to play the piece in its entirety. And it's one of the best feelings in the world.

Anyone can write a song. Just do the work. The tough part is writing a good song. Some of that comes with practice, the more songs you write, the better you'll get at it. But there are also some very concrete understandings that will help you write better songs: structure, motifs, hooks, etc.

This article continues on the website in the article "More on Songwriting," with a discussion of those tools, complete with some examples and experiments you can try.

Bruce wrote another article that you may be interested in, "Right Hand Technique for Guitar".

just GO TO
 Readers Write!

> www.plankroad.org > click **Favorites** > click **Readers Write**



Marianne, George, Kristen and Cathy
at the Annual Membership Meeting & Jam



Folk Resources Next Door

Plank Road Folk Music Society

PO Box 176, Downers Grove, IL 60515
www.plankroad.org

Two Way Street Coffee House

1047 Curtiss St., Downers Grove, IL 60515
(630) 969-9720 www.twowaystreet.org

Jones Family Music School

Lombard (630) 916-1356
www.jonesfamilymusic.com

Maple Street Chapel

Main & Maple, Lombard, 60148
(630) 627-0171
maplestreetpaul@comcast.net
www.maplestreetchapel.org

Acoustic Renaissance Concerts

Unitarian Church of Hinsdale
11 W Maple St., Hinsdale, IL
(708) 802-0236 www.acousticren.com

Fermilab Art series

Kirk Road & Pine Street,
Batavia, IL 60510-0500
(630) 840-2787
www.fnal.gov/culture/NewArts/gen_info.shtml
Email: audweb@fnal.gov

Folk Lore Center & Acorn Coffee Bar

29W140 Butterfield Rd, POB 762, Warrenville, IL 60555
(630) 393-1247 www.folk-lorecenter.com

Woodstock Folk Music/Festival

(815) 338-4245 www.woodstockfolkmusic.com

Fox Valley Folklore Society

755 N Evanslawn Ave, Aurora, IL 60506
(630) 897-3655 www.FoxValleyFolk.com

Warrenville Folk Music Society

POB 248, Warrenville IL 60555
(630) 717-8495 E-mail: Warrenvillefolk@aol.com

Lake County Folk Club

Box 847, Mundelein, IL 60060
(847) 949-5355 http://thelakecountyfolkclub.org

Northern Illinois Bluegrass Association

www.nibaweb.org

HANDS (Hammers & Noters Dulcimer Society)

Box 181, Morris, IL 60450
(708) 331-6875 www.gwdf.org

South Suburban Dulcimer & Folk Music Society

P.O. Box 455, Park Forest, IL 60466
(708) 756-3857

90.9 FM, WDCB, Public Radio

Online Streaming: www.WDCB.org
Folk Festival, Tuesdays 7 to 9 pm
Strictly Bluegrass, Wednesdays 7 to 9 pm

Folk Alliance International

www.folk.org

FARM (Folk Alliance Midwest Region)

www.farmfolk.org



**Get the latest information at
www.plankroad.org**

PRFMS Membership INFORMATION

Don't Let You're Membership Lapse!

To continue receiving the *Quarter Notes* don't

forget to renew your membership for 2009.

Please renew your individual (\$10 year) or family

(\$20 year) membership by sending a check to:

PRFMS

P.O. Box 176

Downers Grove, Illinois 60515

Thank you!

Membership info is available online at

www.plankroad.org



PRFMS Contact:

Bob O' Hanlon

Email: mimioh@hotmail.com

P.O. Box 176, Downers Grove, IL 60515