

### **Bearfoot Bluegrass Band**

In 1999, Cordova 4H Music Camp counselors formed a band called Bearfoot to showcase music camps (the original camp—the Alaska City Folk Arts Camp in Anchorage and the Cordova 4H Music Camp). This Alaskan band was professional with 5 CD's, a recording contract, and an agent. Bearfoot played concerts and taught over 100 Bluegrass Music Camps for Kids in the U.S., Canada, Scotland, and Ireland. They won the Telluride Bluegrass Band Contest in 2001 and in 2009 were the guest artists at the Anchorage Folk Festival. Their 4th CD was ranked number one nationally in Billboard's Bluegrass Charts. Their 5th CD was #2 on the Country Music Television charts for 3 weeks in a row. Bearfoot videos are on [YouTube](#) and their third, fourth, and fifth CD's can be ordered from [Compass Records](#). All the original band members (Kate Hamre, Mike Mickelson, Jason Norris, Malani OToole, Angela Oudean, and Annalisa Tornfelt) are all still playing and teaching music! In Alaska, Bearfoot has led music camps in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Homer, Juneau, Ketchikan, Nome, and Sitka. Dancing with the Spirit hopes young Native bands like Bearfoot will begin in every community to teach younger kids in their village and nearby villages.

### **Dan Booth**

Dan grew up in a thriving bluegrass and country music family and community in Anchorage. His first "gig" was at age 12 with Doug Dillard and Ginger Boatwright at a bluegrass camp concert. Soon, Dan graduated to join his dad in the seminal Alaskan bluegrass band, Rank Strangers. There he met an 18 year old fiddler/mandolinist named Frank Solivan, with whom he would later record an album and go to the Grammys. Dan played mandolin, guitar and bass in some bands during his college years, but it wasn't until he was invited to tour the US and Ireland with Bearfoot in 2005 when the bluegrass seed finally germinated. This heavily influenced Dan to leave home and to pursue playing music in the San Francisco Bay area. Along with his long-time friend Tyson Alteri, they started the band 49 Special and went on to win the Rockygrass Band Competition in 2009. In California he became a member of the Kathy Kallick Band for 5 years and 2 albums, and also spent about a year in Colorado playing with the band Spring Creek. Then one day in fall of 2011 he got the call from Frank Solivan to come join his band in the DC area. There he and Amanda lived for about 4 years while he played with the IBMA award winning band Frank Solivan & Dirty Kitchen. Here's how Dan is described in *Cybergrass, the Bluegrass Music Network*. "In addition to his impeccable bass playing, Dan is a remarkable singer, known for his powerful lead and seamlessly blended harmony vocals." Dan now works as a luthier for Petr's Violin Shop and Guitar Central in Anchorage. Dan was at Dancing with the Spirit's first three summer music camps in *Hohudodetlaatl Denh* (Tanana) in 2006-2008. After that first camp, Dan and two of his friends (Todd and Conor) even jumped in the Yukon River for a quick dip among ice flows with the Rev. Dr. Trimble Gilbert!! Dan was our first Dancing with the Spirit webmaster. He now plays music with his wife Amanda Kerr and their musician families as they help raise up the next generation of musicians.

### **Aurora Bowers**

Aurora is a lifelong Alaskan and fiddler, as well as an archaeologist and high school teacher! She's worn many hats, but through it all, her love for music and teaching remain constant. Aurora grew up in Fairbanks and started playing fiddle when she was 6. She played in a band with some of her friends in high school called Slightly Askew. She went to college at Whitman College in Washington state, and got a degree in politics, meanwhile studying music theory and playing in a

jazz band. After that she enrolled in the Bluegrass, Old-Time, and Country Music program at East Tennessee State University. There she studied both Bluegrass and Old-Time music. Aurora has recorded one album with her family band, the Norris Bowers Band; one album with her brother, Ryan Bowers' band, The Brain Trust; and two albums with The Hannah Yoter Band. She has also been known to appear with Midtown Revival, Carl Hoffman, and her own band, the Sophronies. She worked as an archaeologist for 8 years and then as a public high school teacher for 2 years. She currently does freelance web development as well as teaching lessons, playing music, tutoring, and working for social justice as often as possible. Aurora has traveled for Dancing with the Spirit to Allakaket, Eagle, Fairbanks, Galena, Northway, and Venetie.

### **Annie Carlson**

Born and raised in Alaska, Annie has had a passion for music from the age of 10. Influenced by many different genres from bluegrass to classical music, her range of styles varies far and wide. She was taught guitar and performance techniques from Mike Mickelson of Bearfoot Bluegrass. Taking these skills, she began teaching at music camps in Alaska and Hawaii and performing at Alaskan folk festivals. Her interests grew far beyond the state, encouraging her to pursue an education in Commercial Voice and Recording Tech in Nashville, TN. After a short time there, she's returned home to Cordova to pursue a solo music career. Annie's traveled for Dancing with the Spirit to *Caniqaq* (Chenega) and *Yaakwdáat* (Yakutat).

### **Eagle Elders Ethel Beck, Bertha Ulvi, and Ruth Ridley**

Ethel, Bertha, and Ruth are three of the amazing elders that we have gotten to know through our time with Dancing with the Spirit. These sisters grew up along the Yukon River near the Canadian border in the Coal Creek mining camp just downriver from *Tthee T'äwdlenn* (Eagle). Ethel, Bertha and Ruth spent whole summers in fish camp with their grandparents Eliza and Joe Malcom. Their grandmother didn't speak English, so this helped them to learn not only their language but "where they come from and where they are going." As some of the last fluent speakers of Han Gwich'in—they are encouraging young people to learn the language to enjoy the perspective, world view, and humor of their ancestors. When we travel to *Tthee T'äwdlenn*, usually in February for the annual running of the Yukon Quest Dog Race—these elders come into the school and sing and dance with us—and teach the Han Gwich'in language. One of their favorite ways to teach Han is by having students act out some of their traditional stories. Ruth lives in Fairbanks and is working with the University to preserve the language and has been declared a Doyon Language Champion.

### **Brennan Firth**

Brennan grew up listening to fiddle music on the radio and going to fiddle dances in *Teetl'it Zheh* (Fort McPherson), Northwest Territories, Canada. A friend came to visit him who played the fiddle and the guitar. The friend handed him a guitar and said, "Here, play this chord." And then his friend taught him another chord so Brennan could accompany him in playing for a dance—with just those two chords! His friend also taught him a fiddle tune. Brennan started practicing and playing with his brother Brandon—and today they are some of the best players in the north. Brennan lives in Vashrajj K'oo (Arctic Village) and has fun playing for dances there and everywhere. He plays fiddle on the theme song for the new PBS series *Molly of Denali*. Brennan has traveled and taught music for Dancing with the Spirit in Vashrajj K'oo, Chalkyitsik, Gwich'yaa Zhee (Fort Yukon), and *K'ehthiign* (Northway).

### **The Rev. Dr. Trimble Gilbert and Mary**

Trimble and his wife Mary have been leading Dancing with the Spirit from its very beginning. Trimble taught fiddle and played for the dances at our very first camp in *Hohudodetlaatl Denh* (Tanana) in 2006. They are from Vashraǰi K'oo (Arctic Village) and grew up on the land hunting and fishing. Trimble is a famous Athabascan fiddle player, an Episcopal priest, a Native knowledge and culture bearer, and Gwich'in teacher. He is the Second Traditional Chief and spiritual leader for the Tanana Chiefs Conference and the 52 Athabascan Tribes that they serve. Best of all he and Mary are our friends—and they love teaching music and dancing and passing on the language and culture to students. Trimble was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Alaska Fairbanks, where he often serves as an Elder and mentor bringing traditional knowledge into the classroom. Trimble and Mary have taught for us in Vashraǰi K'oo, Chalkyitsik, *Tthee T'äwdlenn* (Eagle), Gwich'yaa Zhee (Fort Yukon), *Hohudodetlaatl Denh*, *Hut'odlee Kkaakk'et* (Hughes) and *Vijhtqijj* (Venetie).

### **Todd Grebe**

Todd is an award winning Americana and Honkytonk songwriter from Anchorage. He has been an Alaskan touring musician since 2003. In his college years at UAA, he led a band called Wellstrung and in 2008 he formed “Todd Grebe & Cold Country” to feature his original songwriting. He has recorded three full-length Cold Country albums of original music, the latest of which “Citizen” received national critical acclaim. Todd went on a CD release tour that was funded by a Rasmussen Individual Artist Award. He is set to release a 4<sup>th</sup> album in 2020. Todd was a member of Alaska's Internationally touring band “Bearfoot” for a couple years starting in 2010. Todd was a teacher at Dancing with the Spirit's first camp in *Hohudodetlaatl Denh* (Tanana) in 2006, and has travelled to Cordova and *Digenegh* (McGrath) as well. He also spearheaded a Kickstarter fundraiser that raised \$6000 for an Eagle Music and Culture Camp. Todd teaches lessons <https://www.toddgrebe.com> and teams up with fiddle master Angela Oudean as one of Alaska's premier acoustic duos. Enjoy their musical prowess and marital harmonies as they perform original and traditional Americana together.

### **Debbie Tritt-Kendi**

Debbie was born and raised in Vashraǰi K'oo (Arctic Village). She is the youngest daughter of the Rev. Isaac A. Tritt, Sr. who blessed the village's first fiddle and guitar in the 1950's—praying that they would be a blessing for his people. Debbie taught herself the Tukuph hymns and is following in her parents' footsteps as a leader for the church and community. She has worked in the school—teaching Gwich'in language, culture and dancing. Debbie plays a little fiddle herself—and has taught for Dancing with the Spirit in Vashraǰi K'oo, Gwich'yaa Zhee (Fort Yukon), and Fairbanks.

### **Wilbert Kendi**

Wilbert is a Gwich'in guitar player, singer, and song writer who was born in *Teetl'it Zeh* (Fort McPherson), Northwest Territories, Canada—and now lives in Vashraǰi K'oo (Arctic Village). He's been playing since he was 10 or 11 years old. The elders helped teach him. “It's all about repeat,” he says. “Watch, listen, and learn.” His song *Gwich'in Princess* is played all over the north country. Wilbert loves to laugh and joke and say “You bet your boots!” Wilbert was at our very first Dancing with the Spirit camp in *Hohudodetlaatl Denh* (Tanana) in 2006. He has

also taught many times for us in Chalkyitsik, Fairbanks, Vashrajj K'oo, and Gwich'yaa Zhee (Fort Yukon).

### **Amanda Kerr**

Amanda grew up with nurturing musical parents and community in Anchorage. Her fiddling career started with a Cracker Jack box with a ruler taped to it. Somewhere around 10,000 “Huckleberry Stop Stops” later--what Dancing with the Spirit calls “Snowmachine Go Go”—she began traveling to fiddle contests around the country. Her titles include the Alaska State Fair Grand Champion, Western Open Junior and Grand Champion, and the National Junior Fiddle Champion. In 2003, Amanda started teaching music lessons. What started out as teaching a couple students per week in her parents’ living room quickly turned into a full-time teaching studio. After studying music education at the University of Alaska, Amanda went on to complete teacher certification for the Suzuki Method. The methods and traditions that gave her the technique she uses today is now being passed on to the next generation of fiddlers. In addition to teaching private lessons, Amanda also teaches group lessons, workshops, and camps. Amanda taught in the Washington D.C. area from 2014-16. Now back in Anchorage, she has her own studio <https://www.amandakerrmusic.com>. She enjoys performing just as much as teaching. She often plays with High Lonesome Sound and the Anna Lynch Band. You can hear her fiddling on Anna Lynch’s self-titled album that was released in 2014—and around town with her husband Dan Booth. She traveled for Dancing with the Spirit in 2011 to *Deloy Ges* (Anvik) with her dad Jim Kerr, a wonderful “give back time” for their Deg Hit’an heritage.

### **Josephine Malemute**

Josephine is Dancing with the Spirit’s assistant director. She grew up along the Yukon River in *Noolaaghe Doh* (Nulato) and *Notaalee Denh* (Galena) in a musical family. She sings, dances, and teaches guitar and makes students laugh with her wonderful sense of humor. She performs with the Athabaskan Fiddle Festival and is a DJ for their radio station (KRFF 89.1) in Fairbanks. Josephine was an instructor for Young Native Fiddlers with Gwich’in fiddler Bill Stevens for many years. Josephine practiced as a registered nurse for over 20 years—and at the end of her nursing career ran the Chief Andrew Isaac Health Center which serves all of Interior Alaska. Josephine is excellent at talking to students about setting goals and making healthy choices. Josephine has traveled and taught music for Dancing with the Spirit in Anchorage, Anvik, Beaver, Chalkyitsik, Circle, Eagle, Fairbanks, Fort Yukon, Galena, Grayling, Holycross, Hughes, Huslia, Kivalina, Kotzebue, Koyukuk, Minto, Navajoland, Nikolai, Northway, Nulato, Point Hope, Rampart, Shageluk, the Six Nations Reserve (Ontario, Canada), Tanacross, Tanana, Tetlin, Tok, and Unalakleet, and Whitehorse (the Yukon Territory, Canada).

### **The Rev. Belle Mickelson**

Belle started playing fiddle when she was 10 years old—and has been playing in old time and bluegrass bands since 1975. She has a passion for teaching music and helped start the Cordova 4H Music Camp in 1995 and Hawaiian Music Camps in 2004. Now she is the director of Dancing with the Spirit, a program which she was “instrumental” in starting in 2006 to take the music camp idea to Alaskan villages. Color-coded guitar chords and accompanying fiddle tab are used to make music easy for beginners. Belle also teaches an extra-curricular acoustic music program for the Cordova schools and calls an occasional square dance. She became an Episcopal priest in 2007—and loves gospel music, bluegrass jamming, singing, dancing, and

fiddle tunes! She has traveled for Dancing with the Spirit to Allakaket, Anvik, Arctic Village, Beaver, Chalkyitsik, Circle, Eagle, Fort Yukon, Grayling, Hooper Bay, Hughes, Huslia, Kingston (NY), Kotzebue, McGrath, Manley Hot Springs, Minto, Navajoland, Nuiqsut, Nulato, Point Hope, Shageluk, the Six Nations Reserve (Ontario, Canada), Stevens Village, Tanana, Venetie, Whitehorse (Yukon Territory, Canada), and Yakutat.

### **Mike Mickelson**

Mike began playing guitar at age 9. He attended Cordova 4H Music Camps, Alaska City Folk Arts Music Camps in Anchorage, and statewide folk festivals. He was a founding member of Bearfoot (bluegrass), Sloughgrass, and Hit and Run. Bearfoot won the Telluride Bluegrass Festival in 2001 and began performing all over the US, parts of Canada and Europe. Many performances were in conjunction with Bluegrass Camps for Kids 2-4 day music camps. In 2009, Bearfoot signed a recording contract with Compass Records. Their 4<sup>th</sup> CD debuted at #1 on the National Billboard Charts. Mike received a teaching certificate from the University of Alaska Fairbanks in 2006. In March 2007, Mike began traveling for Dancing with the Spirit. In 2010, he left Bearfoot and began commercial salmon fishing during the summers. He has continued to travel with Dancing with the Spirit and in 2018 released, *Pacific Waltz* which features many songs that he has written. Mike has been an instructor for Dancing with the Spirit in Anchorage, Anvik, Allakaket, Arctic Village, Beaver, Chenega, Chalkyitsik, Eagle, Fairbanks, Fort Yukon, Grayling, Holycross, Hughes, Huslia, Juneau, Kivalina, Kotzebue, Manley Hot Springs, Minto, Nikolai, Nulato, Point Hope, Stevens Village, Tanana, Venetie, and Yakutat.

### **Bryan Mills**

In addition to providing technical and website services for Dancing with the Spirit, Bryan has participated in Cordova 4H's Morning Music program with his oldest daughter Evie. He has taught Intro to Live Sound for two summers at Cordova's 4H Music Camp. Bryan enjoys playing the piano at home, and he has begun teaching Evie to play as well.

### **Florence Newman**

Florence is a Gwich'in elder and story teller who enjoys teaching children culture, tradition, and Athabascan fiddle dances. She loves laughing, joking, singing, and dancing. Florence is a church and community leader--always helping people in need. She was born in a tent at 50 degrees below zero near Vashraji K'oo (Arctic Village) ... A few days later when her family was moving on, her mother and she got separated from the rest of the family in a snow storm. So her mother crawled under a downed tree and the family's puppies gathered around them and saved their lives. Florence is featured in two books found on line in the Alaska Native Language Archives: *Traveling in the Old Days* and *Gwich'in Elders Traditional Stories Project*. Florence has traveled for Dancing with the Spirit to Vashraji K'oo, Gwich'yaa Zhee (Fort Yukon), and *Vijhtajj* (Venetie).

### **Jason Norris and Stella Lyn Norris**

Stella and Jason are a husband and wife duo who have been visiting all of the schools in the Southeast Island School District through Dancing with the Spirit for the last several years. They deeply value the friendships and community connections they make on these excursions, and are very impressed by how far along the students have come in a short time. In their home lives Jason is a pilot who flies bush planes for Wright Air Service, and Stella is an herbalist who



makes plant medicine that is widely distributed all over Alaska and the Lower 48. Jason has been a musician since age 7, beginning with mandolin, and over time adding fiddle, guitar, bass and most recently, banjo. He has been teaching music since about age 13, and was in a nationally/internationally acclaimed touring band called Bearfoot from age 15-29. Bearfoot taught kids music camps all over the country for many of those years, as well as recording 5 albums. Stella began playing guitar much later in life, but has a great love for it, and for working with kids. She is currently learning to play clawhammer style banjo, too. They perform as The Barnstormers, and play in the Norris Bowers Band (a two-family band). Jason also plays with multiple other bands, such as Valley Below out of Fairbanks, and several bands in the Anchorage area. So far, through Dancing with the Spirit, Jason and Stella have spent a total of 35 weeks together in the following villages: Rampart, Hughes, Fort Yukon, Angoon, Pelican, Hydaburg, Hollis, Hyder, Port Alexander, Kasaan, Kodiak, Coffman Cove, Whale Pass, Naukati, and Thorne Bay. Jason has also spent time in Nikolai, Holy Cross and Point Hope. What Jason and Stella love about music is that it's a way for people of all sorts of different backgrounds to come together and find common ground. They mainly play bluegrass, Appalachian string band tunes, old country/honkey tonk, and Cajun music.

### **Angela Oudean**

Angela is an internationally recognized fiddler with an award from the International Bluegrass Music Assoc. for Album of the Year in 2006 for the all-female Daughters of Bluegrass recording, "Back to the Well." She was a founding member of Alaska's popular Americana international touring band "Bearfoot," who won the Telluride Band Competition in 2001, had the #2 music video on CMT (Country Music Television) for 3 consecutive weeks, reached #1 on Billboard's Bluegrass Music Charts and #16 in the broader National Americana Radio Charts. More recently Angela has moved back home and is an integral member of local band "Todd Grebe & Cold Country." TG&CC has recorded 3 albums, the last of which, "Citizen," received national acclaim and whose Alaska tour was funded by a highly sought after Individual Artist Award Rasmussen Grant. Angela is 2 time Alaska State Fiddle Champion (2016, 2019). She teaches private lessons <https://www.toddgrebe.com> out of Anchorage, and has travelled with Dancing with Spirit to Nuiqsut, Tetlin, Minto, Venetie, Northway, Grayling, McGrath, and Point Hope to teach fiddle and guitar, as well as a residency for one winter at the Alaska Native Heritage Center. Angela is proud of her Inupiaq heritage and plays backup fiddle for bands at the Athabaskan Fiddle Festival. Angela teams up with award winning songwriter Todd Grebe as one of Alaska's premier acoustic duos. Enjoy their musical prowess and marital harmonies as they perform original and traditional Americana together.

### **Katy Rexford**

Katy began learning violin in her public school orchestra at age 8. She quickly grew to love all kinds of music and enjoyed playing with friends in local talent shows and for community events. Since moving to Alaska, she taught at the Alaska School of Music, for Bluegrass Camps for Kids in Fairbanks, Homer, Seward, and Anchorage, for the 4-H Music Camp in Cordova, Hawaiian Music Camps, and has had the great fortune to teach in the villages of *Menhti* (Minto) and *Digenegh* (McGrath) with Dancing with the Spirit. Katy currently runs a community-supported fishery based in Anchorage called Catch 49, whose mission is to help deliver local, wild Alaskan seafood to the dinner tables of Alaskans while supporting healthy marine fisheries and thriving coastal communities.

### **Rion Schmidt**

Rion sings and plays banjo, ukulele, and a little fiddle, too. “Uncle Rion” loves to play music, ending songs with a big smile and saying “Aw right!” He grew up in a musical family in *Qutalleq* (Seward). He is Sugpiaq from Prince William Sound. He also lived in Cordova for awhile and formed a band called Sloughgrass. He later moved to Hawaii and started the Aloha Bluegrass Band and organized music camps there with his partner Katy Rexford. He has also taught at the Cordova 4H Music Camp and is a board member of the Eyak Preservation Council. Rion has traveled for Dancing with the Spirit to Allakaket, Anvik, Arctic Village, Chenega, Eagle, Grayling, Holycross, Kokhanok, Kotzebue, McGrath, the Midway Festival in the Northwest Territories Canada, Minto, Northway, Point Hope, Shageluk, Tyonek, and Unalakleet as well as a residency for one winter at the Alaska Native Heritage Center.

### **Amanda Simmons**

Amanda is a Mississippian with a soft spot for Alaska. She grew up in Mississippi, and studied archaeology at the University of Southern Mississippi. During that time, she took a class that involved traveling to Jamaica, and her love of travel was born. She lived on the road full-time for three years doing archaeology all over the southern and southwestern US, before she finally made it up to Alaska in 2010. There she fell in love with the grandeur and beauty of the state, and came back year after year to do archaeology every summer. In the past year, she has done less archaeology, and more teaching, working in a kindergarten setting at a public school in Mississippi. She currently works as a carpenter, house flipper, web developer, and plays music as much as she possibly can! She started playing the guitar only a few years ago, and now plays both the guitar and the banjo ukulele! She loves teaching kids (especially the wee ones!), changing the world, and playing a perfect boom-chuck.

### **Jessica Smyke**

Jessica grew up attending the 4-H music camps in Cordova, Alaska and later was a counselor for the camps. She dabbled in many different instruments and began taking violin lessons. She continued to take violin lessons and play music with friends as she attained her Bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies. Most recently, Jessica completed her Master of Arts in Teaching degree and is now teaching junior high in *Sit̄nasuaq* (Nome), Alaska.

### **Ria Smyke**

Ria has been attending the Cordova 4H Music Camp since she was 6 years old and has been a counselor since she was 15 years old. She has participated in many music events, including all-state choir and the honors band at the regional music festival. During her high school years, she received two superior ratings for playing trumpet in a jazz band at the Alaska State Music Festival. Ria graduated high school in June 2020 and is taking music classes while studying Psychology at the University of Alaska Anchorage.

### **Angela Young**

Angela is a wonderful Deg Hit'an elder who has been generous in sharing her knowledge of the Deg Xinag language and her love of music. She works at the Blackwell School in *Deloy Ges* (Anvik) and is much beloved by all the children. Angela is a leader for her church and community.