

# The Inter-Mountain

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## Music, dance event set in Buckhannon

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Submitted photo T-Claw Crawford will be calling at the first Buckhannon Mountain Music and Dance Series kicking off Thursday, Jan. 24 at the Opera House in Buckhannon.

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**BUCKHANNON** — Got cabin fever? Bring your friends and family and come to the Opera House in downtown Buckhannon this Thursday for the

## Mountain Music and Dance Series Kickoff.

The monthly series is something owner C.J. Rylands wanted to bring to the Opera House for its authenticity.

*“Be authentic, tell your story, represent value,” Rylands said. “If that’s your intention, then you have to do something that is aligned with this place culturally and geographically.”*

He hit on square dancing as something that is authentic to Appalachia and got connected with the Mountain Dance Trail and Becky Hill, who is involved with the trail and the Augusta Heritage Center in Elkins.

Rylands said he and his wife, Jeannie, went to his first square dance in Helvetia in December where the tradition has carried on for 65 years.

*“I didn’t know anything but I enjoyed myself,” he said. “It was exercise. By the end, I knew a little bit. I thought what if we do it in the environment of the Opera House with the 14-foot ceilings and 100-year-old hardwood floors?”*

While at the square dance, Rylands talked with the two callers and gave his business card.

One of those callers, Mark Crabtree, connected T-Claw Crawford, of T-Claw Calling, with Rylands.

*“T-Claw called me up to have a conversation,” he said. “He came and looked at the space and what I wanted to do and he said he would*

*arrange the music and the callers.”*

Doors open at 6 p.m. and a dance workshop begins at 6:45 p.m. with the regular dance at 7 p.m. Admission is \$5 a person but a student ID will get them in for \$3. Kids under 12 are free. There will be food and drinks for purchase.

Crawford, who grew up in Nashville, Tennessee playing punk and jazz music, landed in the Northwest with a rich old-time music community.

*“I was living in Olympia, Washington and playing a lot of banjo and fiddle music,”* he said. *“I can’t remember where the first square dance was I went to but I really enjoyed it.”*

Calling came out of necessity.

*“We were playing all this old-time dance music out there and there was no real square dance caller in my town,”* he said. *“So I went to a little workshop and ran with it. I started calling at dances and figuring it out.*

*“I came to calling through the music and I really enjoy the community feel of it — holding hands with strangers and laughing; it breaks down social barriers.”*

Crawford’s wife, Bridget Rue Esterhuizen, accepted an assistant professor of theatre position at Davis and Elkins College, and the two made West Virginia their home.

Crawford had taught square dance at the Augusta Heritage Center for a number of years but was intrigued by the Opera House venue in Buckhannon and the opportunity for more than a dancing experience.

*“At my dances, I like to have it be a get-together more than just a dance,”* he said. *“Not everyone wants to dance, especially all the time. If there are places to sit and socialize, have dinner or drinks or whatever, that is a better environment for the time of community dance I am interested in.”*

Crawford is as comfortable calling for beginners as advanced dances and said that all levels and ages are welcome.

*“Anybody can do it as long as you have a way to move around the floor or be carried,” he said. “Every dance will be taught before we do it to the music so it will be about two to three minutes of learning to dance and three, four and five minutes of dancing while the band plays. If you mess up, it doesn’t matter; you will get back on track.”*

Part of Crawford’s goal with the Mountain Dance and Music series is to find music that is varied.

Besides square dance, there will be two-step, flatfoot, waltz and line, according to the poster for the event.

This Thursday, the event will host Emily Miller and Jesse Milnes with their band.

*“They have a regular honky tonk country gig at Big Timber on Wednesday nights,” he said. “They are avid performers and they are good at other types of music.”*

The next event in the series will be in two weeks — Feb. 14 — and the series will continue on the second Thursday of the month for the rest of year.

*“It should be different combinations of music and bands and callers each time,” Crawford said. “I am hoping to build out some themes for each event so it’s not the regular, ‘same-old’ square dance every month.*

*“I want it to feel special each time,” he said. “Maybe have a fundraiser or cakewalk or other little things.”*

Rylands said, *“When I went to my first dance in Helvetia, I knew zero. I knew a little bit by the end but I was laughing the whole time. It’s a type of dance that is welcoming and it’s friendly. It’s aligned with all our intentions of being a safe, affordable and welcoming community.”*

The Opera House is located at 12 E. Main St. in Buckhannon. For more information, call 304-472-8369 or search for Buckhannon Mountain Music & Dance Series Kickoff on Facebook.