



Albert Music Hall reflects the unique heritage of the **Pinelands**

THE SOUND OF **MUSIC**



By **SUSAN BLOOM**/Correspondent

On Jan. 8, Waretown's Albert Music Hall will celebrate the 14th anniversary of its current building and continue to honor the unique heritage and musical legacy of the Pine Barrens region.

Public relations manager Elaine Everett said Albert Music Hall was conceived in 1974 by brothers Joe and George Albert, who enjoyed playing music with their friends in a fox-hunting lodge that came to be known as "the Home Place" on a sand road in the rustic woods of Waretown.

Over time, more and more area musicians enjoyed participating in these impromptu jam sessions, where the door was always open and coffee and homemade cake flowed. Following George Albert's death and with a growing pool of musicians and visitors continuing to flood the lodge every week to participate in the unique musical experience, Joe Albert kept his brother's tradition alive by renting out the Auction Hall on Route 9 in Waretown for weekly performances.

This official venue allowed attendees to more formally enjoy the flavor of Pinelands music, which involves singing, picking, the playing of such instruments as mandolins, fiddles, guitars, washtub basins and rhythm drums, "and a whole lot of warm feeling and fun," Everett said.

"We aim to encourage performers and give music back to the community," she said. "The group's original mission was to preserve the music of the Pinelands area and that period of time for future generations.

"Though connected to the 1950s era, original Pinelands-style music actually dates back to the 1800s and is strongly influenced by Irish and Welsh melodies and other old folk songs from the British Isles," Everett added.

Following several moves throughout the years, including temporary residence within the Waretown school system, ground was broken for the Pinelands Cultural Society's new Albert Music Hall building in Waretown in May 1996, and the 6,000-square-foot building was officially dedicated and opened on Jan. 5, 1997.

Visitors to the 350-seat auditorium can enjoy seven musical acts perform for 30 minutes each every Saturday night starting at 7:30 p.m. year-round, except for

the weeks of Christmas and New Year's, when friends and performers pitch in to assist with annual maintenance of the building.

"The building was actually constructed by many of our musicians and volunteers, who graciously donated time and materials," Everett said. "Albert Music Hall was built to look like the porch of a cabin in the woods, and its construction reflects the hands-on nature and cooperation of a bunch of people getting together to have a good time and play music."

Ed Connors can attest to that. At 78, the Lakewood resident and longtime mandolin player has been a regular monthly performer at the venue for 15 years.

"Music is such a special gift, and Albert Music Hall is the premier place to play if you like country, bluegrass and old-time music," Connors said. "The audience response is fantastic, and the overall experience is nothing but positive. There is truly something there for everyone, even kids."

Admission to the Saturday night shows is \$5 for adults and \$1 for children 11 and younger.

As part of Albert Music Hall's anniversary show on Jan. 8, doors will open at 6 p.m., and a special pre-show film on the construction of the building, 131 Wells Mills Road (Route 532), will begin at 7 p.m. The cost is the same as the regular Saturday night shows.

A special Sunday show is the 34th Ocean County Bluegrass Festival, which will take place Feb. 6. Doors open 11 a.m., and live music will be played from noon to 5 p.m. Prices are \$8 for adults and \$1 for children.

For more information, call 609-971-1593 or visit www.alberthall.org.

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