



# HAMILTON'S BIG WEEKEND

  
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# ONE FINAL BOW

## Hardtimes Bluegrass Fest's 18th year is last

CHRISTINA RODRIGUEZ

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After 18 years of pickin' and grinnin', the Hardtimes Bluegrass Festival south of Hamilton is coming to a close.

Musicians and festival organizers Mike and Tari Conroy have been married almost 52 years and have played together for most of that time. Tari says when she met and married Mike he thought she should be able to play and put a guitar in her hand and taught her. They joke she learned to play against her will.

The couple have decided it's time to move on to the next chapter in their lives, and it's not as emotional for them as people would think. "We're both just so ready, we're kind of wore out," said Tari. "It's a huge amount of effort."

However, Mike says it will become emotional once the festival starts and all the memories are brought up by people attending.

**"This year our plan is to have a lot of the ones that helped us start it and helped us all through the years come back and play have a big send off."**

**Musicians and festival organizers  
Mike Conroy**

"This year our plan is to have a lot of the ones that helped us start it and helped us all through the years come back and play have a big send off," he said.

The last Hardtimes Bluegrass Festival will take place July 24-26, 10 miles south of Hamilton at 424 Forest Hill Road. There will be 13 bands taking the stage including Johnny Campbell Band, Ladd Canyon Ramblers, The Jolley Family,



PROVIDED PHOTO

Musicians and festival organizers Mike and Tari Conroy with their dog Polly.

Darby Sirens, Pinegrass and, of course, the Conroys. Mike's love of music and bluegrass started at a young age when he would play at sixth grade sock hops in Hamilton and scout around for new records to listen to. He says there wasn't anywhere to buy records in the Bitterroot Valley so he would have to go to Missoula.

Mike said they had always thought about starting a real old-timey blue-

Please see **BLUEGRASS**, Page L4

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A musician performs at the 2023 Hardtimes Bluegrass Festival south of Hamilton.

## BlueGrass

From L3

grass festival with one microphone and one stage, nothing fancy. One day Mike was talking with a friend on Forest Hill Road who said they had a place it could be held. When Mike went to look at the area he noticed the neighboring property was timbered and looked like what they had envisioned.

He asked who owned the property and found out it was owned by some friends he knew, the Heilands, who agreed to have the festival on their property. The first few years it was held on both the Thomas Ranch and Heiland Ranch but then moved to just the Heiland Ranch. Tari said the festival was given the name "Hardtimes" because the first year they held it was in 2008 when the economy tanked, the cost to get in was cheap and reflected the name.

The first year was small and had a limited budget and most of the people who attended were friends of theirs who came from as far as Idaho and played for a percentage of the gate.

"I'm not even sure the numbers, because we were so new at doing this," Tari said. "We really didn't know what we needed to do, you know, and I think we just had a stamp for the back of the hand, so we didn't count anything."

Over the years there have been around 45 bands who have come to play at the festival and Tari says one of the fun things they do is have a contest where the crowd gets to vote for the best band and the band with most character. She makes huckle-



JESSICA ABELL PHOTOS, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

Local favorites Lochwood perform at the 2023 Hardtimes Bluegrass Festival.

berry jam for the prize with a button that says, "I done won."

Tari has been making memory boards with photos from over the years which will be set up for display during the festival this year. She also is lining the back of the stage with posters from every year.

"It will give people something to do, walk around and relive the history, or get to read about it if they hadn't been there before," she said.

Mike says one of his favorite parts of the festival is Sunday Morning when they put on a bluegrass gospel show because it is casual where anyone can sign up to play or sing. He says he gives music lessons for a living so a lot of the people who go on stage are his students, and for some it is their first time performing on a stage. Another highlight of the festival are the jam sessions that happen in the evening.

"A lot of the festival happens after dark, that's when all the bands start playing and people are roaming around, so much fun jamming," Mike said.

The Conroys say no one will be stepping

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up to take over the festival, and that is the way they want it.

“I just don’t think anybody could step in and keep it what we had it built up to be, and what we’re so proud of, you know?” said Tari. “The reality of it is it’s hard to have a traditional bluegrass festival and they would look at the gate and say well we need to bring a little different kind of music in to get people to come. I could just see that happening, and I couldn’t live with that. We wanted to go out as it was, a traditional festival.”

For more information on the Hardtimes Bluegrass Festival visit [www.hardtimes-bluegrass.com](http://www.hardtimes-bluegrass.com)

Christina Rodriguez is a general assignment reporter and photographer with the Ravalli Republic in Montana. She may be reached at [christina.rodriguez@ravallirepublic.com](mailto:christina.rodriguez@ravallirepublic.com).

Attendees of the 2019 Hardtimes Bluegrass Festival.  
PHOTO PROVIDED BY MIKE CONROY







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Volunteers busily prepare for the 30th annual Bitterroot Brewfest at the Daly Mansion in this 2025 file photo.

JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

# BITTERROOT BREWFEEST

## to celebrate 31 years of beers

**CHRISTINA RODRIGUEZ**  
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Bitterroot Brewfest is celebrating 31 years of Montana beers, food and music from 3 to 9 p.m. on July 25 at the Daly Mansion in Hamilton.

The family-friendly event, hosted by the Bitterroot Chamber of Commerce, costs \$40 and includes a commemorative

pint glass and unlimited tastings. Entry is free for those who are not drinking.

VIP passes will get people early access at 2 p.m. for the event as well as a limited-edition beer stein according to Bitterroot Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Jodi Mitchell. She said over 2,500 people attend the event every year and she is happy to see so many people





come out. She said people even coordinate family reunions and class reunions around the event. "I love this has brought the community together for 31 years, the same weekend every year," Mitchell said.

This year's musical entertainment includes opening act The Benevolents, followed by the headliners The Timber Rattlers. Mitchell said last year The Timber Rattlers could not perform because of the weather, so they are excited to have them back.

Some of the food trucks at this year's event include Swanson's Apple Cider Donuts, The Pattee Wagon, Mr. Gyro, Zeera, and Amaze N Smoke BBQ. Parking at the Daly Mansion is available but fills up quickly. A free shuttle service is available to pick up and drop off people from the Hamilton High School parking lot and the public parking lot at Fourth and Main Streets in Hamilton.

Bitterroot Rides is also available for safe transportation to Darby, Hamilton, Corvallis, Victor, and Stevensville. Bitterroot Rides is not a free service and requires people to pre-schedule rides before the event by calling 406-529-0625.

Mitchell said the chamber has been trying to put on more events that help local commerce with increasing traffic to local businesses, restaurants, and hotels, and Brewfest is a great way to incorporate their mission to bring economic vitality to the area.

"It means a lot we get to bring in music and on historic grounds, and is kind of a cool thing," Mitchell said.



People line up to sample beers at the 30th annual Bitterroot Brewfest in this 2025 file photo.  
**JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC**

For more information on Brewfest visit Bitterroot Brewfest 2026—Bitterroot Valley Chamber of Commerce. Christina Rodriguez is a general assignment reporter and photographer with the Ravalli Republic in Montana. She may be reached at [christina.rodriguez@ravallirepublic.com](mailto:christina.rodriguez@ravallirepublic.com).



**JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC**

Hamilton Mayor Dominic Farrenkopf serves beer at the 30th annual Bitterroot Brewfest in this 2025 file photo.

## WELCOME TO THE STEVENSVILLE CREAMERY PICNIC



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PERRY BACKUS, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

Dick Moon of Hamilton kept his 1957 Pontiac Starchief shining Saturday while participating in the 2011 Daly Days car show sponsored by the BitterRodders Car Club.



JESSICA ABELL, RAVALLI REPUBLIC

A truck with a barbecue grill cooks hamburgers over the rat rod's air filter during the 2023 Daly Days car show.

# BitterRodders' Daly Days car show features classic cars, swap meet at fairgrounds

**CHRISTINA RODRIGUEZ**  
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The BitterRodders' Daly Days Car show will take place from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on July 25 at the Ravalli County Fairgrounds in Hamilton.

This will be the second year the BitterRodders Car Club will host the event at the fairgrounds, where people can gain free entry

and enjoy music and food while looking at classic cars.

They will also be holding a swap meet during the event that will include car parts, unfinished projects, memorabilia and more. There is a new motorcycle category this year, and the club hopes to see several bikes come out to join the cars.

Vice President of the BitterRodders Car Club Rocky Munroe said the nonprofit club has been around for 29 years and gives back to local organizations every year. In the last three years, the group has given over \$21,000 to help local veterans according to Munroe.

"I really enjoy doing it," Munroe said. "It's really good for the community and raises

The  
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from 10 a.m.  
to 3 p.m. on  
July 25 at the  
Ravalli County  
Fairgrounds in  
Hamilton.





awareness for the things they do.”He said all the money they raise and give away has to stay within Ravalli County according to the group’s bylaws.

“It really feels good,” he said. “I’m retired, and I’m fortunate to be in a position to help contribute to the community.”

Munroe said there is a diverse group of

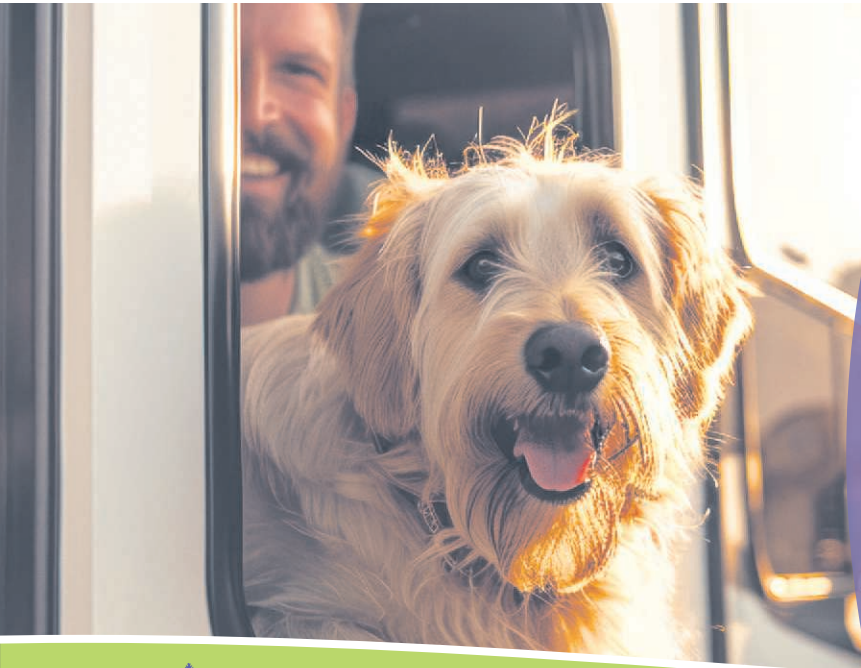
people and cars amongst the club, from those who build cars in their backyards to professional shops who restore classic vehicles. He said the event gives people in the community a chance to see cars they wouldn’t be able to normally.Trophies

Please see **CAR SHOW** , Page L10



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A restored GMC truck at the 2023 BitterRoddors’ 2023 Daly Days car show.



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**Left:** A car-hop tray complete with menu from Arnold's Drive-in sits in the window of one of the entries during the 2023 Daly Days car show in Hamilton.

**Right:** A woman looks inside a restored Chevy Greenbrier van during the 2023 Daly Days car show.

**JESSICA ABELL,**  
RAVALLI REPUBLIC

Car Show

From L9

will be awarded in each category including farthest traveled, work in progress, people's choice, best motorcycle, best

engine and best of show. The car show brings in entries from all over the western U.S. with the furthest from Virginia according to Munroe. He said they already are planning next year's show because it is the 30th anniversary of the club and they are planning

to have a great event in store. He said the key is to keep having fun and try to make everything better. "We try not to make it bigger, because better will make bigger happen all by itself," he said. For more information visit the Bitter-

Rodders' Car Club on Facebook. Christina Rodriguez is a general assignment reporter and photographer with the Ravalli Republic in Montana. She may be reached at christina.rodriguez@ravallirepublic.com.

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PRESERVING THE PAST:

# THE DALY MANSION

Keeps Bitterroot History Alive

Long before it became one of the Bitterroot Valley's most recognizable landmarks, the Daly Mansion was home to one of Montana's most influential families. Today, more than a century later, it continues to serve a different purpose, connecting the community to its history while preserving the legacy of Marcus and Margaret Daly for future generations.

# SEE YOU AT The Daly Mansion



RAVALLI REPUBLIC





The stately 40-plus-room mansion stands as a reminder of the people who helped shape the Bitterroot Valley. While Marcus Daly is remembered as one of Montana's famed Copper Kings, his impact reached far beyond mining. His vision for agriculture transformed the Bitterroot Valley through innovative farming, livestock operations, horse breeding, and orchard development. Alongside him, Margaret Daly became known for her generosity and dedication to the community, leaving a legacy that extended well beyond the walls of their home.

Today, the Daly Mansion Preservation and Trust, works to preserve that history through educational programming, guided tours, exhibits, and special events that invite visitors to experience life at Riverside firsthand. Throughout the year, the Mansion welcomes school groups, history enthusiasts, local families, and travelers eager to learn more about the people and stories that helped shape western Montana.

Preserving a historic property of this size is no small task. Although the Mansion is owned by the State of Montana, it receives no regular operational funding. Its ongoing preservation depends on the dedication of volunteers, members,

donors, and community support. That partnership has allowed the Mansion to remain a living piece of Bitterroot history rather than simply a building frozen in time.

This weekend offers another opportunity for residents and visitors alike to step inside one of Montana's most treasured historic homes. During Brewfest on Saturday, July 25, the Daly Mansion will be open for discounted self-guided tours from 2 to 6 p.m. Volunteer reenactors stationed throughout the home will bring the Mansion's history to life, offering guests a glimpse into the lives of the Daly family and those who once worked and lived on the estate.

Whether it's a first visit or a return trip, walking through the Mansion offers more than a look at beautiful architecture and antiques. It provides an opportunity to better understand the people, vision, and history that helped shape the Bitterroot Valley we know today.

As summer brings thousands of people to the grounds, the Daly Mansion continues to fulfill its mission, simply as a historic house, but as a place where the community can gather, learn, and celebrate the heritage that defines the Bitterroot Valley.

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# MORE THAN HEADLINES: A Community We're Proud to Call Home



Hamilton's Biggest Weekend is a celebration of everything that makes the Bitterroot Valley special. From stepping back in time at the Daly Mansion and enjoying Brewfest to gathering with friends, supporting local businesses, and celebrating family traditions, it's a weekend that showcases the pride, history, and spirit of our hometown.

For generations, the Ravalli Republic has had the privilege of telling those stories.

Long before the festivities begin, our team is already working behind the scenes, covering community meetings, sharing event details, promoting local businesses, and helping organizations spread the word about the events that bring our valley together. When the weekend finally arrives, you'll often find us doing more than taking photos or writing stories. Many of our employees volunteer their time, serve on local boards, support nonprofits, and help organize the very events we cover.

We don't just report on this community, we're part of it.

The pages of the Ravalli Republic tell far more than the day's headlines. They celebrate new businesses, student achievements, local volunteers, championship teams, and the traditions that have become part of Hamilton's history. Each edition becomes another chapter in

the story of our valley, preserving today's moments for tomorrow's generations.

Hamilton has always been built on neighbors supporting neighbors. It's a place where businesses invest in one another, volunteers step forward when help is needed, and families gather to celebrate life's milestones. That same community spirit has connected the Ravalli Republic to the Bitterroot Valley for generations.

Our commitment extends well beyond the newsroom. We believe in showing up, whether that's sponsoring local events, partnering with nonprofits, volunteering our time, or helping local businesses share their stories. Supporting our community has always been part of who we are because we know that when the Bitterroot Valley succeeds, we all succeed.

As Hamilton's Biggest Weekend celebrates the people, places, and traditions that make this valley so remarkable, we're honored to help preserve those memories. Every photograph, every story, and every edition captures another piece of our shared history.

Thank you for allowing the Ravalli Republic to be part of your lives and this community for so many years. We look forward to continuing to celebrate Hamilton's successes, support its traditions, and tell the stories that connect us all for Hamilton's Biggest Weekend and every day of the year.



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### WELCOME DR. MARSTAELLER!



#### Bitterroot Health new pediatrician starting soon!

HAMILTON, Montana — Bitterroot Health is proud to announce that pediatrician Dr. Megan Marstaeller will join the organization to provide comprehensive pediatric care for newborns, children, and teens up to age 18, with a focus on healthy development, preventive care, early diagnosis, and compassionate, patient-centered medicine.

Dr. Marstaeller will see patients at Bitterroot Health's Hamilton and Stevensville locations, expanding access to pediatric care across the region.

Dr. Marstaeller earned her degrees in Chemistry and Philosophy from Carroll College before attending the University of Washington School of Medicine through the residency program.

## Welcoming our new pediatrician.



### Dr. Megan Marstaeller joins Bitterroot Health!

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