

# 2019 Vandalia Contest Winners

On Memorial Day weekend 2019, the West Virginia Department of Arts, Culture & History hosted the 43<sup>rd</sup> annual Vandalia Gathering at the Culture Center on the State Capitol Complex. This celebration, free to the public, honors our state's finest traditional arts, music, dance, stories, crafts, and foods. Here's a list of the 2019 contest winners. Please join us **May 22-24, 2020**, for our 44<sup>th</sup> Vandalia! All photos by Steve Brightwell.

## Youth Old-Time Fiddle (15 and under)

- 1<sup>st</sup> place: Liam Farley, Chapmanville  
2<sup>nd</sup> place: Sydnee Stricklin, Hurricane  
3<sup>rd</sup> place: Mallory Hindman, Reader

## Old-Time Fiddle (59 and under)

- 1<sup>st</sup> place: Tessa Dillon, Morgantown  
2<sup>nd</sup> place: Jesse Milnes, Valley Bend  
3<sup>rd</sup> place: Andy Fitzgibbon, Montrose  
4<sup>th</sup> place: Jesse Pearson, Huntington  
5<sup>th</sup> place: Ben Davis, Marlinton



## Senior Old-Time Fiddle (60 and over)

- 1<sup>st</sup> place: Gerry Milnes, Elkins  
2<sup>nd</sup> place: Jenny Allinder, St. Albans  
3<sup>rd</sup> place: David Bing, Gandeenville  
4<sup>th</sup> place: Bob Smakula, Elkins  
5<sup>th</sup> place: Jim Mullins, St. Albans



## Mandolin (all ages)

- 1<sup>st</sup> place: Sawyer Chapman, Charleston  
2<sup>nd</sup> place: Seth Marstiller, Mill Creek  
3<sup>rd</sup> place: Robin Kessinger, St. Albans  
4<sup>th</sup> place: Luke Shamblin, Elkview  
5<sup>th</sup> place: Isaac Putnam, Kenna

## Bluegrass Banjo (all ages)

- 1<sup>st</sup> place: Nick Freeman, Charleston  
2<sup>nd</sup> place: Jake Eddy, Parkersburg  
3<sup>rd</sup> place: Jake Stover, Red House  
4<sup>th</sup> place: Seth Marstiller, Mill Creek  
5<sup>th</sup> place: Jared Long, Frametown



## Lap Dulcimer (all ages)

- 1<sup>st</sup> place: Nick Freeman, Charleston  
2<sup>nd</sup> place: Ezra Drumheller, Prosperity  
3<sup>rd</sup> place: Tish Westman, Beckley  
4<sup>th</sup> place: Martha Turley, Ona



## Old-Time Banjo (59 and under)

- 1<sup>st</sup> place: Hunter Walker, Beckley  
2<sup>nd</sup> place: Pete Kosky, Charleston  
3<sup>rd</sup> place: Cody Jordan, Charleston  
4<sup>th</sup> place: Jarrod Saul, Sumerco  
5<sup>th</sup> place: Trevor Hammons, Marlinton

## Senior Old-Time Banjo (60 and over)

- 1<sup>st</sup> place: Paul Gartner, Yawkey  
2<sup>nd</sup> place: Gerry Milnes, Elkins  
3<sup>rd</sup> place: Jim Mullins, St. Albans  
4<sup>th</sup> place: David Bing, Gandeeville  
5<sup>th</sup> place: John Davis, Ivydale



## Youth Flatpick Guitar (15 and under)

- 1<sup>st</sup> place: Hazel Riley, Hillsboro

## Flatpick Guitar (all ages)

- 1<sup>st</sup> place: Robin Kessinger, St. Albans  
2<sup>nd</sup> place: Matt Lindsey, Culloden  
3<sup>rd</sup> place: Dan Kessinger, St. Marys  
4<sup>th</sup> place: Isaac Putnam, Kenna  
5<sup>th</sup> place: Jarrod Saul, Sumerco



## Quilts/Wall Hangings, 1<sup>st</sup> Place (all ages)

- Best of Show: Debbie Chancellor, Nitro  
Applique Quilt: Marie Miley, Huntington  
Mixed/Other: Irene Goff, Huntington  
Wall Hanging: Carol Cutlip, South Charleston  
Award of Merit: Darene Webb, Cross Lanes

## Classic Cookies (all ages)

- 1<sup>st</sup> place: Hannah Potter, Sissonville  
2<sup>nd</sup> place: Maureen Cremeans, St. Albans  
3<sup>rd</sup> place: Ashley Susan Hale, Charleston  
Youth (15 and under): Kendall Atkins,  
Scott Depot



# 2019 Vandalia Liars Contest

## *Biggest Liar*

### James Froemel

When I was 10 years old, my friend Calvin and I entered our town's soap-box derby race. This was held each year on the steepest hill in town. The winning car was paid \$20, which went to the drivers, or their next of kin. If generally constructing a car wasn't difficult enough for a bunch of 10-year-olds, the racing committee decided we should build the cars in fun shapes—the shapes of specific animals, which were assigned at random by the committee. And they had some fun animals you could be. There was a lion, a dinosaur, a wolf, even a woolly mammoth. But Calvin and I managed to draw from the hat the ever-fearsome smallmouth bass.

Being 10 and being quite broke, we had to build this thing out of the cheapest material we could find, which happened to be some sheetrock down at the hardware store that had been left out in the rain, and they were trying to get rid of it. The advantage of making a car out of sheetrock if you're trying to make it shaped like a fish is that sheetrock is really easy to shape. The disadvantage of building a car out of sheetrock is that when you finish it, you have a car made out of sheetrock.

We were working on this thing over at Calvin's Granny's garage. There was plenty of room, so it was a great place to work, plus she was always feeding us. She had these amazing cookies, which officially, on paper, were called sugar cookies. But she put so



Photo by Steve Brightwell.

**Biggest Liar:** James Froemel, Madsville

**Bigger Liar:** Gary Buchanan, Preston

**Big Liar:** Suzy McGinley, Ripley

**Youth (15 and under):** Zane Wilkinson, Ovapa

much Crisco in them that Calvin and I just called them Crisco cookies. So, that whole week, we were just eating Crisco cookies, building this car, and gaining 10 pounds each until the day of the race.

We drag this car up to the top of this steep, steep hill. We get up there and see our competitors for the first time. Looking at the other kids' cars, which they were supposed to have built themselves, they looked like they were built by professional carpenters and mechanics. I mean, they were beautiful streamline cars. They painted these terrifying faces on them, so they looked like fighter jets—all of them, but not ours. No, ours just looked like a regular smallmouth bass staring down a steep hill, looking as terrified as the kids who were about to drive it.

We were looking around. The other kids, they all got out wrenches. They're tightening bolts and polishing their cars. Kind of wanting to play the part, I turned to Calvin, and I'm like, "Did you bring a toolbox?" He said, "Oh yeah, yeah." So, he opens up the toolbox, and all that's inside are more Crisco cookies.

I say, "Did you bring a wrench?"

He says, "No."

I say, "Why not?"

He says, "Do you need one?"

I say, "No."

He says, "Are you hungry?"

I say, "Yeah."

So, we stood there, eating Crisco cookies and watching the other kids work on their cars. But Calvin, being 10, doesn't pack napkins. So, our fingers are getting all greasy from these cookies. He leans over and wipes his fingers on the hood of that car. When the sun hits it, it starts shining. And I get an idea. We start breaking up these cookies and wiping them directly on

the car—I mean, top side of the car, bottom side of the car, all around, and especially on the wheels.

The guy gets up, ready to start the race, and tells us all to climb in. We climb into our giant fish, one behind the other, and he says, “Ready, set, go.” We lean forward and wait for gravity to take over on us, our extra 20 pounds, and our newly *Criscoed* wheels. Now, I think for everybody, there’s distinct sounds of summer. For some, it’s the sound of crickets at night. For others, maybe it’s the sound of waves breaking on the beach. But, for Calvin and I, it will always be the sonic boom of a Crisco-covered sheetrock fish flying down the hill and breaking the sound barrier. We flew down in a fishy flash and hit the bottom, where it leveled out before

the finish line. The wheels shot off the car, and we started gliding across the ground, about 50 feet, leaving a cloud of gypsum and confusion behind us until the drywall under our butts was so thin we ground to a stop. We looked back. We were still in the lead, but the other cars were gaining. Thinking fast, we grabbed the car, kicked through the bottom of it, pulled it up like a pair of pants, and started to make a run for it. Mr. Darwin is watching from the finish line as there comes barreling toward the end of his contest a fish with legs, followed by a dinosaur and a woolly mammoth.

At the start of the day, I’d never have thought we’d have won that thing, but as we crossed that finish line, I knew that we had always been the *natural selection*. 🌿

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## Youth Award

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### Zane Wilkinson

**G**ood afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and this is my dog, Corbin. I’ve tried to encourage Corbin to enter the Liars Contest this year because they always say, “Let sleeping dogs lie.” But I changed my mind when I remembered, “If you lie with dogs, you get fleas,” and I don’t want to get fleas, again. Plus, honestly, Corbin can’t tell the truth.

So, I thought I’d tell you about some of my and Corbin’s adventures. There are lots of beautiful places in West Virginia: Dog Bible Run here near Charleston, Dog Patch in Logan County, and Dog Run in Clay County. Last summer, we went to Camden Park. He was really confused by the Pronto Pups they sold there. They were sort of like a corn dog, but Corbin has seen lots of dogs, and none of them were mad at corn. Corbin loved the water ride but threw up on every roller coaster. He got as sick as a human.

After that, we went to Hillbilly Hot Dogs. He got a Homewrecker. It’s a hot dog covered

in everything. After losing his lunch on the rides, he was starving. It was a dog-eat-dog world.

We went to the state capitol, and he met some of our leaders. He told me he wasn’t impressed by them. He said they were more crooked than his hind leg. He said there was no way to improve on them because you can’t teach an old dog new tricks.

He also went with us the last time Ringling Brothers would come to Charleston. He loved the animals and trapeze act. He saw some clowns, too. He was sure he’d seen them earlier at the capitol. At one point, though, it was all quiet. All of a sudden, Corbin got up from his seat in a flash and ran into the center ring before anyone could stop him. There were horses standing on each other’s backs. Corbin joined their conga line. It was a real dog-and-pony show.

I would stay and tell you more, but I have to go. My dog ate my homework. 🌿



Photo by Steve Brightwell.



Dwight Diller jams with Kim Johnson at Jackson's Mill, 2006. Photo by Gail Hatton.

## 2019 Vandalia Award Recipient

# Dwight Diller

By Kim Johnson

I first met Dwight Diller at the West Virginia State Folk Festival in Glenville in the late 1970s/early 1980s. I'd just started playing with Clay County fiddler Wilson Douglas (the 1992 Vandalia Award recipient), who was good friends with Dwight. I was a rank beginner, and Dwight was already an energetic hard-driving banjo player who'd performed a lot with (1998 Vandalia Award recipient) Glen Smith and the Morris Brothers band. And he wasn't just a banjo player. He also fiddled and could do some singing.

Dwight was born in 1946 in Rand (Kanawha County) but has lived most his life in Pocahontas County. In 1975, he started teaching at the Augusta Heritage Center in Elkins. He taught a lot of great banjo players, like Ron Mullenex and Mike Burns. Budding

The Vandalia Gathering always kicks off on Friday evening with a concert in the Culture Center's Norman L. Fagan West Virginia State Theater. The 2019 performances honored three longtime members of the Vandalia family who passed during the previous year: George "The Earl of Elkview" Daugherty [see Mack Samples' tribute, Summer 2019], Marvinne Loving [see Bobby Taylor's tribute on p. 3], and Judson Wallace [see Rebecca Kimmons' tribute, Winter 2019].

musicians from all over the world came to Dwight's banjo camps in the mountains of Pocahontas.

To learn more about our 2019 Vandalia Award recipient, please read "The Rhythm of Dwight Diller" by Allen Johnson, Winter 2014.



(Left-right) Dwight plays banjo with Clay Countians Lee Triplett on fiddle and David Morris on guitar, 1973. Photo by Nancy McClellan.

After I'd been playing a few years, I began playing with Dwight from time to time. He was never one to hesitate giving advice. One year, at Jackson's Mill, somebody asked me if I was intimidated to be playing with him. I didn't know any better at the time and said, "No." But I should've been. Dwight was, and is, one of a kind.

He learned from what we consider traditional-music royalty—namely the Hammons family. He documented their music and lives in photos and videos and took great pride in passing their music down to younger generations. He traveled to festivals and gave slideshow presentations with photos, film, music, and stories. Eventually, Dwight collected many of these photos and videos together on a four-DVD set. Instead of selling them, though, he donated them for free to libraries and schools throughout the state. Dwight epitomizes what the Vandalia Award is about: preserving and sharing old-time traditions so they won't be lost.

Dwight was at the first Vandalia Gathering in 1977 and has attended pretty regularly ever since. As he approaches his 74<sup>th</sup> birthday, he's slowing down a bit but still making the festival rounds, including Vandalia, the state Folk Festival, and the Appalachian String Band Music Festival at Clifftop. Each year at Vandalia, he renews friendships with other musicians, such as John Morris, and jams all over the capitol grounds. He's become an old-time-music icon, especially at Clifftop, where most attendees are from out of state; many likely learned to play banjo by attending his camps or watching his videos.

Congratulations, Dwight, on receiving the 2019 Vandalia Award! 🍀

KIM JOHNSON is the former editorial assistant of GOLDENSEAL. Since her retirement in 2018, Kim's stayed busy on the old-time-music circuit with her band, The Modock Rounders. This is her sixth contribution to GOLDENSEAL as an author (but much, much more in reality).