

Local muzzle loader inducted into country music hall of fame

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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Jay Lewis, brother honored by organization.

Little did Jay Lewis know when he bought his first black-powder rifle that it would eventually steer him toward country music and a state award.

In October, 70-year-old Lewis—a bushy-bearded Gothenburg resident who also portrays Santa Claus—and his brother Steve “Louie” Lewis of Centennial, CO, were inducted into the Nebraska Country Music Foundation (NCMF) Hall of Fame.

During the ceremony, the brother duo also received first place in the professional country songwriter category for “Sounds of the Mountains.”

“It means quite a bit but I felt small when I saw some of the others who have been inducted,” Jay said about the award, noting that famous singer-songwriter Michael Martin Murphey and Hadley Barrett, a country-western band leader turned national rodeo announcer, are also state country music inductees. “It’s a big honor and will enhance opportunities for us to sell our song and other music.”

Hall of fame inductees are nominated and reviewed by the NCMF board.

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"You don't have to be from Nebraska but have to have performed a lot in Nebraska or written songs about Nebraska," he explained.

So far, Jay and his 60-year-old brother have collaborated on the writing and singing of country music on three CDs that were recorded in a Denver studio.

"My brother plays acoustic or bass guitar and I sing," he said.

Country music, he said, tells a story as it is sung around a campfire, on a trail ride or in another type of cowboy-country setting. He explained that the genre has deeper roots than more modern-day country-western music that sounds a lot like rock 'n roll.

Although Jay sang in grade school and the high school choir while growing up in Sioux City, IA, he didn't do much else until a few years ago when he toured as a back-up singer with Steve who has always been involved with music.

Jay laughs when he remembers first moving to Gothenburg and buying a black-powder rifle for decoration.

In the store, he struck up a conversation with a muzzle loader who invited him to a black-powder shoot at a range south of town.

Muzzle loading is the firing of muzzle loader or black-powder firearms, often done at a rendezvous, where participants promote the history of fur trading.

Jay attended the weekend shoot and was hooked. He became a muzzle loader and later was on the board of directors for the Nebraska Muzzle loader Rifle Association.

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Sometimes Steve would attend muzzle loader gatherings, bringing his guitar and singing with Jay around the campfire.

At a rendezvous in Deadwood, SD, Jay became acquainted with Murphey and was invited to

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