

# OUR TOWNS

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## Gayville Hall Hits The Big 1-0

### Sharples Make Plans For 26-Show Season

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GAYVILLE — When Doug Sharples went to a building auction in 1997, he had no idea he would be the one who came away with the building.

He and his wife Judi were friends of the previous owner, who had passed away, and Sharples said he went to the auction strictly as a spectator.

"They were trying to get the first bid, and I just (rose my hand) to bid on it, just to get it going," he said. "Then there was no other bid. That opening bid was below what they would find acceptable, so they told me what their minimal would be, and it was a darn good price."

When he returned home, Judi asked him, "Who bought the building?"

"Guess what?" he told her. "I did."

Since that time, the Sharples have managed to turn that building into Gayville Hall, a major area venue for music and art.

This year, Gayville Hall will be holding its 10th season — its biggest one yet, with 26 shows scheduled.

Over the course of those 10 seasons, Gayville Hall has hosted approximately 160 shows.

"In all this time, we've only canceled two shows because of weather," Doug Sharples said.

"We've lucked out," Judi Sharples added. "But who knows what'll happen this March?"

The season kicks off at 8 p.m. Saturday, March 13, with "A Celebration of Merle Haggard," featuring Gayville Hall regulars John and Susan McNeill, Nick Schwebach and Owen DeJong.

There will be continuous shows through May 1. They will resume after a two-week break and continue into the summer.

Season 10 will bring some exterior changes to Gayville Hall, as well. The Sharples plan to have the building painted this spring, and they have commissioned some signage from Greg Preheim.

The Sharples owned the building for four years before they ever thought to hold a concert there. This was because it was the home of a grocery store, which closed in 2001.

During this time, the couple were making a film about Omaha resident and jazz musician Preston Love, who died in 2004 and spent his career playing with artists like Count Basie and Ray Charles. Love also performed in smaller venues across the Midwest.

"I thought to represent that ... I wanted to get him playing in the hinterlands of South Dakota, so I got him a gig playing at the National Music Museum, and then he said, 'I want to play someplace at night,'" Doug Sharples said.

The store had been cleared out by that time and the acoustics of the building were good, so a stage was built, and the concert was held Wednesday, May 16, 2001. The show still remains one of the Sharples' favorites.

"It was quite an event," Judi Sharples said. "He was wonderful."

The show attracted approximately 100 people, and the Sharples decided to hold another, this time with John and Susan McNeill — whom they met as students at the University of South Dakota — and Nick Schwebach and Owen DeJong.

Doug Sharples said the next two shows both attracted 83 people, and he wasn't sure if it would be feasible to continue.

Then John McNeill suggested hosting a celebration of Hank Williams.

"We had to turn away 50 people," Sharples said. "We had more than 200 people."

"It was tremendous," Judi Sharples added. "The show was so great."

The Hank Williams show was so successful that it's been performed again in different versions through the years. It will be performed again this season on March 27.

Doug Sharples said they even called it, "The show that saved Gayville Hall."

Since that time, the venue has hosted "celebrations" of other artists, including Johnny Cash and fiddler Chet Olsen, which was broadcast by South Dakota Public Television.

These performances have been among Gayville Hall's most popular.

"The most we ever had in here was the first time we did the Johnny Cash show. We had 270 paid people in here. It was just crazy," Doug Sharples said.

On average, most performances attract more than 100 people, although some attract many more than that.

"Our last show of the season had 230 people in here," he said. "They were even sitting in the aisle and into the gallery."

Sharples said the concerts have attracted "a lot of regulars" over the years, some of whom travel long distances



TRAVIS GULBRANDSON/P&D  
Gayville Hall, which is owned by Doug and Judi Sharples, will begin its 10th season at 8 p.m. Saturday, March 13, with "A Celebration of Merle Haggard." The owners say this will be the biggest season yet for the venue, with 26 shows scheduled.

to attend.

"We have customers that come as far as 150 miles on a fairly regular basis," he said. "Not every show, but they'll pick out four or five shows a year and they'll come that distance."

Apart from music, art is also a very important part of Gayville Hall. Its walls are lined with posters from past shows, vintage sheet music, signage and albums.

There's also a gallery that features a revolving schedule of art exhibitions.

Some works of art have even been donated by attendees of the concerts.

"At the Johnny Cash show, there was a person in the audience (April Dawboy)," Judi Sharples said. "We did-

n't even know her. And she came to us and said, 'I was inspired by that concert.'"

Since that time, Dawboy has painted a number of portraits of musicians, many of which are on display in the gallery.

"This is like an old-time music hall," Judi Sharples said. "That's what we aspired to be. ... It's turned out that there is a market, and people do want to come and have a wholesome and enlightening evening. They sit and listen to the music and interact with the musicians, rather than in a bar environment where people are visiting and the band is just in the background."

She added that neither she nor her husband anticipated such an enduring response.

"When you think about it, it's pretty unbelievable that we're still here, that something like this would take off and grow," she said. "We have some really wonderful patrons. It's exciting. They respond, and we respond to them."

For more information about Gayville Hall, visit [www.gayvillehall.com](http://www.gayvillehall.com).

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