

Grammy-award winning bluegrass band to perform

By **JULIE HULLETT**

GATES MILLS — When Michael Cleveland learned how to play the fiddle, he had no aspirations to become a band leader. He started taking lessons at age 4 and quickly learned bluegrass music, later becoming a Grammy award-winning artist. He now leads the band Michael Cleveland and Flamekeeper and is excited to bring bluegrass to Gilmour Academy in Gates Mills on July 4.

The Encore Chamber Music Institute holds the annual Music and Ideas Festival at Gilmour Academy. This six week festival includes lectures, yoga classes and concerts to spark curiosity and make a community of learning, according to Artistic Director Jinjoo Cho.

Mr. Cleveland, 40, of Charlestown, Indiana said that no one else in his family played the fiddle, but his grandparents loved bluegrass music and helped start a bluegrass association in Henryville, Indiana, his hometown. Mr. Cleveland's grandparents took him to bluegrass shows every second and fourth Saturday starting when he was six months old. He heard someone play "Orange Blossom Special" on the fiddle when he was 4 years old and knew he wanted to do that, too.

Mr. Cleveland was born blind and his parents enrolled him at the Kentucky School for the Blind. The school had a classical music program that used the Suzuki method and the students learned how to play by ear.

"It took a couple years before I could play a few songs, it did not come right away," Mr. Cleveland said on Monday. "We were wondering if I would ever really get it. I started so young but it took awhile to get going. Everyone said I just picked it up and started playing, but I don't believe that. Whoever you are, even if you have ability, you have to put work into it."

He also lost part of his hearing in one ear as a child due to an ear infection. Mr. Cleveland said that it did not impact him much because it happened at an early age.

Since he grew up listening to bluegrass music, Mr. Cleveland said there was no doubt in his mind that he would pursue that genre of music for his career. He enjoyed the energy and soul of bluegrass before he learned to play the fiddle.

"Even before I was into playing the fiddle, I was big into bluegrass," he said. "I went to my grandparents' house and listened to records and eight-track tapes. I went to sleep with my head on the speaker of the record player. It was definitely bluegrass early on. There wasn't ever really any doubt."

Mr. Cleveland wanted to perform in other people's bands, but not lead a band himself. He made a few solo records for Rounder Records, a major bluegrass label, and worked with other artists such as Rhonda Vincent and Dale Ann Bradley. Mr. Cleveland and a few other artists performed for a showcase in Nashville, Tennessee, and a bluegrass booking agent suggested that they start a band. Michael Cleveland and Flamekeeper formed in 2006. Josh Richards plays guitar, Nathan Livers



Photo courtesy of Michael Cleveland and Flamekeeper

Michael Cleveland and Flamekeeper will bring bluegrass music to the Encore Chamber Music Institute Music and Ideas Festival at Gilmour Academy in Gates Mills on July 4. Band members include Chris Douglas, from left, Michael Cleveland, Josh Richards, Nathan Livers and Jasiah Shrode. Mr. Cleveland is a Grammy award-winning artist for his album "Tall Fiddler."

plays mandolin, Jasiah Shrode plays banjo and Chris Douglas plays bass.

"We thought about it and planned a little bit, but we had no idea what we were getting into. We just kind of started it," Mr. Cleveland said. "There were a lot of learning experiences for me. I had no clue how to be a band leader. I still don't like to be the bad guy, the guy that says you can or can't do something. Thankfully with my band, it's a good bunch of guys."

Mr. Cleveland won a Grammy in 2020 for Best Bluegrass Album for "Tall Fiddler," which was co-produced with Sean Sullivan and Jeff White. They are always looking for good songs, Mr. Cleveland said, which are "harder and harder to find." He credits his success to his bandmates, some of whom are childhood friends. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic when they only gathered once every couple months to rehearse, the band members still "nailed it."

"Michael Cleveland is the perfect person for this festival," Ms. Cho said on Friday. "He has an inspiring and invigorating mind. We're thrilled he's taking time out of his holiday to be with us."

Mr. Cleveland said that this is a "changing

time" for him. Although traditional bluegrass is still his favorite genre of music, Mr. Cleveland said that he is interested in other genres as well and is looking forward to new collaborations. He will tour with banjo player Bela Fleck in September.

"This thing with Bela Fleck is a departure from what I normally do and what people normally expect, and that's exciting for me," he said. "It's exciting for the band too because we're doing things like this (the festival in Gates Mills). We want to play at classical concerts for that audience. It's a pretty exciting time."

Mr. Cleveland said he and his bandmates are excited to play at the Encore festival. They enjoy playing for bluegrass fans, but are also looking forward to bringing bluegrass to people who may not be very familiar with it. They do not come to Cleveland very often, he said, and this is their first time at the Gates Mills festival, which has taken place for six years. They will perform July 4 at 4:30 p.m. at the Lorraine and Bill Doderer Center for Performing Arts at Gilmour Academy in Gates Mills. Tickets are available at encorechambermusic.org or call the office at 216-559-4015.

Chester police levy headed to Nov. 2 ballot

By **BRIAN DOERING**

As part of their ongoing support for the police department, Chester Township Trustees are moving forward in the process of putting a levy on the Nov. 2 ballot.

Trustees on June 17 approved a motion to sign a resolution for a certificate of need to be submitted to the Geauga County Auditor's Office for the addition of a 0.5-mill police levy. Trustee Walter "Skip" Claypool voted no.

"The timing of levies is important because if we didn't put the 0.5 [mill] levy on this year and we'd be needing to put it on next year, how does that impact the other departments," Trustee Ken Radtke, Jr. said of his support of the issue. "You wouldn't collect the \$200,000 which this levy would bring this year so you're now short on your revenue projections." That could mean asking voters to approve a larger levy in the future, he said.

The proposed levy is expected to generate \$204,500 annually and would be the first additional funding for the department in 19 years.

Mr. Claypool previously said the better plan is to support the police department with existing tax dollars and then put a levy on the ballot in 2022.

"Right now, if we put the 0.5 mill levy in 2021 to be collected in 2022, it is actually ahead of when it is needed, it is not really needed for a couple of years," said Mr. Claypool. "I think strategically, we're better off to wait until 2022 to put the 0.5 mill levy rather than do it this year."

The next step in the process is for the auditor's office to review the numbers and confirm if there is a need, then it will come back to the trustees to vote on the issue to be put on the ballot this November.

"If the levy does pass, one thing that is important to communicate I think to the residents, what their actual tax impact is," said Mr. Radtke. "So, for a 0.5 mill levy, it is \$17.50 per \$100,000 of market value, so if you had a \$200,000 home, it would be \$35 and a \$300,000 home would be close to \$50" annually.

The meeting was held at the Chester Township Town Hall. The next regular Trustees meeting is scheduled for July 1 at 6:30 p.m.

RESIDENTIAL | COMMERCIAL | INDUSTRIAL

Specializing in Standing Seam Only

MARK WENGERD, OWNER
440.321.9434

Windsor
METAL ROOFING LLC

Financing Option Available

AUBURN POINTE

Summer Sale On Annuals!

Great selection of flats, potted annuals and hanging baskets!
Huge selection of begonias and other shade plants.

Plus, check out our cool succulents!!

Lisianthus, Alstromeria and other cutting flowers still available.

Plant Black and Blue Salvia and Fuchsias for your hummingbirds.

10089 E Washington St, Chagrin Falls, OH 44023 ☎ 440-543-7455
Mon-Fri 9-6, Sat 9-5, Sun 10-4 ☎ www.auburnpointegreenhouse.com