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EVENT



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hilineharvestfest.com

The 5th Annual Hi-Line Harvest Festival Returns to Downtown Chester, MT

Hi-Line Harvest Festival, the annual celebration of community culture, rural tradition and agriculture in Chester, Montana, is returning for its fifth year on September 17-19, 2026. The free, family-friendly event is bringing with it a stacked lineup of national, regional and local entertainment highlighted by The Braun Brothers – of Reckless Kelly and Micky & the Motorcars.

The festival is brought to you by Liberty County Community Development Committee & the Liberty County Chamber of Commerce along with Chester native Peyton Cole. All Hi-Line Harvest Festival proceeds go directly back to the community, benefitting the LCCDC to further develop the Chester community through events, gatherings and local resources – as well as future Hi-Line Harvest Festivals.

“We’re really trying to bring Chester and the surrounding area together to instill more culture and foster community,” Cole says of the event. “There’s nothing like small town camaraderie. They will show up for you tenfold when you need them, and we are lucky to give back with a festival of this scale, especially in rural Montana.”

The capstone of the celebration is the live music, headlined by The Braun Brothers – Idaho natives with a strong sense of the togetherness that Hi-Line Harvest aims to foster in Chester. Reckless Kelly has spent 30 years touring the world with a history of headlining iconic venues like Nashville’s Ryman Auditorium and the Old Saloon in Emigrant, Montana. Sibling barnstormers Micky & the Motorcars are still riding high off the 2025 release of their eighth studio album, Micky & the Motorcars, that showcases their Idaho roots and the friends and fans they have made on the road. Joining both bands on the Hi-Line Harvest bill are Austin’s

Chasen Wayne & the Honky Tonk Machine from Austin, and Conrad, Montana’s Wylie & the Wild West. Kalyn Beasley (Wyoming), Raina Wallace (Montana) and The Moon-docks (Montana) will round out the musical bill.

While music is a showpiece of Hi-Line Harvest Festival, it’s far from the only attraction. Visitors of all ages can partake in an array of competitions: Bed Races; Meat Smoking (ribs, wings and toma-hawk); a Cheesecake & Pie Bake Off; a Cribbage Tournament; Trivia Night; Corn Hole; and Ski Races. There’s also a community breakfast, an open mic showcase, bucket truck rides hosted by North-western Energy, hay rides hosted by Vintage Floral, tractor rides hosted by the CJI Track Team and live painters – plus local business and craft vendors, food vendors and an array of children’s activities to round out the fun.

Hi-Line Harvest Festival relies heavily on the support of community donations, sponsors and volunteers, and it gives back to Chester and rural Montana at every turn – with small-business grants, scholarships, and free vending for K-12 school and extra-curricular groups.

Fans and visitors can support Hi-Line Harvest in all manners big and small, and during the festival they will find organizers combining fundraising with good, old-fashioned community fun with events like a

farm-to-table community dinner, a live auction featuring donated items, and a pie-and-cheesecake auction.

Whether attendees make a weekend out of Hi-Line Harvest or just drop by to say hello, all are welcome to experience the essence of community spirit and togetherness again this year. Visit hilineharvestfestival.com for

more details, and come join in the fun in September in the heart of Montana.

- Josh Crutchmer is a journalist for The New York Times and Rolling Stone and the author of The Motel Cowboy Show, about the music from the Mountain West. Find him at backloungepublishing.com or on Instagram at @backloungepublishing



Festival Poster Hand Drawn by Drew Scherger

SMALL BUSINESS GRANTS

The Hi-Line Harvest Festival is pleased to offer two (2) Small Business Growth Grants of \$1,000 each to support local businesses in their growth, improvement, and long-term success.

To learn more about this opportunity, please visit our website: hilineharvestfest.com

Application Due Date: September 1st, 2026

Grant Award Date: September 19th, 2026 at the 5th Annual Hi-Line Harvest Festival

Letter From The Editor

5 years ago, living on the Wicks’ Farm in East Ledger, I finally had the chance to farm and ranch in real time. Shout out to the Meissner’s and Wicks’ for taking care of me amidst the COVID-19 pandemic! It was a real treat to come home and reconnect with all of the folks that practically raised me.

I think now, more than ever, it’s important to stay connected and come together as a community. This was the idea for the Hi-Line Harvest Festival. Over the last 5 years, our hometown has come together because we all know the importance of homespun events & togetherness. Every single person and business in the surrounding Hi-Line communities are the reason the Hi-Line Harvest Festival exists.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you for your support, monetary & in-kind donations, time, and encouragement. The Hi-Line is a special place and I am so proud to



Photo by Loni Judisch

help put it on the map. Here’s to celebrating Rural Montana! Cheers, and I hope to say hi and thank each and every one of you at the 5th Annual Hi-Line Harvest Festival.

Peyton Cole,
Festival Producer



Photo by Amanda Moss

This newspaper was made possible with the help of Chad Smith and the Blaine County Journal

THE HI-LINE HARVEST FESTIVAL IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY TWO COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Building Community, One Project at a Time: The Story of the LCCDC

On January 25th 2017 “a group of like-minded individuals met...to determine the feasibility of forming a committee to work toward making positive changes in the Chester community.

Our first mission was to decide on a title for this group. The Community development Committee was chosen. We will strive to work alongside the Chamber and other community organizations, maintaining good communications with them with the goal of strengthening and enhancing all of our endeavors.”

This quote was taken from an article in the Liberty County Times by Karla Kulpas, Chairperson.

Some of the main goals were to prepare for the 2020 All School Reunion, bring back the “burning of the green” skating party with Rocky Mountain hot dogs/ hot cocoa, free swim day/summer Splash event, and other family and community events that allow us to enjoy

our neighbors.

The LCCDC has coordinated with other area groups and businesses to co-sponsor many helpful, informative events including the Back to School community picnic, Vegas Night fundraiser at the Golden Triangle center, Brewfest fundraisers, Community Earth Day clean up, Color run and other fun runs, Health fairs, and the Re Imagining rural program. They also support the Joplin Art in the Park and Car show, and participated in the annual Christmas stroll.

The committee has spearheaded several community initiatives such as the Chester entrance signs with lights, 2020+1 Reunion (because of Covid), safety lights on the North side of the County Library, a Phil Aberg event, creation of a new Liberty County logo, the annual Harvest Festival celebrating Ag on the Hi-Line and our annual Trunk or Treat event.

The committee recently developed



a LibertyOpoly game based on the Monopoly theme and, sold them as a fundraiser.

They initiated a program to give a Community service Senior student scholarship yearly. The committee has also been a Golden Prairie grant recipient for new development.

The LCCDC is a 501 C (3) group, holds monthly meetings, and “will continue to work to bring a sense of wellbeing in our community through projects and events that promote and preserve the unity of the community”.

Please consider joining the team! They meet at the Northern Plains Insurance office at 12 noon on the 3rd Wednesday of each month.

Liberty County Chamber of Commerce Expands Community Outreach Through Newsletter, Radio, and Leadership Initiatives

The mission of the Liberty County Chamber of Commerce is to promote and support the vitality of the county’s agricultural heritage, empower small businesses, and encourage sustainable tourism that showcases the charm and strength of our rural communities. The Chamber is dedicated to fostering economic growth, building meaningful partnerships, and preserving the values that make Liberty County a unique and thriving place to live, work, and visit.

Since the closure of the local newspaper in 2023, residents of Liberty County and the surrounding communities have had limited access to reliable local news, event information, and advertising. Recognizing this need, the Chamber has made improving community communication one of its primary goals this year.

The Chamber has expanded its community newsletter to include local news, community events, and information about area organizations while continuing to promote and support local businesses. In addition, the Chamber recently launched a Community Online Radio Station to further connect residents, visitors, and travelers with everything happening throughout Liberty County.

The online radio station has proven to be an effective and affordable way to share information across our large, rural county. Programming includes agricultural news, weather, community calendars, local business updates, school news, city and county government



announcements, public service announcements, and other important community information.

The station also provides nonprofit organizations, community groups, and local events with donated airtime, helping them increase awareness and participation. By reaching both residents and visitors, the radio station serves as another tool to promote local businesses, encourage tourism, and strengthen the local economy.

Advertising revenue helps support the station’s operating expenses. Chamber members receive free advertising in the community newsletter, while sponsorship opportunities are available for businesses wishing to advertise on the radio. Both the newsletter and the online radio station are free for the public to access through the Liberty County Chamber website.

In addition to these communication efforts, the Chamber has partnered with The Outdoor Communities Lab, a leadership development program powered by Outdoor Community Partners and the Heart of the Rockies Initiative. The immersive coaching program helps rural communities strengthen local leadership, encourage collaboration, engage residents in community planning, and prepare locally driven projects for implementation.

As part of this initiative, the Chamber

launched its first community survey in June through the Chamber website. Fifty-one residents participated, providing valuable feedback about the county’s strengths and future priorities.

Survey results showed three consistent themes about what residents value most: a strong sense of community, the safety of the area, and the natural beauty of Liberty County’s rural landscape. Overall, respondents identified the close social connections and quality of life as some of the county’s greatest assets.

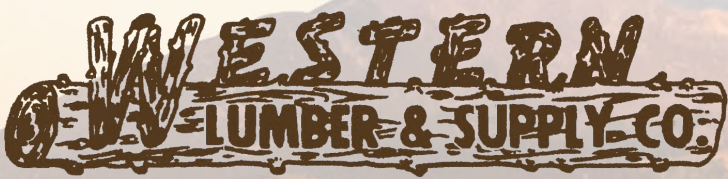
Residents also expressed a desire to see Chester and Liberty County continue to thrive while preserving their small-town character. The most frequently identified priorities included supporting business growth, attracting and retaining young families, creating opportunities for younger generations to stay or return, improving community beautification, expanding recreational and family amenities, and investing in infrastructure such as housing and sidewalks.

Complete survey results are available for public review at the Liberty County Chamber Office in Chester.

To learn more about the Chamber, access the community newsletter, or listen to the Community Online Radio Station, visit libertycountyycc.com.

THE HI-LINE HARVEST FEST

WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE SUPPORT & CONTRIBUTIONS OF LOCAL INDIVIDUALS AND BUSINESSES LIKE WESTERN LIUMBER & SUPPLY CO.



WE ARE THANKFUL FOR 5 YEARS OF SUPPORT THAT HAS ALLOWED US TO PROMOTE LOCAL BUSINESSES, CELEBRATE OUR FARMERS & RANCHERS, SHOWCASE MONTANA MUSICIANS, AND BRING NATIONALLY TOURING BANDS TO CHESTER.



WE HOPE TO SEE EVERYONE AT THIS YEAR’S FESTIVAL SEPTEMBER 17TH- 19TH!

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Hi-Line Harvest Festival



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**MONTANA FARMERS UNION ADVOCATES FOR FAIRNESS
FOR FARMERS AND RURAL COMMUNITIES. WE WORK
TOWARD LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD, PUSHING
BACK AGAINST CORPORATE MONOPOLY CONTROL OF
OUR FOOD DOLLAR. WE ADVOCATE FOR BROADENED
AND DIVERSE MARKET OPPORTUNITIES, EXPANDING
PROCESSING CAPABILITIES, AND ADDRESSING SUPPLY
CHAIN VULNERABILITIES.**

**LEARN MORE BY VISITING
MONTANAFARMERSUNION.COM**



SPONSORS

The Hi-Line Harvest Festival would not be possible without our generous sponsors, who have kept the Harvest Festival alive for the past five years.

THANK YOU for helping us keep this family-friendly festival FREE!

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GOLD SPONSORS

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CHAD SMITH PHOTO

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NUTRIEN



LOCH ELECTRIC



BACKLINE MT



BEAR'S DEN

COMPETITION RULES

5th Annual Hi-Line Harvest Festival



September 17th-19th, 2026



Chester, Montana

To register for competitions & read a full list of rules, judging criteria & scoring, please visit the festival website - hilineharvestfest.com



Traveling trophies for 1st place competition winners are hand forged and engraved by Cary Kolstad of Ick Metal!

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17TH, 2026

TRIVIA NIGHT

HOSTED BY
SHALON NORICK

- ⦿ 7:00 PM at the Grand Bar, \$20 registration fee
- ⦿ Max 8 teams. 6 ppl or less per team.
- ⦿ No cell phones out (even for texting)
- ⦿ Each team may star one round to double their point
- ⦿ Prizes will be given to 1st and 2nd place

PRIZES
SPONSORED BY
THE GRAND BAR
&
RU'S TIBER MARINA

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18TH, 2026

CRIBBAGE

HOSTED BY
SHEA
KUMAEWA-NORICK

- ⦿ 3:30 PM Registration, 4:00 PM Tourney at 1st St. Mercantile
- ⦿ Registration Fee: Unexpired Food Bank Donations
- ⦿ Max 16 teams, double elimination
- ⦿ Regular cribbage rules, no mulligans
- ⦿ Prizes will be given to 1st and 2nd place

SPONSORED BY
RU'S TIBER MARINA
&
GARY STANDIFORD
(Handmade Crib Board)

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19TH, 2026

BED RACES

1:00 PM Downtown Chester, MT
at the Hi-Line Harvest Festival
in front of the Public Library.



HOSTED & SPONSORED BY TREASURE STATE MEATS & MONTANA ROOTS ACCOUNTING

1. Adult & Junior Divisions. 5 member teams, registration costs \$150 per team. Nonrefundable. Max 8 teams in each division, double elimination bracket. Bracket position, lanes, and bed will be drawn for. The bracket will be drawn before Calcutta.
2. Registration is on a first come, first served basis. As there is a max of 8 teams, your team will not be registered until your payment has been received. You can pay online via Paypal or write & mail a check to LCCDC PO BOX 553 Chester, MT 59522.
3. Each team will use provided bed frames. No alterations to be made of beds.
4. Straight line race, approximately one block long. Will be disqualified if you go out of bounds.
5. One team member must be riding on the bed at ALL times. Team players must take turns riding on the bed frame. All team members must have had a turn as a rider before any member of the team can ride again. All 5 members must be in contact with the bed when it goes across the finish line. If a team advances to the next round, a different rider must ride on the bed in the next race.
6. Pay out of entry fees: 45% for first place, 25% for second place, 10% for third place. 20% goes back to the Hi-Line Harvest Festival.



BED RACES CALCUTTA

AUCTIONEER:
ANDY SHWAB

- ⦿ Teams in both the Adult and Junior divisions will be auctioned to the highest bidder before the races.
- ⦿ The bidder who purchases the winning team in each division will receive 75% of that division's Calcutta pot, while the remaining 25% will go directly to the Hi-Line Harvest Festival to help support this annual community tradition.



SKI RACES

HOSTED BY FRITZ AUCTION

FRITZ INC



AND AUCTION
Chester, Montana

Join us right after the Bed Races! Four people work together to scoot plank skis across the finish line. It's easy, it's fun, it's down right hilarious.

- ⦿ \$20/team, winner takes 50% of the pot.
- ⦿ The remainder of the pot goes to help the Harvest Festival grow!

COMPETITIONS CONT'D | SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19TH, 2026

CORN HOLE

SPONSORED BY CORDER & ASSOCIATES AND KAITLYN & LOGAN LYDERS

TOURNEY BEGINS AFTER THE BED RACES & SKI RACES.

3PM REGISTRATION, 4PM TOURNEY

TOURNEY

HOSTED BY
JORDAN ORAW



- ☼ Max 16 teams, double elimination bracket
- ☼ Team Fee: \$20 per team. Fees are non-refundable.
- ☼ Bracket will be chosen at random.
- ☼ You have 10 minutes to start your match or you forfeit the round.
- ☼ Team registration is on a first come first served basis and ends until teams are full, or the tournament starts, whichever happens first.
- ☼ Corn hole boards and bags will be provided.
- ☼ Corn hole boards are placed 27 feet apart from front edge to front edge.



1. Cornhole is played with two teams, each consisting of one player (singles) or two players (doubles).
2. Players pitch their bags in an underhand motion from the pitcher's box next to each side of the board.
3. Players alternate turns tossing their cornhole bags toward the opposite board.
4. After each team has pitched four bags, players take score, and resume pitching to the opposite board.
5. The team who scored points in the previous inning goes first in the next inning. If it was tied, the team who went first in the last inning gets to go first again.
6. **NEW THIS YEAR:** The winner of the losers' bracket may challenge the winner of the winners' bracket. The winner of that game is the tournament champion.



PIE / CHEESECAKE



PRIZES
SPONSORED BY
FRONT PORCH &
J&M SALON



Please bring your pie or cheesecake to the Tip Top Lounge by 1:00 PM on Saturday, Sept. 19th



Judging will take place at the Tip Top Lounge on Saturday, Sept. 19th at 2:00 PM.

- ☼ Adult & Junior Divisions in Both Pie & Cheesecake Categories
- ☼ \$5 registration fee per pie or cheesecake
- ☼ All cheesecakes & pies must be homemade. This means no pre-made crusts, fillings, or other commercial products. We're looking for your personal touch and baking expertise.
- ☼ Pies/cheesecakes must be delivered to the competition in a disposable pan.
- ☼ All pies & cheesecakes will be donated to the Hi-line Harvest Festival and auctioned off after judging. A % of proceeds raised in the auction will be donated to the Chester Food Bank.
- ☼ To ensure the health and safety of everyone, we ask all bakers to follow the best practices in food safety and sanitation.



To register for competitions & read a full list of rules, judging criteria & scoring, please visit the festival website -

hilineharvestfest.com



COMPETITIONS CONT'D | SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19TH, 2026

MEAT SMOKING



Tomahawks Sponsored by Treasure State Meats

Ribs sponsored by Tip Top Lounge

Wings Sponsored by Terra Firma Organics



PRIZES SPONSORED BY

Smith & Rogue, Western Lumber, & AgGro Weather Media



Competitions will take place on Saturday, September 19th, 2026
at the Tip Top Lounge - 111 E Washington Ave, Chester, MT.



Judging will take place in Tip Top Lounge between 4:PM - 6 PM.
4:00 PM Tomahawks, 5:00 PM Wings, 5:30 PM Ribs

Photo by Mia Osgood



Kord Ramberg & Adam Fitzpatrick 2025

- ☼ Teams: Max 10 teams. 1-2 people per team.
- ☼ Registration Fee: \$20 per team per category, \$50 for all 3 meat smoking competitions (tomahawk, wings, & ribs). Fees are nonrefundable.
- ☼ Registration is first come first served, you are not registered until you have paid your team fee. You may register online at hilineharvestfest.com
- ☼ Meats Provided (Teams must use the meats provided – no outside meat allowed)
 - 1 Tomahawk per team sponsored by **Treasure State Meats**
 - 1 bag (5 lbs) of wings per team sponsored by **Terra Firma Organics**
 - 2 Spare Ribs per team sponsored by **Tip Top Lounge**
- ☼ Pickup: You may pick up your meat on Wednesday, September 16th, 2026.
- ☼ Meats must be cooked on-site at the Tip Top Lounge - 111 E Washington Ave Chester, MT.
- ☼ Competitors must provide their own gear including but not limited to - grills or smokers, pop up tents, thermometers, extension cables, etc. Power is available at Tip Top Lounge, but is limited. Please plan on bringing a back up power option.
 - No deep fryers allowed.
 - **The Hi-Line Harvest Festival is not responsible for any damages or stolen property.**
- ☼ To ensure the health and safety of everyone, we ask all competitors to follow the best practices in food safety and sanitation.
- ☼ A panel of 3 judges per category will be provided by the Hi-Line Harvest Festival.

For complete rules on each category, judging criteria & scoring, and registration,
please visit our website - hilineharvestfest.com



COMPETITIONS CONT'D | SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19TH, 2026

DANCE COMPETITION

HOSTED BY SAVANNAH RIGGIN
PRIZES SPONSORED BY SMITH & ROGUE



6:30 PM IN FRONT OF THE STAGE

Join the fun during Wylie and the Wild West's festival set! The competition is family-friendly, and winners will be chosen based on overall entertainment, creativity, and crowd engagement.



Photo by Mia Osgood

Dell & Rennay Harmon 2025



2025 COMPETITION WINNERS



Trivia Night: Chester Pharmacy's Team
'Dose of Genius'
Cribbage Tourney: Justin 'Hoss' Ratzburg
Pinball Tourney: Nash Ramberg
Duck Drop: Melissa Kantorowicz
Fun Run: Tara Case & Garrison Riggins
Dance Competition: Lane & Daycee Lerum
Bed Races: South Africans sponsored by
1st St. Mercantile
Bed Race Calcutta: 1st St. Mercantile
JH Bed Races: Speed Kills
Hi-Line Rancher Plank Walk: Class of 1985
Zucchini Growing Competition: Heston Jones
Pies: Carol Fulbright
Lemon Meringue Pie
Cheesecake: Susan Van Dessel
German Chocolate Cheesecake

Pie / Cheesecake Grand Champ: Carol Fulbright
Cornhole 1st Place: Dolan Hull & Eric Kleinsasser
Cornhole 2nd: Javin Miles & Tyson Hull
Brisket 1st: Peyton Cole & Christiaan von Waltsleben
Brisket 2nd: Jimmy Fossen
Brisket 3rd: Kord Ramberg
Ribs 1st: Adam Fitzpatrick
Ribs 2nd: Kord Ramberg
Ribs 3rd: Jerry Brinson & Bim Snyder
Wings 1st: Adam Fitzpatrick
Wings 2nd: Courtney Romain
Wings 3rd: Peyton Cole & Jerry Brinson
Overall Meats 1st: Peyton Cole
Overall Meats 2nd: Adam Fitzpatrick
Overall Meats 3rd: Jimmy Fossen





The Hi-Line Harvest Festival strives to highlight Montana musicians and artists while inviting regional and national touring acts to Rural Montana.



2026 FEATURED ARTISTS

Friday, September 18th

Tip Top Lounge

Song Swap | 1st Street Mercantile

The Moondocks - Butte, Montana

Emerging from the backroads of Granite County, Montana, the Moondocks duo smashes together the poignant rural lyricism of Ben Larson with the impromptu interstellar instrumentation of percussion guru Dr. Pfahl.

Powerful and evocative singers, Ben and Pfahl have shared the stage with The Wilder Blue, Yarn, Melissa Carper, Big Richard and more. As lifelong musicians, this duo have produced numerous albums in previous bands including The Backwoods Dreamers and The Grownass Men. The Moondocks is an evolution of Ben’s Western Americana sound with new cosmic influences from Pfahl’s deep dive into the realm of the theremin.



Kalyn Beasley - Wyoming

Kalyn Beasley is one of the West’s most distinctive songwriters and storytellers, crafting vivid, emotionally grounded songs about a way of life few live but many are drawn to. He makes his home in the high, dry mountains of Northwest Wyoming, home of grizzlies and geysers.



Raina Wallace - Montana/Wyoming

Raina Wallace is a singer, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist whose raw emotion blends the storytelling soul of country with the grit of Americana. For the past four years, she toured as the bassist for the Lowdown Drifters, earning her stripes on the road and onstage, now breaking out on her own with her unique voice and songwriting style.



Saturday, September 19th

Braun Brothers (Cody, Willy, Micky, Gary) - Stanley, Idaho

Few places inspire music like the American West, and nobody embodies that classic western sound like the Braun Brothers. Hailing from Idaho’s White Cloud Mountains, Willy, Cody, Micky, and Gary Braun have spent their lives following in the footsteps of their father, Muzzie, and generations of Brauns before them, performing and making music.

The Braun Brothers are the founders and leaders of Reckless Kelly, one of the most influential and enduring bands in American roots music. Micky & The Motorcars would carve out an equally impressive career with more than two decades on the road, eight studio albums and a devoted fan base. Together, thereby show the worlds of country and Americana music the payoff from hard work, determination, and writing songs that pull no punches.

Although the tour schedules of both the Motorcars and Reckless, as well as the brothers’ individual dance cards, makes a Braun Brothers performance a relative rarity, when they do reunite, fans can expect a stripped-down acoustic version of their band’s signature sounds. They tend to dig deeper into the catalogs, focusing on songs co-written together, choice covers, as well as tunes that feature the brothers’ signature harmonies.

While their individual careers have taken them around the world, the Braun Brothers remain connected by family, a shared history, and a lifelong love of making music together.



Chasen Wayne & the Honky Tonky Machine - Austin, TX

Chasen Wayne Mitchell was born on a team roping ranch in Kennedale, Texas and raised in a world fueled by rodeo, drag racing, and blue-collar grit. After his family relocated to Granbury, Texas in hopes of a safer life, he found refuge in music when it seemed that trouble wasn’t something he could easily escape.

He set his sights on Austin for a fresh start At 17 years old - making his way by working nights as a bouncer on 6th street and days digging tunnels for a plumbing crew. His journey hasn’t been clean or easy—marked by addiction, close calls, and a long road of hard-earned experience that’s deeply embedded in his songwriting while incorporating Psych, Jazz, Rock and country all into one piece of art that is always chasing down his own unique sound.



Wylie and the Wild West - Conrad, MT

Wylie Gustafson is an American original. The native Montanan singer/songwriter has recorded 24 albums backed by over 3 decades of performing around the world. He remains distinct in country music as one of the few authentic voices of the genre. Wylie’s muse is the empty sprawl of his native Montana home where he crafts the words and music that reflect his life on the 4th generation family ranch.

For over the last 33 years, he and his band, The Wild West, have performed their refreshing blend of cowboy, western, and traditional country. They are hugely popular on the festival and theatre circuit. Stateside, they have performed at such prestigious venues as the National Folk Festival, MerleFest, the Bumbershoot Festival, The Stagecoach Festival, A Prairie Home Companion, The Conan O’Brien Show and the Grand Ole Opry (with over 50 guest appearances).



Celebrating 5 Years of Live Music in Chester, MT

- 2022**

 - Cole Kleinert - Sunburst, Montana
 - The Lucky Valentine’s - Fort Benton, Montana
 - Jarred Hanson & the Sunsah406 - Helena, Montana (Chester Native)
 - The Ditch Riders (Art Johnson, Mark Engstrom, Kim Haaland) - Chester, Montana
 - Colby Acuff - Idaho

- 2024**

 - Local Strangers - Rudyard, Montana
 - Mary Kate Teske - Billings, Montana
 - Layloni Ghee Band - Chester, Montana
 - Tylor & the Train Robbers - Ketchum, Idaho
 - Tanner Laws Band - Thompson Falls, Montana

- 2023**

 - Local Strangers - Rudyard, Montana
 - Jaden Decker - Missoula, Montana
 - Jonathan Terrell - Austin, Texas
 - Luke Dowler & the Midnight Conversations - Kalispell, Montana

- 2025**

 - Cole Kleinert - Sunburst, Montana
 - Jarred Hanson & the Sunsah406 - Helena, Montana (Chester Native)
 - Jeff Crosby - Macall, Idaho
 - Paige Plaisance & the Yeah You Right Boys - Waterproof, Louisiana
 - Kyle Hunter & the Mountain Standard - Missoula, Montana

One Hundred Years of Liberty County Memories

By Rhonda Petersen
CJI History Teacher

Liberty County was officially created on February 11, 1920, from portions of Hill and Chouteau counties. In a 1919 election, 72% of voters supported the formation of the new county. During the same election, Chester was chosen over Joplin as the county seat. Liberty County became the first Montana county established after World War I, and its name reflected the patriotic spirit inspired by America's wartime victory. The county's population reached 3,340 in 1925 but had declined to an estimated 2,337 by 2019. Agriculture remains the county's primary industry.

One of the most

significant tragedies remembered in Liberty County is the 1957 murder of Undersheriff Otto Fossen. A resident of Joplin and a law enforcement officer for thirty years, Fossen was killed while pursuing a stolen vehicle. He was shot by 21-year-old car thief Donald Bujok, who later stole Fossen's vehicle and fled. A massive manhunt involving law enforcement agencies and local volunteers eventually captured Bujok. Although sentenced to life in prison, he served only eleven years before being released. Years later, unproven theories linked him to the

Zodiac Killer case.

Another major tragedy was the March 7, 1966 collision of two Great Northern passenger trains east of Chester. The crash killed engineers Bernard L. Runyan and Eric A. Walters and injured dozens of passengers. Investigators determined that operator error caused the accident when a westbound

train failed to stop and struck an eastbound train head-on.

While the museum documents difficult moments, it also celebrates the achievements and milestones of local residents. Wedding announcements, family histories, and an extensive collection of school yearbooks help preserve memories of community life. Former

residents often return to browse yearbooks and reconnect with their past.

The museum also highlights community celebrations and cultural events. Its collections include photographs of parade floats built by the Lamplighters band, materials from Montana's Centennial Celebration in 1989, and artifacts from Liberty County's 75th anniversary in 1995. Historical records related to Chester's post office, including documents from the dedication of the current building in 1964, are also preserved.

A major resource housed at the museum is the Chester Country Notebook Collection, which contains information on local topics

such as homesteading, railroads, and community history. Recent additions of photographs and documents have enhanced these notebooks, making them valuable tools for future research.

Over the past century, Liberty County has experienced significant events ranging from the Spanish Flu pandemic to COVID-19. Through all of these changes, the Liberty County Museum and Archives has remained dedicated to preserving the county's history accurately and responsibly. As Liberty County enters its second century, the museum continues its mission of safeguarding the stories, memories, and heritage of the community for future generations.



Photo courtesy of the Liberty County Museum

MUSEUM HOURS

The Liberty County Museum will be open on Saturday, September 19th from 10 am to 2 pm during the Harvest Festival. Visitors have the opportunity to tour the Liberty County Museum that is normally only open from Memorial Day to mid-August each year. Visitors can experience the area's rich history with artifacts about the area's homesteading and railroad heritage along with thousands of other items on display in our three buildings and machinery yard. The Liberty County Museum does not charge an admission fee. Come check out this local treasure on Saturday, September 19th at 230 Second Street East in Chester.

THANK YOU

Chad Smith
&

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**Thank you Rhonda & Russ Pimley
for hand crafting our
festival photo booths!**



Meat Smoking Judges at the 2025 Meat Smoking Competition

Left to Right - Photo by Mia Osgood
Shalon Norick, Brad Romain, Beau Carter, Mark Elner

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR FESTIVAL COMMITTEE!

Thank you to our Harvest Festival Committee & Festival Activity Leaders for their ongoing efforts towards making the Hi-Line Harvest Festival better each year and a community event for all to enjoy. Part of the committee meets year-round, while others are the boots on the ground during the festival. If you are interested in getting involved, have questions or feedback, please reach out to Peyton Cole at hilineharvestfest@gmail.com.

Peyton Cole, Megan & Chad Hedges, Karla Kulpus, Karen Graham, Ashley Matkin, Judy Tempel, Jenni Chelmo, Jeanne Kucera, Sheila Roberts, Chad Smith, Jesse Fulbright, Dennis Hull, Juli Neva, Kelsey & Kord Ramberg, Damon & Lacee Lalum, Shalon & Shea Norick, Savannah Rigglin, Dena Fritz, Casey & Gary Buffington, Britney Tempel, Jordan Oraw, Kaitlyn & Logan Lyders, Brad & Courtney Romain, Cary Kolstad, Brittney & Logan Anderson, Gayle & Tim Fenger, Jim Vinson, Derek & Jenny Fraser, Andy Schwab, Mia Osgood, Amanda Moss, CJI Football Team, Rebecca Maska.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who stepped up wherever help was needed. Whether you volunteered weeks in advance or answered a last-minute call, your willingness to lend a hand is what makes Harvest Fest possible.



Andy Schwab, 2025. Photo by Mia Osgood

Andy Schwab

**Ag Broadcaster - Northern Ag Network
Festival MC & Auctioneer (5 years & counting)**

“I’ve been going to the Hi-Line Harvest Festival for the past several years and boy has it been an exciting event to attend. Whether it be from the bed races to the live auction and the Calcutta to just the camaraderie in rural Montana, the Hi-Line Harvest Festival is certainly one that I look forward to each and every year.”

“I think one of the highlights for me is the bed races that take place before the music gets going. Not only does it help improve my sports broadcasting skills a little bit, but they also offer a lot of entertainment and the potential to win some money during the Calcutta.

Another thing that always sticks out to me when I think about the Hi-Line Harvest Festival is this small town coming together, but not exactly just one small town, many other small towns surrounding Chester. It reminds me of my hometown, Powell, Wyoming, when people get together during the annual county fair. Sometimes it's about the only time you get to see some of your friends and family all in one place.

Lastly, I'll say this, it's the volunteers that really make this come together, as there's a lot of work that goes into putting this on. Hats off to Peyton Cole and all of her team, as it's not an easy feat to bring such talent all the way up to the Hi-Line.”



PHIL AABERG

April 8, 1949 - May 23, 2026

Phil Aaberg lived a life filled with remarkable achievements and adventures, all of which began here on the Hi-Line. I will always be grateful to Jeff and Natalie Mattson for giving me the opportunity to study under Phil in my early years. When you listen to the music he wrote, you can truly feel his soul in every note.

Though he may never have realized it, Phil played an important role in shaping my love of music and inspiring me to believe that someone from rural Montana could pursue big dreams and make an impact beyond our small community.

Thank you, Phil, for the gift of your music and the legacy you leave behind.
— **Peyton Cole**



A beautiful life well lived through family, friends and music.
And of course fly fishing.

Phil passed peacefully Saturday evening, May 23, surrounded by Patty, his sons Jake and Michael, and his brother Steve. His sons Sean and Dan were not able to be there in person but were in close touch throughout.

We know Phil was loved by many and that his music has touched many lives and will continue to do so. We are so grateful for the community that has surrounded him over the years.

Listen to his music, cast a line, and continue to share your favorite Phil stories.
—**The Aaberg Family**



FOOTBALL & COMMUNITY

JIM VINSON
CJI HEAD FOOTBALL COACH

As Harvest Fest is approaching, I couldn't help but reflect on the great year for both! As a coach, I hope that our program is a small part of what makes our community great. I know that there are many cogs in that wheel of greatness and I am proud that Hawk Football is one of them. There is so much new around here since the last Harvest Fest... new construction, new businesses, and a State Championship! We base our football program on Family. We are one, each of us have one, and we are so happy and proud to be part of an even bigger one...our community! We have always tried to help out by unloading/loading moving vans, laying sod, setting up for Harvest Fest, or just helping out wherever needed. We also provide a couple opportunities for the community to meet and hang out with your State Championship Football Team.



Left to Right - Ryland St John, Coach Jim Vinson, Cooper Streit, 2024 State Champions

On August 13th, we will be providing the dinner at the Summer Fair. "Hawk Smash Burgers" will be on the menu along with Coach Stanley's "World Famous Baked Beans". We will also be serving those same "Hawk Smash Burgers" at Harvest Fest. We asked for everyone to please show up and partake in the great food and these amazing community events!

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Kaitlyn & Logan Lyders

FOR FESTIVAL UPDATES, PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE

hilineharvestfest.com

The History of the “Biggest Little Town on Earth”

By Rhonda Petersen
CJI History Teacher

Joplin’s famous nickname, “The Biggest Little Town on Earth,” has been part of the community’s identity for more than a century. The slogan was first coined by the Joplin Commercial Club in 1915. A 1916 description proudly promoted Joplin’s location along the Great Northern Railway and highlighted its importance as a growing agricultural center.

From its earliest days, Joplin was closely tied to farming. Local boosters praised the area’s fertile soil and hardworking farmers, describing them as some of the most skilled and persistent agricultural producers in Montana. The town itself began in 1909 when the Great Northern Railway built a section house. Joseph E. Rehal, a Syrian immigrant who arrived in 1910, is considered the town’s founder. Rehal operated a homestead

near Joplin and served as postmaster.

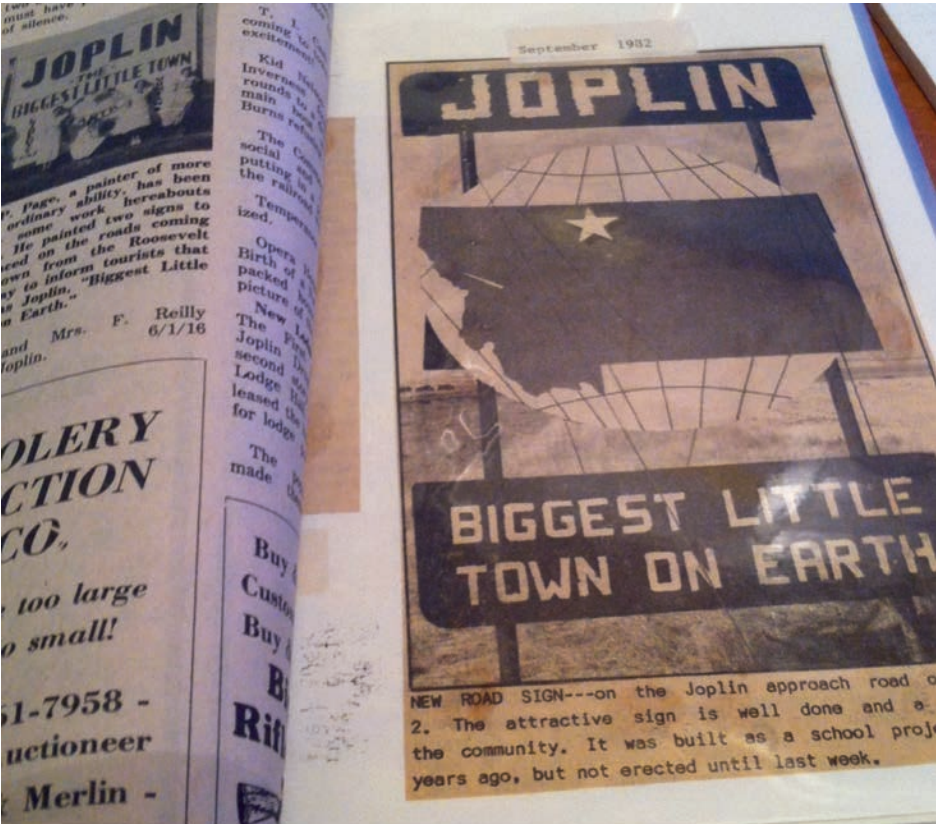
Early advertisements promoted Joplin as a modern and promising community. A 1910 ad described a town with sidewalks, water service, and a newly planted park. By 1913, lots were being sold for prices ranging from \$35 to \$100 as the community continued to grow.

Like many agricultural communities, Joplin residents faced ongoing battles with pests. One of the most unusual events was “Gopher Tail Day,” held in May 1916. Boys between the ages of five and fifteen competed to collect the most gopher tails, with prizes awarded to the top participants. Nearly 100 boys entered the contest, collecting almost 20,000 gopher tails. Frank Hodges won first place with an impressive total of 897 tails. The day also included races, jumping contests, and other games. During World

War I, local frustration with gophers was reflected in a newspaper headline that humorously declared, “Gophers Are Pro-German—Enemies of U.S.”

By the 1920s, jackrabbits had become the next major agricultural nuisance. Community rabbit drives were organized to reduce their numbers. One 1927 hunt involved 25 farmers and resulted in the killing of approximately 300 rabbits. These events were social occasions as well as pest-control efforts, with local women preparing meals for the participants afterward.

Although the slogan “The Biggest Little Town on Earth” was not used continuously, it remained an important part of Joplin’s identity. In 1949, the Joplin Commercial Club announced plans to revive the motto. A new sign bearing the slogan was installed on Highway 2 in 1982, though it had actually been constructed years



earlier as a school project. Earlier signs had also been displayed along the Roosevelt Highway to attract travelers and promote the community.

The slogan continued to resonate with residents. In a 1988 writing contest entry, Karen

Johnson-McWilliams reflected on the deep attachment she felt to her hometown. She described Joplin as a place where concern, friendship, and family connections created a bond that extended far beyond those who still lived there. Her

words captured the loyalty and affection many current and former residents continue to feel. Today, Joplin remains proud of its heritage as “The Biggest Little Town on Earth.”

Photo courtesy of the Liberty County Museum

A New Voice for the Hi-Line: Local Sports Coverage Platform Set to Launch This Fall

Community-powered coverage aims to keep every local student’s story free to read, and gives area businesses a new way to support the schools and teams they already believe in.

By Chad Smith
Hi-Line Sports & News

For as long as anyone can remember, Friday nights in Chester, Rudyard and towns across the Heart of the Hi-Line have meant packed gyms or fields, hard fought games and kids giving everything they have for their school and their town. What has not kept up is the coverage. As local newspapers shrink and stretch thinner every year, fewer of those moments make it into print, and more student athletes finish a season without a single photo or story to show for it.

Hi-Line Sports & News is a new digital first coverage platform launching this fall to help close that gap. Built by local reporter and CJI school photographer Chad Smith, the outlet will bring in-depth game coverage, expanded photo galleries and weekly updates to families across the CJI and North Star school districts, with room to grow into the rest of the region over time.

Smith recently brought on a second photographer and reporter, giving the outlet the reach to cover more games, more schools and more events than one person alone ever could. That growing team is also the first step

toward a bigger goal, expanding coverage beyond athletics to include speech and drama, band, 4-H, FFA and other school and community activities, so students who pour just as much effort into those programs get the same recognition athletes do.

“Every kid in these towns is working hard at something, whether that’s a state tournament, a speech meet or raising a steer for the fair,” Smith said. “They all deserve to have that written down and remembered, not just the ones with a scoreboard behind them.”

Hi-Line Sports & News will be free to read for every family, delivered through a website, a weekly email digest and active social media accounts that make it easy to keep up without hunting for updates. But for a lot of families, a story does not feel finished until it is something they can actually hold onto. That is why printed story clippings and commemorative photo and article keepsakes will be available for purchase, along with special sponsor-supported print editions built around tournament runs, graduation and other milestones worth keeping for good.

“A family should

be able to frame the article about their kid’s big night, not just scroll past it,” Smith said. “That matters just as much as getting the story online fast.”

None of it works without support from the community itself. Hi-Line Sports & News is entirely sponsor supported, meaning local businesses across the region are stepping up to cover the real cost of writing, photography, travel and gallery management so that families never run into a paywall. A handful of founding sponsors have already come on board, and Smith is inviting other local businesses who want their name behind something that matters to the community to reach out before the fall season begins.

Hi-Line Sports & News plans a soft launch on September 1, 2026, just in time for the 2026-27 fall sports season. Families can sign up now for the weekly email digest and follow along on social media to be among the first to see coverage when it goes live.

For sponsorship opportunities or more information, contact Chad Smith at 406-220-0397 or Chad@HLSports.news, or visit HLSports.news.

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Chad Smith

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ROADSIDE RODEO
-Dena Denney Fritz

Once again it was dry on the plains
And we were haul'in cattle to where it actually rains
It stared out as one of those eggshell in the McMuffin kinds a days
And what would happen next was hard to say
It's amaze'in how native cows become when they see a semi
They lose all respect for barbed wire and I swear I saw one fly
We finally get 'em rounded up, sorted and such
But all them pairs for one semi was too much
So we backed in the fifth wheel trailer for some calves
Load'in the front and back with equal halves
Traffic sure was friendly as we headed on our way
Everyone was a wave'in, act'in like they had something to say
This one couple flagged us to pull off
She jumped out a fling'in her arms and stuff
Eh, some city chick gonna tell me haul'in cattle is bad
Boy, was I wrong as she pointed down the highway look'in might sad
The trailer door had popped open and calves were hobble'in this way and that
Except the one on the highway look'in somewhat flat
The flat one still had a pulse, we were amazed
So we drug him on in while he was still dazed
We were close to home so for a 4-wheeler off I ran
And when I returned this Roadside Rodeo began
I took the reigns of the Japanese pony and Jim was the rope'in man
We were dodge'in rigs like they were ole Coors cans
Loops were a fly'in left and right
Snag'in everything in sight
Well, OK, a Roy Cooper Jim is not
It took quite a few loops and some time undo'in a knot
But we got 'em, well all but three
We searched for hours, where could they be
It was almost dark and this cowhand was worn
When Jim had an idea and this rodeo got air-born
Ole Cousin Johnny had a two seater plane
No room for me and I didn't complain
This cowpoke likes to be on the ground
Both feet planted safe and sound
Those other two yahoos jump on in and found calves on the north side
No mistake'in they were ours with their new brand, slash hang'in hide
Would ya believe we didn't lose a single critter as we doctored that stock
And I got myself a new career, spokes model for Master Locks



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This newspaper was made possible with the help of Chad Smith and the Blaine County Journal

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“It’s been my belief that learning how to do something in your hometown is the most important thing.”
– Pete Seeger

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