

Ned Ryerson and the Groundhogs Pour Out Plenty of Hits at Beach Haven Wine Festival

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Photo by: Grant Kelly

Ned Ryerson and the Groundhogs

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Beach Haven Wine Festival



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There's no better way to transition into summer than with good eats, loud beats and, of course, delectable wines. The sixth annual "Pour Into Summer" Wine Festival this weekend included a variety of vendors for attendees to wine and dine and soak up the sunshine in Beach Haven.

Villari Vineyards traveled from Sewell to showcase a new assortment of sweet wines, including a patriotic sangria set with red, white and blue wines one can drink mixed together or separately. The Villaris, brother and sister Joe and Regina, began making wines four years ago on the farm that has been owned by their family for more than 100 years. This year, light, pink wines are the clients' favorites, which seemed to be a common thread among a few wineries. Sharrott Winery of Hammonton also said that its most popular wine is pink because it is a sweet and refreshing choice, particularly for festival environments and younger crowds.

A glass of wine isn't the same without a well-balanced meal. Local restaurants showed their support for the festival by bringing their top tasty treats for all to enjoy. Bistro 14, now in its 14th season, displayed its signature trays of clams and oysters to pair with fragrant dinner wines, while Panzone's Pizza served



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up slices to kids and adults alike. Country Kettle Chowda brought its award-winning soups and Hangover Pretzel Company was prepared to help visitors who may have had a few too many glasses.

Drinks were flowing, but the main attraction on Friday night was Ned Ryerson and the Groundhogs, a six-person cover band that delivered a three-part set of songs that appealed to every musical taste. The band took over the main stage and played a mix of melodies and mash-ups, ranging from classic rock hits like Bruce Springsteen's "Hungry Heart" to Shaggy's "My Angel." Ned and the Hogs even cleverly altered the lyrics to "I Melt With You" to "I'll have some wine and drink with you." Adults sipped their wine and sang along to the catchy tunes, while kids frolicked in the grass in front of the stage.

Formed in 2012, Ned Ryerson and the Groundhogs, named after "Groundhog Day" starring Bill Murray, share a passion for music and love coming together to create a fun atmosphere for the crowd. The band was originally named Two-Story Outhouse, but with its expansion and large group of six musicians, the new name seemed more appropriate. The lineup consists of founder and singer/guitarist Mike Konopka, who commands attention to the stage not only with his talent but also with his stature, standing at 6 feet, 10 inches tall, lead vocalist Katie McKenna, keyboardist/DJ Brian Lloyd, bassist Ryan Tierney, lead guitarist Pete DiCanto and drummer Tony Genovese.

Most of the band members live in Toms River and were friends or coworkers beforehand, but Genovese and DiCanto signed on after seeing a posting on Craigslist. Ned and the Hogs enjoy playing all over New Jersey, but have developed a following on Long Beach Island because of the community's appreciation for live music.

Konopka comes from a family of musicians, so naturally, it was instilled in his mind and heart from a very young age. He began playing percussion at the age of 5 and played in the high school band, as well as local bands. In college, Konopka taught himself how to play the guitar; his mother and father both play the guitar and his younger brother plays guitar and harmonica. Even though Konopka is inspired by his family on a daily basis, he also admires Mumford & Sons and Pepper, taking as much as he can from both bands to put passion into his performances to be the most "approachable, down-to-earth person."

Musically and lyrically, Konopka thinks Mumford & Sons is the best and its intimate and heartfelt performances are unlike any others. Konopka has gotten to know Pepper on a personal basis, and the band often invites him to hang out when it is touring on the East Coast. "Not only do I love their music, but I'm impressed by the type of people they are: very humble," he said. Each member of the band has different musical influences, and Konopka feels that is what makes the songs unique, when each player brings their influences into it. "We may not necessarily play it the way it normally sounds or an album version, but we'll play it our own way," Konopka said.

For Lloyd, self-proclaimed "resident rapper extraordinaire," playing the keyboard wasn't something he was eager to learn. "My parents made me take piano lessons when I was a kid. Emphasis on *made*. I guess it paid off. I actually found a piano teacher that realized I had absolutely no interest in playing classical piano music," Lloyd said.

Lloyd's instructor allowed him to go to the record shop next door to the studio and pick out sheet music of artists and songs he wanted to play, instead of wasting the lessons his parents already paid for. "I told her that I would be happy to practice and play, but I wanted to do it my way and with music I enjoyed. So, there I was in a classical piano studio with a classically trained piano teacher playing Blink 182 and Green Day songs on the piano," he said. During his college years, Lloyd also spent time producing music for local hip-hop artists and singers.

"Mixing, mastering and sound design all went into making those songs, and I enjoyed every minute of it. Then Mike asked me if I thought I could play keyboards with him in a band while we were working together on the lifeguard stand. The rest is history," Lloyd said.

Tierney started playing guitar when he was 13 years old and switched over to bass at age 15 when friends of his needed a bassist to start their band.

"I've been playing the low notes ever since," Tierney said.

He has been fortunate to be a part of both a regular band, with whom he toured the West Coast and parts of Europe, and a cover band, and each experience has been extremely rewarding for him.

"When I was in a band that played originals, I loved seeing people sing along. It was the most gratifying feeling to see people enjoy something you created. As a member of a cover band, I love helping people have a good time. I'm uncomfortable in crowds myself, so helping others enjoy the experience is a great feeling," he said.

McKenna, the only female in the group, joined the band last October after returning home from Los Angeles when Lloyd, an old friend of hers, mentioned the Hogs were looking to add to its lineup.

As a freelance producer and writer in television production, McKenna works on several different TV shows in New York City. She enjoys writing and performing original music, and also teaches voice lessons at Garden State Music in Toms River. She has been singing since she was in preschool, and picked up guitar and piano when she was around 15 years old. McKenna comes from a musical theater performance background, and even though the guys poke fun at her, she loves show tunes.

She is also inspired by singers Brandi Carlile, Sara Bareilles and Maren Morris.

"I have sung and performed in a lot of different ways over the years – musical theater, a cappella groups, acoustic solo performances – but being in a band was something that was totally new to me. I am super grateful to have the opportunity to perform in bars and venues all over the Jersey Shore with a really talented group of guys, and I'm definitely learning a lot from the band, but, most importantly, making some good music and having a ton of fun," McKenna said.

With such a diverse and talented lineup, listeners can come to expect a dynamic and engaging performance from Ned Ryerson and the Groundhogs.

"We know that we are cover musicians and we have a lot of fun doing it. We're not trying to be something we're not, these rock stars that are untouchable on stage. We have fun and it will carry over to whoever is watching us. I think that is one of the biggest things that sets us apart," Konopka said.

"If you're not having fun, you're doing something wrong," Genovese added.

Catch Ned and the Groundhogs at Nardi's Tavern on Long Beach Island every other Tuesday night, starting July 4. Visit nedryersonlive.com for a complete schedule of upcoming events.

"We hope to build a steady crowd as the weeks go on," Konopka said.

— Sandra Weyant

Set List Snippet

"My Angel," Shaggy

"3 A.M.," Matchbox Twenty

"The Joker," Steve Miller Band

"Steal My Kisses," Ben Harper

“Wonderwall,” Oasis

“Hey Jealousy,” Gin Blossoms

“Wagon Wheel,” Old Crow Medicine Show

“Fly,” Sugar Ray

“Hungry Heart,” Bruce Springsteen

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