

## Open Stage for Adults

Open Stage is a coffee house we hold monthly. Our music director and singer-songwriter, Ron Sowell, encourages others from around the state to come and perform in a friendly atmosphere. Our former minister encouraged these events and there is an ongoing series of performers whose performances are devoted to his memory. For more information contact us at 304-744-7300.

All local musicians are welcome to come and share their talents in a friendly and enthusiastic atmosphere. The performers sign up at 7pm and the music begins at 7:30pm. General admission is \$5.00. Admission for performers, seniors, and children is \$2.00. Various coffees, teas, soft drinks, and delicious homemade treats are available at a small cost.

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Singer/songwriter Ron Sowell moves "Open Stage," his monthly open mic night, to Unity of Kanawha Valley's new location on Myrtle Road starting this month. DOUGLAS IMBROGNO | Gazette

## Open Mic Report: Ron Sowell's Open Stage at Unity

April 18th, 2007 by Bill Lynch

Ron Sowell, leader of the Mountain Stage band, hosts an Open Stage the second Friday of each month at Unity Church of Kanawha Valley. The show kicks off around 7:30 p.m. (and it's suggested that performers show up around 7p.m. to sign in.)

Unity Church has a cozy, home and hearth feel to it. The rustic, wood paneling and the high ceiling of the place give it the impression of a lodge or cabin, not a bar or church. Only the occasional sign mentioning God in some way, shape or form, for shadows the business done here on Sunday morning. Otherwise, it could be a particularly spacious living room of an old friend who is doing pretty OK.

The air is clean and the acoustics are good. If you've got the goods, the place can make a single strummer sitting on a stool sound like all he needs is a drummer and a bass player to start playing paying gigs. If you don't quite have the goods, don't worry. You'll still sound better than singing in the shower and nobody is going to chuck a beer bottle at you.

You can't get beer here, anyway, just brownies... um, really... just brownies. Fifty cents in the back.

Everyone is supposed to bring their own gear, but master of ceremonies Sowell seems to keep a couple of guitars around just in case something goes wrong, if for instance you snap a string or lock your guitar in the trunk of your car.

Just a reminder, this is more of an acoustic, gentle music kind of place. Save the death metal for maybe some place downtown (actually, acoustic death metal would be worth the price of admission which is \$5 for listeners, \$2 for players).

Sowell is a good host. He is ever-encouraging and ever considerate of the frayed, tangled nerves of some of the aspirants and old-hands who take the stage. People get it.

Everybody who takes a turn gets applause, a kind word, and they deserve it. Standing on a stage, in front of a crowd is only slightly less stressful than an audit from the IRS for most people. Natural instinct would be to toss the guitar at the closest warm body then dive for the window.

The crowd is best described as nurturing and can tolerate the clunks and clanks of a homemade, handmade tune just as much as they can an imperfect rendition of a John Prine cover tune. That isn't to say that everybody who performs is bad. Some people are a little rough, but that's OK.

Everybody has to start somewhere and this is as good a place as any.