

BEHIND THE SCENES OF POUND RIDGE'S HARVEST FEST

THE STORY OF HOW A COZY LITTLE NORTHERN WESTCHESTER TOWN HAS TRANSFORMED INTO AN ANNUAL DESTINATION, THIS YEAR FEATURING GRAMMY-NOMINATED BLUES TRAVELER

Pound Ridge only has a little over 5,000 residents, but they somehow manage to lure big musical acts to their annual Harvest Festival. The event is put on by The Pound Ridge Partnership – a non-profit community-based organization whose mission is to bring residents, business owners, landlords and community leaders together to support and improve the Pound Ridge Business District. Over the years, they've had everyone from The Spin Doctors and Soul Asylum to Toad the Wet Sprocket and Edwin McCain grace their stage. They've perfected the art of the local festival, so we wanted to know how it all began and what the future holds.

In 2011, Pound Ridge residents Kevin Long and Steve Bensusan grabbed a drink at North Star after the Pound Ridge Pride Festival (now called the Proud Festival). They started to discuss the possibility of adding live music to that event. As the conversation continued, their



SEPTEMBER 10 - 11

**OKTOBERFEST
OF PEEKSKILL**

11 Kramers Pond Road, Putnam
www.gac1936.com

In search of traditional German cuisines like Oktoberfest pretzels and Viennese coffee alongside American classics? Visit Peekskill's annual (exceptions may apply for pandemics) Oktoberfest – kids and adults are welcome. And because it's Oktoberfest, those of legal drinking age can wash down their schnitzel and brats with either Spaten and Hofbrau – two imported German beers that will be on tap throughout the weekend. Enjoy entertainment from The Heimat Klange Orchestra, Eric Baal and Joe Unger. Rain or shine.

vision transformed: it should be a street fair with live music, food and drinks.

I'VE STILL GOT THIS DREAM I JUST CAN'T SHAKE

The men knew they were on to something, and as Pound Ridge Partnership board members, they knew they could make it happen. They presented their idea to the other board members. Everyone loved it; they started to plan.

By that October, they had a fully fleshed out, up-and-running festival with Edwin McCain as the headliner. In the beginning, Long, who is now an advisor for The Partnership, said everyone was nervous.

“The night before, we weren’t even sure if anyone was going to show up,” Long remembers.

But they did. And so did McCain. In fact, as Long, Bensusan and several volunteers gathered to set up, McCain’s tour bus pulled up. McCain, who drove the bus, walked out and approached the group. He introduced himself and just wanted to hang. Then, he volunteered to help them set up. They told him to relax – they’ve got it.

A bit later, Katonah resident John Praino got up on the first ever Harvest Fest stage and opened the show.

NOBODY THINKS OR EXPECTS TOO MUCH

Initially, Harvest Fest was modeled after traditional Oktoberfest celebrations – there were tables where people could eat, a few tents selling drinks and some good music, all within the confines of Westchester Avenue. But after four years, the festival outgrew

Westchester Avenue and moved to the town park. The larger venue allowed The Partnership to offer more family-friendly activities, support a bigger stage and hire food trucks. They’ve grown almost every year since, adding new vendors and activities annually.

“Last year we doubled our previous capacity and about 6,000 people came to Harvest Fest,” says Long. “It was a huge undertaking and kind of a shock. After taking a year off and then pausing for COVID-19, it was the perfect storm – everyone craved live music.”

“Even the weather was nice that day,” Bensusan adds.

A SURE-FIRE WAY TO SPEED THINGS UP

Bensusan, who plans and books the musical acts, is no stranger to musicians. He owns, operates and books music acts for Sony Hall in New York City and is also the owner of The Blue Note jazz clubs throughout the world. Because Bensusan has numerous industry connections, he’s booked the musical acts since day one.

“The first thing we do is figure out which bands or musicians are available on the date of the festival,” Bensusan explains. “Then, I secure the deal with the band or artist. I fully donate the stage, the artist fees and everything associated with the artist so that we aren’t negotiating on behalf of The Partnership.”

This year, Bensusan did the impossible: he booked Blues Traveler. They’ve been at the top of The Partnership’s list since the beginning. Now, ten festivals later, their dream is coming true.

Bensusan doesn’t only book triple-A headliners for Harvest Fest. Since one of their main goals is to build community, he also finds and books up-and-coming local acts. Three years ago, The Partnership began hosting a

SEPTEMBER 9 - 11

GERMANIA OKTOBERFEST

51 Old DeGarmo Road, Poughkeepsie
germaniapok.com/

The Poughkeepsie Oktoberfest encourages all to strap on their lederhosen and bring the family for a feel-good game of Gemütlichkeit! (German for “friendly,” according to the Internet.) Entertainment by Joe Unger and The Bratwurst Boys, who are self-described “lederhosen clad hipsters and dirndl wearing frauleins.” For those of us who either took Spanish or slept through German in high school, they play German music and German-inspired covers of 90s-2000s American music. Also, everyone’s favorite foods like schnitzel, kraut and brats, and, of course, beer on draft. The Poughkeepsie Oktoberfest is entering its 171st year, so we’re going to guess they know what they’re doing.

Battle of the Bands competition at Proud Day, featuring local finalists who compete for the opportunity to open for the headliner. This year, Badger Scratch won the student competition (they all attend Fox Lane High School) and Platinum Moon won the adult competition.

WHAT WILL BE WITH YOU AND ME, I STILL CAN SEE THINGS HOPEFULLY

One of Bensusan's immediate goals is to expand the number of musical acts by adding a second stage.

"Our local artists are typically our Battle of the Bands winners, so building a second stage would be a great way to expand and feature more local talent," he explains.

Bensusan recognizes that this may mean booking artists outside of his preferred genres, but that's something he does regularly, and he says up for the challenge.

"If I only booked bands I liked, I would probably be out of business," he jokes. "It's not about what I like, it's more about what bands or musicians our community wants to see live. Adding a second stage would also require a balance between local and non-local bands. Different bands bring out different types of people."

"We aspire to have an additional stage someday, if the logistics work out," Long adds. "But, in general, we want to keep offering a better experience to our festival goers and participants each year."

I WANT MORE THAN A TOUCH, I WANT YOU TO REACH ME

Harvest Fest works due to the dedicated volunteers who do everything from set up the stage to man the booths.

Bensusan and Long say they're blessed with a group of committed volunteers who always show up on time and happily do their jobs well.

"Many of our volunteers have volunteered with us before," Long explains. "In fact, there are about 50 or 60 who have volunteered for Harvest Fest for many years. It's a great community, and without our volunteers, we wouldn't be able to run the event. The only problem with our volunteers is finding enough of them!"


Local businesses and organizations play a key role in the festival as well. The Market at Pound Ridge Square and The Kitchen Table are constant supporters, serving food alongside area food trucks. Local businesses set up tables – selling everything from candles and crystals to clothing and accessories, while nonprofits engage with the community. Plus, there's a beer garden (which also serves wine), food trucks and, of course, live music.

And then there's the "Kids Village" as Long calls it. The area features everything from goat petting and sumo wrestling to games (mini golf, toilet paper toss, goldfish bowls, etc.). There's also a root beer garden, inflatable rides, tie-dye and Euro bungee.

The event has become so popular that people drive for hours, coming from as far as Pennsylvania to see their favorite bands for free (minus the parking fee).

"One of the reasons we created Harvest Fest was to put Pound Ridge on the map," Long explains. "No one knew where Pound Ridge was. It was this sleepy little town in Westchester, but now it has this great vibe – everyone talks about how Pound Ridge is such a cool place."

But at the end of the day, Long and Bensusan say the community is what really matters. It's all about the volunteers who donate their time, Pound Ridge residents coming together and neighbors from the surrounding towns joining in the fun. Without them, the festival would not be what it has become today.

Harvest Fest will be held on October 1 at Pound Ridge Town Park. Parking is \$25, but admission is free. 

SEPTEMBER 14 - 18

WHITE PLAINS JAZZ FEST

*Downtown White Plains
artswestchester.org/
programs/jazz-fest-2/*

(See page 52 for story.)

SEPTEMBER 25

BREWSTER FALL FESTIVAL 2022

*Main Street, Brewster
https://www.brewsterfallfestival.com*

The Brewster Fall Festival invites those of all ages to stroll their pedestrian-only (for a day) Main Street. Shop local vendors' booths, enjoy live entertainment, play games, eat food and hobnob with local politicians. Because who doesn't love politicians? Expected attendance 4,000+.

WATCH OUR BLUES TRAVELER INTERVIEW,
INCLUDING A STROLL IN THEIR TOUR BUS!



HEY HARVEST FEST,
BLUES TRAVELER
WOULD LIKE SOME PITA CHIPS, PLEASE

BY GIA MILLER & JUSTIN NEGARD

FALL FESTIVALS 

SEPTEMBER 30

**OKTOBERFEST AT
PUTNAM COUNTY
GOLF COURSE**

WITH THE AMISH OUTLAWS!

187 Hill Street, Mahopac

(No official website; head to [Eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com) for details.)

Oktoberfest at Putnam County Gold Course welcomes all who love German-American traditions, like eating bangers, knockwurst and kielbasa and drinking beer, as well as listening to The Amish Outlaws, a particularly contradictory band name. Located on the Putnam County Golf Course...because what's more German than golf?

When The Pound Ridge Partnership asked us if we'd like to interview Blues Traveler guitarist Chandler Kinchla (who goes by Chan), we said yes, of course. But what can you ask a band who has no secrets? In true Katonah Connect style, we created a dozen unconventional questions, and Chan happily played along. Forty minutes later, we'd covered everything from The Simpsons and sumo wrestling to pita chips and pop stars. And then, Kinchla took over for Dear John (see page 92) and gave us a tour of their bus (head to our YouTube channel for the video). We all had a blast!

Katonah Connect: Have you ever heard of Pound Ridge?

Chan Kinchla: I sure have! Who hasn't been to Pound Town? Wait, do you actually call it Pound Town? Is that the local vernacular?

KC: No, but we may just have to start!

CK: I might just grab the mic from John at the beginning of the show and say, 'it's so great to be here in Pound Town!'

KC: What do you imagine Pound Ridge is like?

CK: I'm imagining some kind of bucolic forest and a kind of hilly vibe because there's a ridge involved. And, of course, there's lots of pounding.

KC: Moving on, we want to officially congratulate you on your 35th anniversary! We did a little research and learned that the Simpsons began in 1987 as well – they started as a short on The Tracey Ullman Show. So, we were wondering, which Simpsons character is the most like Blues Traveler?

CK: It's got to be Homer because we always win in the end, but we just kind of pedal along. Sometimes we don't care that much, but we keep on trucking.

KC: This year, The Harvest Festival will include sumo wrestling, a goat petting station, tie die and Euro bungee. Where will we

find you before the show?

CK: Well, if I was gonna do anything, I would like to do the sumo. But I might try and do it without the suit because I'm a very large human. And gosh, one of the things I miss most about getting older is I can't like tackle people and laugh it off anymore. It would either hurt me or I'd be sued. So, I'd definitely do the sumo.

KC: We hear the town supervisor is looking for someone to wrestle...

CK: On the show day? That's too dangerous. I have to watch out for my hands.

KC: What's in your rider before a show? Are you a "blue M&M's only" type of group?

CK: You know, we learned a long time ago that all the stuff in your rider actually costs you money. You're buying it. It's the huge foible. If you get all this fancy stuff backstage, someone somewhere is charging you for that. Over the years we've realized that 90 percent of the stuff just gets left there, so we've stripped it down to the bare essentials, which are chocolate almonds, whiskey, Frosted Mini Wheats and some beer.

KC: All at once? Do you mix them all together?

CK: Well, on some days...you never know.

KC: We get it. Every time we eat Frosted Mini Wheats, we think to ourselves, 'this needs some whiskey.'

CK: Okay, perhaps we have some milk back there as well. But honestly, as long as we've got the chocolate covered almonds, we're good.

KC: You're touring with Train and Jewel this summer, who seem like perfect musical companions, even though you each have your own style.

OCTOBER 1 - 23

**BEAR
MOUNTAIN
OKTOBERFEST**

*Harriman State Park – 99 Service Road, Tomkins Cove
Entrance at Anthony Wayne Recreation Area
visitbearmountain.com/special-events/oktoberfest/*

If, somehow, by October 1st you were still craving more Oktoberfests, you're in luck. For **FOUR CONSECUTIVE WEEKENDS** you can display your German-American pride at the Bear Mountain Oktoberfest. Revel in all your classic Oktoberfest traditions, namely drinking beer, eating sausage and making fun of the French. It's all right in the center of Harriman State Park.

CK: Yeah, that's what is fun about it. It's all very different styles. It's nice when a package isn't all the same. We complement each other well.

KC: Do you share your Frosted Mini Wheats with them?

CK: Yeah, we do, but they've got a lot more expensive stuff on their rider. I'm not sure if anyone told them that they're actually paying for it. Maybe I'll tell them at the end of tour.

KC: So just ride their rider until the end.

CK: Surprisingly, even the expensive stuff gets old when you have the same rider every night. That stuff really piles up. We have bags and bags of pita chips now. We don't we don't need any more pita chips, ever.

KC: Got it. We'll make sure to tell The Harvest Fest folks to stock your room full of pita chips.

KC: Switching gears, we dug up this old Los Angeles Times article from 1991 where they interviewed a 24-year-old John Popper. He described the band like this: "It's our garage band attempt at our appreciation of jazz improvisation through the reality of rock 'n' roll."

CK: I remember when that was his go-to phrase. We were a basement band, but we loved all different kinds of music. We started out with blues, but a couple of the guys went to New

School in New York, which has a big jazz program, so we also played jazz. And we were huge fans of classic rock – The Allman Brothers, Santana, Led Zeppelin, Grateful Dead and Eric Clapton, who all improvised a lot. That's what was kind of interesting. We took all those influences, along with punk and new wave, mashed them together and kind of jammed on them while also being influenced by the improvisational style of rock and roll.

KC: Do you think that description from 1991 still holds true today?

CK: One hundred percent.

KC: In that same article, Popper said he originally wanted to be a comedian, but he wasn't funny enough. We know you're all funny guys, but...

CK: What's so funny about me? There's nothing funny about me! Sorry, go ahead.

KC: No. Definitely not. But who is the funniest bandmate?

CK: Everyone's got their style. I'm kind of the aggressive, inappropriate one-liners guy. Tad is more of the snarky aside guy. Ben is a big goofy guy. John is kind of the wacky, 'where did that come from' guy. And Brandon is kind of the slow burn Irishman whose got that wonky English sense of humor.

KC: You sound like our type of people. So,

John doesn't steal the show when it comes to the humor? It's the whole band?

CK: Yeah, you can't survive out here if you take yourself too seriously. I guess that's what has kept us together for 35 years.

KC: We have the same approach to work and life, especially in our neck of the woods – we need a little humor sometimes.

CK: I'm from Princeton. I know of which you speak.

KC: Your last album, Traveler's Blues, was all covers, why? Did you run out of things to say?

CK: We'd considered doing a blues record for years. We were a blues band in high school, but we quickly devolved, or evolved, into what we are today because of all those different influences. But everyone always asked us, 'why Blues Traveler?' And it's because we actually started out as a blues band. So, we always wanted to show people we could actually play blues, and that's kind of how it came about.

KC: We read it was actually quite difficult for you to make the album because you had to practice restraint. What was that like?

CK: Yeah, all the covers are classic blues songs from way, way back. I have to give credit to our fearless producer



OCTOBER 1
**THE
HARVEST
FEST**

*Pound Ridge Town Park – 199
Westchester Avenue, Pound Ridge
poundridgeharvestfestival.com*

(See page 41 for story.)

OCTOBER 1 - 2
**ARMONK
OUTDOOR
ART SHOW**

*205 Business Park Drive, Armonk
<https://armonkoutdoorartshow.org/>*

(See page 50 for story.)

Matt Rollings for getting us to simplify and actually stick to the form because our instinct is to always play more and add cool parts to this and that. But it was a good learning process for us to strip it down. And perhaps, when we next go into the studio to do an original record, whenever that may be, we'll take some of our music and strip it down.

KC: Please keep the blues going. We think it's great that you're focusing on that, and we hope you can help bring some of that music back.

CK: Hey, we got nominated for a Grammy for that album! We all went to the Grammys and hung out with all the little pop superstars. It was pretty hilarious.

KC: They could use a little Muddy Waters in their life.

CK: Yeah, they definitely could. But they can sing, though. All those little kids can sing their tails off.

KC: Who was your favorite collaborator on Traveler's Blues?

CK: You know who really surprised me? The two voices behind The War and Treaty. They were super cool. And I just love them as an outfit. They have some smooth voices, and they're talented musicians all around.

KC: What we really like about your music is that most blues artists get better with age, but your old stuff is just as good as your newer stuff.

CK: You're right, the blues playing does get better with age. But I think we've also gotten better. During our first decade, when we miraculously got some pop hits – which was the last thing we expected, we were just going on energy. It was great, but you can't really go on like that forever, especially when you're punk rock hippies. But we've definitely improved, and I do really enjoy that. I'm always working on stuff with the guitar. And as a musician, I'm looking forward to getting better in the future, and so are the guys in the band. One of



the great things our music is that it's something you can build on.

KC: What can we expect next? Did Traveler's Blues inspire you to work on more classic blues music? Or something totally different?

CK: We're actually going to do an R&B covers album next. It'll be with that same crew that we did the blues one with. We're continuing to work through our roots because we had such a fun time doing it and it worked out great. Playing all these great songs and reinterpreting them in our in our voice has been really fun. We'll start on that in February.

*Head to our website for some behind the scenes footage of our interview with Kinchla. And check out the entire band at Harvest Fest on October 1. **KC***

OCTOBER 1 - 2

**HANDCRAFTED
OKTOBERFEST
AT RHINEBECK**

6636 US-9, Rhinebeck

dutchessfair.com/the-fairgrounds/all-events/octoberfest-handcrafted-at-rhinebeck/

This Oktoberfest offers classic German-American cuisine like kielbasa, brats and kraut, as well as "The Hudson River Valleys' best wine and brew." There will be activities for children, including farm animals and agriculturally-themed activities. Among the many vendors are furniture makers, artisans and glass and fiber artists.