

- [Stay Connected](#)
- / Tuesday, March 22, 2011

Search in site...



Reporter
Newspapers

- [Home](#)
- [Brookhaven](#)
- [Buckhead](#)
- [Dunwoody](#)
- [Sandy Springs](#)
- [Special Sections](#)
- [About us](#)
- [Contact us](#)
- [Advertise](#)
- [Where to find us](#)
- [Photo Galleries](#)
- [Digital Paper](#)
- [Classifieds](#)

Unitarian coffee house feeds hungry ears and mouths

By Amy Wenk

[amywenk @ reporternewspapers . net](mailto:amywenk@reporternewspapers.net)



Don Sechelski performs
at the Hungry Ear.

On a recent Saturday night, Cindy and Ron White of Norcross came early to the Hungry Ear Coffee House in Sandy Springs. They toted a wicker picnic basket packed with white wine, fruit and other snacks. The couple wanted a spot at one of the tables covered in red-and-white checkered cloth.

“We enjoy it,” said Cindy as she opened a Tupperware container of almonds for the April 3 performance. “This is a very cozy setting.”

Each month for 20 years or more, the sanctuary of the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation on Mount Vernon Highway has transformed into the Hungry Ear Coffee House, a venue for folk singer-songwriters.

“It’s sort of eclectic,” Cindy said. “You never know who or what you will see.”

The coffee house for decades has fed the Atlanta music community. But recently a new organizer has encouraged Hungry Ear regulars to donate food for the Community Action Center in Sandy Springs.

Center spokeswoman Kristen Ristino said the nonprofit organization that assists people in need appreciates the help.

“Food donations on a regular basis are so important because we have about 60 families a day coming to us for food,” Ristino said in an April 5 e-mail. “The monthly Hungry Ear Coffee House donations are coming at a good time because while we receive many donations during the holidays, this time of year our shelves tend to empty quickly.”

The Whites said an evening at Hungry Ear in the dimly-lit space with wood-paneled walls takes them back to another time.

Ron was playing folk music in the 1960s when he met his wife Cindy, a nursing student at the time.

“Even though I play guitar and sing, I don’t measure up to the people that do perform here,” Ron said.

That night the couple heard the original songs of two musicians.

“A venue like this supports people who write their own music,” said the evening’s first act, Don Sechelski of Norcross.

Sechelski performed acoustic songs like the politically-themed “Welcome to America” in front of the sanctuary’s picture windows when the setting sun cast a blue hue on the small forest of pines and hardwoods outside.

It is believed that during the Civil War General William Sherman’s troops, before the Battle of Atlanta, camped on the ridge where the Unitarian church sits, according to the church’s Web site.

The second performer April 3 was David Leinweber, also known as Dr. Blues. The musician is the assistant professor of history at Oxford College of Emory University in Oxford, Ga.

With fast-picking fingers, Leinweber entertained the audience with songs from genres like rock, blues, folk and gospel.

“They are all songs you have never heard before,” said Sandy Springs resident and church member Clarence Rosa. “You won’t hear them anywhere else.”

Rosa said Hungry Ear draws intellectuals who like music to have meaning.

“I call contemporary folk music poetry set to music,” he said.

Rosa began the Hungry Ear Coffee House in 1989 as a means to raise money for the church. At the time, the Unitarian Universalist congregation wanted to encourage African-American members and looked to build a church in south Atlanta.

“I was scared to death,” said Rosa, a tenor banjo and mandolin player who plays in a band called the Dixie Kings. “I wasn’t sure I was going to pull it off.”

Although the south Atlanta church never panned out, the coffee house was a hit.

“We succeeded in raising more money than anybody else on that effort, but the effort finally failed,” said Rosa, who added the church had held a similar coffee house in the 1970s. He said it was Atlanta’s first coffee house. “We decided after a year of doing [the coffee house], it was so fun we’d keep doing it.”

Rosa named it Hungry Ear after a coffee house in San Francisco, Calif., called “Hungry i.”

He got into his role as coordinator and became known for wearing a Dr. Seuss-inspired hat. Patrons called him the “Cat in the Hat,” said Sechelski who has played at the coffee house since its early days.

The coffee house was a regular event for the next 20 years until Rosa retired from the duty.

“Hungry Ear was on a hiatus for about half a year or so,” said Decatur resident Tom Godfrey, a church member.

Godfrey soon agreed to coordinate the coffeehouse, because as a guitarist, singer and songwriter himself, he missed the venue.

“It started with me talking to people like, ‘Oh man, too bad Hungary Ear is gone,’” said Godfrey, who earned a music education degree from University of Illinois and played trombone in the U.S. Air

Force. He switched to jazz guitar after an injury to his lip and now plays with two bands, On the Cool Side and Allen, Vinton, and Godfrey.

Next thing Godfrey knew he volunteered to run the coffee house and began the food drive in February.

“So in addition to starting up the Hungry Ear again, we decided to make it a food drive too,” he said. “The Hungry Ear feeds the hungry.”

Godfrey said he hopes the food drive and better marketing will bring more people to the coffee house.

“I want to make this a go-to venue, a place where performers feel they should play,” he said.

Did you like this? Share it:

[Tweet](#) [Like](#) 13 people like this.

Related posts:

1. [House fire in Brookhaven in area ripe for new development](#)
2. [Lions, food, fireworks usher in Chinese Year of the Rabbit](#)

« [Library to dedicate reading garden](#) [Print this page](#) [Standout Student – Eden Weingart](#) » »

Posted by [Chris North](#) on Apr 8 2010. Filed under [Brookhaven Community](#), [Buckhead Community](#), [Sandy Springs Community](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#). You can leave a response or trackback to this entry