

Freedom Song III salutes local veterans



Heather Vandenege

In 2008, as America was in the throes of conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan, Worcester musician Jim Perry was frustrated by the number of Armed Forces personnel returning to America who were not receiving the support they needed. So he did what a skilled musician with many musical contacts could do: organized a benefit concert for veterans featuring performances by Worcester musicians.

Now in its third year, Freedom Song continues to raise funds for Veterans Inc., a homeless shelter for veterans that also provides employment training and mental and behavioral help. The concert will be held this Saturday, July 9, outdoors at the shelter's new facility in Shrewsbury.

"You really do not have to be veteran to feel their pain. There is a general feeling in the public that regardless of whether you have military experience or whether you believe in the war or not, veterans are people who need help and support," said Perry.

The musical performers seem to share this sentiment as they are all volunteering their services. The lineup includes the spirited Blackstone Valley Bluegrass Band, eclectic and worldly folk and pop by Jubilee Gardens, and Jim's Blues Band, Jim Perry's group of musicians including Scott Bronnes, Lisa Marie, Bruce "Big Dawg" Reed and more.

Also performing is Ric Porter and the Sons of Soil, whose sound Porter describes as "American roots music that kicks butt." Porter's father, a World War II veteran, will introduce the group. "The day I was asked to do the concert I called him, and my dad said he would be proud to do it and he thinks that he could still fit into the old uniform," said Porter

Betsy Listenfelt will play solo acoustic selections from her recently released second album, *Be Alive*, which features her tribute to veterans, "Freedom Song," from which the event got its name. Rounding out the lineup is a special appearance by Veteran Inc. Blues Experience, a blues band composed entirely of veterans.

A portion of Freedom Song III proceeds will help fund the shelter's frequently used food bank, said Veterans Inc. Vice President Denis Leary. "The supply has gone down, but the demand for the food bank has gone up," said Leary.

This year will also be the first time that veterans residing at the shelter will be able to attend Freedom Song. In previous years, the event was held at a different location where alcohol was served, and because Veterans Inc. has an alcohol-free policy for their residents, they were unable to attend.

Now, those who will receive the benefits from the concert will be able to enjoy it, too, said Porter. "We just want to give the Vets a couple of hours to forget about everything and have a good time. It's as simple as that to me."

Freedom Song III will take place on Saturday, July 10, from noon to 6 p.m. at Veterans Inc., 59 South St., Shrewsbury. Call Jim Perry at 508-527-1918 or visit freedomsong4vets.com. Tickets are \$12 and can be purchased through the website or at the event