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- Weddings
- Obituaries
- Senior Focus
- Cookbook
- Community Guide
- Archives
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Reston Performer Turns to Life of Music

By Jason Hornick 
Observer Staff Writer

It's a little past 11 p.m. and Jon Fritz has kicked off his sandals. The tip jar, bungee-corded to the microphone stand, is full of bills, mostly wads of ones, but there are a few larger denominations that can be seen through the clear sides of the plastic pitcher.

The front half of the bar at the Lakeside Inn in South Lakes Shopping Center is packed with people, singing along with Fritz as he plays "Buttercup" by "The Foundations." On a ledge behind Fritz there is a crumpled pile of napkins with scribbled song titles, requests from the audience.

The Lakeside Inn is a monthly stop for Fritz. As a full-time musician, he plays at bars and festivals throughout Virginia, West Virginia and Pennsylvania.

"I'm content these days just to play and make a living," said Fritz as he sucked on a lollipop before the show.

Fritz looks much different than he did seven years ago. Working at a corporation, Fritz had short hair, a briefcase and a tie. Now, sitting at the Lakeside Inn, Fritz, who lives in Front Royal, has long, curly brown hair flowing out of the back of his baseball cap. He is wearing a T-shirt and shorts with side pockets. A pair of sandals keep his feet exposed. He traded in his briefcase for an acoustic guitar.

"It fell into my lap," he said about playing music professionally.

Fritz was laid off from his job seven years ago and decided to play music to earn money while searching for a new job. Little did he know that he had already found it.

At the Lakeside Inn, Fritz has chalked up the best sales of any artist that has played at the establishment. He mixes in his original songs with myriad cover songs he knows, describing it as "solo acoustic rock" or "mainstream Americana." Fritz has three albums and one single, which has seen airplay at some West Virginia radio stations.

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One fan, who talked to Fritz before the show, printed out copies of the cover songs that he can perform, a total of 156 songs spread over two pages.

Fritz has been playing music all of his life. While growing up in southern New Jersey, Fritz's brothers showed him a few chords on the guitar. Since then, he has been mostly self-taught, writing his first songs at the age of 15.

"It's mostly relationships and life experiences I make into some type of song that's not too heavy but something that I won't get tired of playing over and over," said Fritz.

Fritz has always played in a band. His last band was "The Wild Hearts" before he decided to shed the group spotlight for a more individual one.

"I can have the same effect as a band getting people dancing," he said. "Acoustic is very simple. I'm a purist when it comes to acoustic. What you see is what you get."

When most fans see Fritz, he appears to be a young man—no more than maybe 30—with a guitar in hand. But, he is actually 42 years old and has two children, one of which is about to enter college. His youthful complexion helps him relate to a diverse audience. "I'm real young at heart," said Fritz. "I get both the kids and the parents. That's the bizarre thing about it. I get both generations."

Jon Fritz will be playing at the Lakeside Inn on Sept. 13. He also will be playing at the Barefoot Pelican in Sterling on Sept. 18.

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