

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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*Pressroom for more information and/or downloadable images:*

*www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos*

*Program companion website: www.pbs.org/polkatime*



**INDEPENDENT LENS's "POLKA TIME"  
CAPTURES TWILIGHT OF AMERICAN  
MUSICAL TRADITION**

*Toe-Tappin' Film from Lisa Blackstone  
Premieres Nationally on "Independent Lens"  
ITVS's Acclaimed Series on PBS  
Hosted by Susan Sarandon  
Tuesday, November 9, 2004 at 10:30 P.M.  
(check local listings)*

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(San Francisco, CA) — For more than 30 years, RVs from all over the country have descended on the tiny, rural town of Gibbon, Minnesota for the Gibbon Polka Fest, where in three ballrooms, over five days, thousands of polka-loving dancers from across the country party until dawn. A rural and Midwestern cultural tradition for generations, the polka is celebrated by its devotees with great passion and joy, many exuding a zest for life that belies their age. But with attendance declining and the Gibbon Ballroom for sale, **POLKA TIME** may be capturing the twilight of a great American musical tradition and the end of an era. **POLKA TIME** will air on **Tuesday, November 9th at 10:30 P.M. (check local listings)** on **Independent Lens**.

Steve Seeboth, the 30-something owner of the Gibbon Ballroom, initiates viewers into the world of the polka. He and his father, Dick Seeboth, decided to buy the ballroom a few years ago as a way of supporting the health and vitality of the small towns in the vicinity of Gibbon. Promising to give it a go for five years, they have now put the ballroom up for sale, feeling the ongoing financial pressures of rural America. Steve shares his knowledge of the ballroom, the polka and the history of the Polka Fest.

In **POLKA TIME**, numerous festivalgoers express their love for the polka through dance, personal stories and observations about the festival. Donna and Roy tell us how they found love late-in-life with each other at a polka dance. Rudy and Joyce explain why dancers wear matching outfits. Doris and John talk about the synergy of the polka on the dance floor. A group from the Polka Lovers Club of America, or the P.O.L.K. of A., extols the virtues of holding your partner when you dance. And, Wally Pikal, bandleader of the Dill Pickles, recounts his longtime career as a trumpet player. He's in his seventies and he "ain't quitting."



In spite of the fact that the average age of polka lovers hovers around 75 (and not getting any younger), there are glimmers of hope that we are not witnessing polka's absolute last gasp. Native son Dan Witucki returns home from his ongoing gig at Disney World's German pavilion to play for his hometown fans. Young bands like Jon Dietz and the Twin Lakes Trio keep the tradition alive, their excitement and attachment to the music clearly visible in their playing. By mixing traditional tunes with modern sensibilities they are, perhaps, the only way the polka will live on in younger generations. But it's an uphill battle.

Regardless of whether the polka carries on in full force, the polka people will still have a good time. As Sharon Nienkerk, who's been to every Gibbon Polka Fest but two, says: "Polka music is happy music. The music is happy. The people are happy."

Additional information and/or downloadable photographs from **POLKA TIME** are available at [www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos](http://www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos).

The program's interactive companion website [www.pbs.org/polkatime](http://www.pbs.org/polkatime) features detailed information about the film, including an interview with the filmmaker, as well as links and resources pertaining to the film's subject matter. The site also features a "talkback" section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions, preview clips of the film and more.



## **POLKA TIME Credits**

DIRECTOR/PRODUCER/EDITOR  
 DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY  
 LOCATION AUDIO  
 ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY  
 AUDIO SWEETENING

**Lisa E. Blackstone**  
**Lucas Roman**  
**Joe Demko**  
**Michael Villar**  
**Ezra Gold**  
**Benfield Music**

## INTERVIEWEES (In Alphabetical Order)

**MIKE BUDIN**, the tuba player in Jon Dietz and the Twin Lakes Trio, has been playing polka music since he was a child when he played the milk cans in his family's barn while listening to KCHK (K-Czech) radio.

**JON DIETZ**, the front man for Jon Dietz and the Twin Lakes Trio, is a concertina player and bon vivant making his living as a truck driver for a gravel company while pursuing more polka gigs.

**ELMER NIENKARK** and his wife **SHARON** have attended the Gibbon Polka Fest for over 30 years. Before they retired from John Deere in Waterloo, IA, they used to plan their vacations around the Gibbon festival. Even though Elmer grew up with polka and old time music he didn't learn to play the concertina until late in life. Now he goes around to retirement homes and adult day care facilities and plays his concertina for residents.

**SHARON NIENKARK**, in addition to accompanying Elmer to the Gibbon Polka Fest, is the leader of the daily parade. She is well known among festival attendees.

**WALLY PIKAL** is the two trumpet-playing leader of the band Wally Pikal and the Dill Pickles.

**ROY ROGERS** fell in love with his wife Donna at a polka festival. He was celebrating his 75th birthday on the day he was interviewed for the film.

**DONNA ROGERS** fell in love with her husband Roy at a polka festival. Donna also works for the polka clothing vendor at the festival, helping to keep the festival attendees attired in matching outfits.

**DICK SEEBOTH** is the co-owner of Gibbon Ballroom with his son Steve.

**STEVE SEEBOTH**, informal narrator and co-owner of Gibbon Ballroom with his father Dick, has been the driving force in keeping the body and soul of the ballroom together. A professional nurse, Seeboth keeps his medical kit behind the bar and is well suited to attend to any of his patrons' emergency needs. He also owns the plumbing and heating shop in town.

**JOYCE** and **RUDY TOKKESDAL** met at a dance some 40 years ago while dancing to the "Blue Skirt Waltz." Now married, it is their song. They like to wear matching outfits when they polka.

**DORIS WIRTZ** met her second husband John online, after being widowed in middle age. She grew up in Minnesota but spent most of her adult life in the Los Angeles area. She had forgotten about polka dancing until she met John. Now they travel around the country in their shiny bus with their parrot, Mack.

**JOHN WIRTZ** is a retired Coast Guard officer. Many years ago he learned to polka as part of officer's training. It was meant to help the officers learn to socialize. He reintroduced his then-girlfriend Doris to polka dancing when they started dating. When they were interviewed for the film they had been married just shy of a year.



**DAN WITUCKI** is a native son of Gibbon that made good. Not only was he the bandleader and concertina player for the German World band at Epcot Center in Florida, he traveled around the world singing and playing traditional German music. When Dan was a boy, his father didn't want him to play the concertina, but Dan fell in love with it anyway. With the support of his mother and paternal grandmother he acquired a concertina and started taking lessons. When his father found out, he said: "What kind of Mickey Mouse job do you think you'll get playing the concertina?" Dan considers it fate that he worked at the home of Mickey Mouse—Disney World.

## ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

**LISA BLACKSTONE** (Director/Producer/Editor) was born and raised in the Chicago suburbs. After graduating from Goucher College on the East Coast, she heard the siren song of the Midwest calling her home. Rather than return to the City of Big Shoulders she migrated slightly northward to Minneapolis, the City of Lakes. It was there that she found inspiration and support for pursuing her love of telling people's stories. Since 1989, Blackstone has been practicing her storytelling craft in television. Her work as a director, producer and editor has been seen on the PBS Emmy Award-winning series *Zoom* and *Newton's Apple*. She has directed and produced projects for The Travel Channel, MSNBC and Animal Planet. In 2003, she received the Unity Award in Media for her work on the lifestyle economics series *Right On The Money!* broadcast on PBS stations around the country. She is also the recipient of the Science Journalism Award from the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the Silver Award for Children's Programming from the National Education Association. Blackstone believes that everyone has a story to tell. Her production company, Blackstone Productions, is committed to telling those stories and sharing them with the world. **POLKA TIME** is her first independent documentary.

## ABOUT INDEPENDENT LENS

**Independent Lens** is a weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. Hosted by Susan Sarandon, the acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. **Independent Lens** features unforgettable stories about a unique individual, community or moment in history, which prompted Nancy Franklin to write in *The New Yorker*: "Watching **Independent Lens**... is like going into an independent bookstore—you don't always find what you were looking for but you often find something you didn't even know you wanted." Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites, and national publicity and community outreach campaigns. Further information about the series is available at [www.pbs.org/independentlens](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens). **Independent Lens** is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS, and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts.

## ABOUT ITVS

Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the weekly series **Independent Lens** on Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. More information about ITVS can be obtained by visiting [www.itvs.org](http://www.itvs.org).



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## **ABOUT PBS**

PBS is a private, nonprofit media enterprise that serves the nation's 349 public noncommercial television stations, reaching nearly 90 million people each week. Bringing diverse viewpoints to television and the Internet, PBS provides high-quality documentary and dramatic entertainment, and consistently dominates the most prestigious award competitions. PBS is the leading provider of educational materials for K-12 teachers, and offers a broad array of educational services for adult learners. PBS' premier kids' TV programming and Web site, PBS KIDS Online ([pbskids.org](http://pbskids.org)), continue to be parents' and teachers' most trusted learning environments for children. More information about PBS is available at [pbs.org](http://pbs.org), the leading dot-org Web site on the Internet. PBS is headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia.



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