

A workshop set for November offers the chance to help preserve the musical heritage of the region.

The Mount Airy Museum of Regional History is set to host its first-ever cigar box guitar workshop, and attendees will leave with their very own hand-crafted instrument, Matt Edwards, director of the museum, said.

The workshop is scheduled for Nov. 9, from 10 a.m., until 4 p.m.

Edwards said the workshop is designed to complement the museum's ongoing Luthier's Craft exhibit, which launched in May.

"The exhibit deals with the string instrument traditions of the Blue Ridge mountain region, and in putting it together, we worked with local craftsmen who make fiddles, banjos and guitars to bring it to life," he said. "From a programming standpoint, we've tried to put together things that directly relate to the exhibit, whether it is a concert, educational program or a hands-on workshop like the cigar box guitar event."

Participants at the day-long workshop will actually build a working cigar box guitar, Edwards said.

"We will also offer them instruction on how to play the instrument they build," he said.

The cigar box guitar came about out of necessity, according to the museum director.

“The cigar box instrument is a fairly old tradition,” he said. “People who couldn’t afford to purchase commercially-made instruments actually went out and made their own, and the cigar box made an easy conduit to build the body of these instruments. It was a ready-made component that many people had around.”

Edwards called the cigar box guitar a “gateway instrument.”

“Many of the luthiers we worked with for the exhibit actually started by building cigar box instruments,” he said. “This is a pretty common gateway craft that leads to the more refined instruments they’re building now as professionals.”

And in today’s breakneck world, many craftsmen are returning to their roots.

“Today, there has been a revival of interest in cigar box instrument making, and there are blues musicians out there who are playing them,” he said. “They’re really fascinating pieces of functional art.”

“Cigar box guitars can even be fitted with pick-ups that will allow them to be played both electronic and acoustically,” Edwards said. “And one of the great things about them is they’re made with a minimal number of specialty parts. Other than the tuning keys and corner braces, pretty much everything you need to build one is readily available at the local hardware store.”

The workshop will be conducted by Mike Lowe, whom Edwards describes as a “local folklorist, musician and artist.”

The cost to attend is \$60 for museum members and \$80 for non-members.

“This includes all material and instruction,” Edwards said.

Limited space is available, so Edwards said advance registration is encouraged.

For more information call the museum at 336-786-4478.