

Fiddlin'

Joe Dobbs' talent will take him to Europe and Africa

By SARA BERKELEY

Of The Advertiser staff

Joe Dobbs of Lavalette said he never dreamed of seeing Europe and Africa, but he's going to fiddle his way there and back.

The 42-year-old mountain fiddler, originally from Louisiana, leaves the first of April for a six-week cultural exchange tour with the United States Information Agency.

Dobbs has never been out of this country. By July, he will have seen Scotland, France, England, Egypt and parts of Africa, including Tunisia, the Ivory Coast, Sudan, Algeria and the Upper Volta, among others.



Joe Dobbs

"It didn't hit me until I got my visa application for Egypt," Dobbs said. "I got excited — the application was written in Arabic."

Dobbs, who has played festivals in California,

Kansas, New Jersey and throughout Appalachia, claimed he was not chosen for skill or renown, contending it was all a matter of chance.

"Well, the USIA did have to approve it when Mary Faith Rhoads (a hammered dulcimer player) from Pennsylvania asked me to accompany her. She had gone the year before. They wanted a fiddler to go with her this year."

The two will play traditional mountain music at American embassies. Appalachian crafts also will be displayed.

American embassies? Pickin' and grinnin' for coat and tie, crystal-chan-

deliered, \$25-a-plate dinners?

"When Rhoads was in Europe before, she wouldn't play at the embassies," Dobbs said. "Thought they would be stuffed shirts. But they love that type of music over there. She said she was embarrassed — the young folk singers there knew more traditional songs than she did."

With his brother Dennis, Dobbs co-owns an instrument repair shop, Fret 'N Fiddle, 524 W. 14th St.

"My little brother is going to mind the store. He's been great about me going," Dobbs said that if Dennis had not agreed with the plan, Joe would have stayed home.

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stayed home.
Dennis, a guitarist, com-
prises half of a local musi-
cal group called "The
Dobbs Brothers."

While Dobbs is showing his face and his fiddling to the citizens of Cameroun, Africa, thousands of Americans will be looking at it here — in the pages of the Bluegrass musician's magazine, Pickin'.

He is featured in a full-page advertisement for a new fiddle. The magazine, available at area news-
lotion, has an 80,000 circu-
lation, he said.

And, yes, he's grinnin'.

"When the magazine came out, all my friends called to say they were canceling their subscrip-
tion," Dobbs said, laugh-
ing.

"When my picture was entered in that magazine's photography contest, they called to ask, would I do an ad? I said, what the heck? I believe in the product. Sure.

"But, now, people are coming in the store asking for my autograph! It makes you feel dumb."