

# They sing, you dine: Minstrels make connections at Hopkins

**BY AUSTIN M. DAVIS**

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Being wandering minstrels requires quick thinking.

“It’s an exercise in improvisation” said Norm Walker. “You never know what’s going to happen next.”

Walker and his musical partner Ken Dormer perform as Ye Olde Wandering Minstrels at Hopkins Dining Parlour. They move from table to table, striking up conversation and playing music specifically for those people. Walker said they have a list of songs in their repertoire, but the music could go in any direction.

“We’ve been doing it long enough that we’ve figured ways, for the most part, to make it work out well. Once in a while something doesn’t quite work. There’s no way to know some times,” Walker said. He gave an example of a young couple

that was dining last year. The woman said she used to live in Saskatoon, so Walker started singing a song about a Saskatoon moon. She told him to stop singing the song only a couple of lines in because something bad had happened to her in that city.

“How do you know that? That’s kind of the exception. Usually it works out quite differently,” Walker said.

For every time that Ye Olde Travelling Minstrels don’t make a connection with their dining audience, there are multiple examples of success.

“Once each evening there’s a table where things really, really click and you make connections,” Walker said. He remembers people and the places they’re from. He said part of the trick is to draw particular songs from the people in the restaurant.

“What we end up playing entirely depends on the people we meet, the encounters and things people say,” Walker said. Sometimes we’ll do very common and familiar things but other times we’ll end up playing a song we haven’t played in 20 or 30 years.”

Walker said a key element to the success of Ye Old Wandering Minstrels is the chemistry that he and Dormer share.

“We’ve been playing together for a fairly long time. We play off each other, and to some degree improvise,” Walker said. “We both play guitar and mandolin and we just trade instruments back and forth.”

In an unpredictable performance environment, Dormer and Walker have at least one person each of them can rely on.