

## Fall Fun: Putting the 'Oom-pah' in Oktoberfest German band is an authentic wind band that plays alpine village music.

By Julia O'Donoghue

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Catching up with Sam Laudenslager during the fall season is not an easy task. During the first four days of October, the Burke resident performed at two public Oktoberfests and two private parties with Alte Kameraden, a German music ensemble associated with the City of Fairfax Band.

Next week, the group is booked for another private party and Oktoberfest event in Maryland, said Laudenslager, the all-volunteer ensemble's "kapellmeister," or director.

"There is no other group that does what we do in this area," he said.

Alte Kameraden specializes in traditional wind music associated with alpine villages, said Laudenslager. When performing, the musicians wear Bavarian vests, alpine hats, knickers and knee socks that they have to special order from a company in Pennsylvania.

Other German music ensembles play in the area, but they tend not to play the village band music people associate with Oktoberfest celebrations. A person has to travel to Richmond, Southwest Virginia, Philadelphia or North Carolina before they find another group with a sound like Alte Kameraden's. That means the group is in high demand at this time of year, said Laudenslager.

"We have had them for the last few years. Who else is there? There isn't another group that is quite as authentic as they are, especially with the costumes," said Laurie Weber, who has hired Alte Kameraden to play her Oct. 23 Oktoberfest party at The Swiss Bakery and Pastry Shop in Springfield.

STARTED IN 1977, Alte Kameraden has grown from a six-piece band to an ensemble with a 35-member roster. Typically, 16 to 18 musicians from the larger group play a gig at one time, said Laudenslager.

"Of the six original members, I am the only survivor. I am 65 and, when we started, I was the kid of the group. ... Of our core members now, most have been in the group for 10 to 12 years," said Laudenslager.

Approximately three-quarters of Alte Kameraden's members also play in the 90-member City of Fairfax Band. Though not professional, many of the musicians in Alte Kameraden have extensive backgrounds in instrumental music.

Some are graduates of conservatory programs and others played in a military band previously.

"Really, some of our musicians are some of the best players in the regular [City of Fairfax] band. Our lead trumpet, clarinet and tuba players are also the leads in the regular band," said Laudenslager.



Photo by Deb Cobb

**Tobi Cisin of the Alte Kameraden plays the Alphorn to a delighted crowd at last weekend's Vienna Oktoberfest.**

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A few members of Alte Kameraden are German natives, including a baker from a German pastry shop in Northern Virginia and a local music store clerk. In past years, staff members from the German Embassy in Washington, D.C. played with the group.

Other American members of band have lived in Germany while serving in the U.S. military, said the director.

"We do a lot with the German Embassy. We do both the German Embassy and Swiss Embassy open houses every year," said Laudenslager.

Dennis Sackman, a trumpet player with the ensemble, said it is particularly thrilling to play for a German audience.

"It is really flattering to perform the music with an authenticity and accuracy appreciated by Germans themselves. There is a great deal of precision in how you have to perform the music," said Sackman, who lives in Vienna.

For more information, visit Alte Kameraden's website at [www.fairfaxband.org/ensembles/german](http://www.fairfaxband.org/ensembles/german).



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