

"Catfish" John Tisdell

"Relax your mind," says KUFM radio star

by Debra Brinkman
Main Reporter

Once when "Catfish" John Tisdell and his friend Richard Baker were hitchhiking across the South, they had trouble catching a ride.

Both being musicians, they started playing music by the side of the road. A driver stopped and asked if they could play his favorite song. They could and they did.

The driver took them to his home, gave them dinner and a place to stay for the night.

"That's why I'm involved in music," Tisdell said in an interview Thursday. "To meet people and to share things."

He has been sharing music with Missoula for about 15 years now. Along with performing, Tisdell also is been hosting a folk show on KUFM for 12 years and the radio audience for seven.

On his weekly jamboree, Tisdell offers listeners an array of music from non-professional Montana folk musicians. "I've developed a show to support the amateur musician," he said. "It's important that they have an avenue for their music."

A country blues musician, Tisdell performs at coffee houses, festivals, workshops and concerts. Last

Saturday he kicked off KUFM's public radio week with a concert in the Montana Theater. The concert began an eight-day pledge drive which ends Sunday evening when the station hopes to have raised the \$200,000 it needs for operating costs.

Tisdell's involvement with KUFM began with his Radio/TV degree from UM. KUFM has helped

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him grow as a musician, he said. "I used to have a more narrow appreciation of music."

He said that KUFM has what other stations do not. "It's not commercial or mainstream. People have a direct connection to (KUFM)," he said. "Everybody has a say in what they want on the station."

At age 12, Tisdell, who is from Great Falls, started playing the guitar and has "dabbled" with it all his life, he said. "I've always thought of music as my friend."

After hitchhiking around Eu-



Liz Hahn/Kalmb

"Catfish" John Tisdell

and Richard said I looked like an old catfish," he said.

He and Baker came to Missoula about 15 years ago to put together The Great Northern Bluegrass Band. Since then he's been in several bands and has played folk, along with country rock and Irish music.

Tisdell has produced several tapes over the years and has just put out a new one called "Relax Your Mind." He also teaches guitar, banjo and mandolin. He has written a book called "Beginning Guitar" and has produced a tape of the same name to let beginners hear what the music sounds like.

rope, he settled in North Carolina for a couple of years to absorb the music of the region. He lived on a commune and learned banjo and fiddle.

The name "Catfish" came from the time he was swimming in a Carolina pond. "I had algae sticking out of my hair and my beard,