Mountain Democrat
PROSPECTING
Arts, entertainment and everyday life
Section B ■ mtdemocrat.com Friday, July 24, 2026

J Woody
a new musical chapter

Shelly Thorene
Staff writer

Fans of popular local singer-songwriter James Woodward (J Woody) will be pleased to hear about the release of his second self-produced album titled "Mission of Me" by J Woody and the Knotholes, which includes a mix of fresh sounds and personal storytelling. Five years in the making, this collection of 15 songs introduces new themes and musical styles building on the success of Woodward's previous work, "A Long Way to Heaven."

Woodward said the title track, "Mission of Me" was written a couple of years ago and his producer, Danny Shaffer really liked it.

"We had been sifting through previously recorded songs that weren't included on my first album and he felt the song should be the first track on the new one," he said.

Woodward's partnership with the Chicago-based sound man Shaffer goes back more than 20 years.

"He sifted through my catalog and gave me an honest thumb's up or down on what he heard," Woodward said. "I knew right away that his instincts were good, and that he was focused on the song, what it had, or didn't have. When he hears potential, the wheels of artistic collaboration start spinning. There would be no J Woody without Danny's amazing guitar playing and production skills."

Woodward's talent is supported on this album by many musicians from his first album and he said they had a lot of fun making it. Dave Wren "makes magic" he said, on his pedal steel guitar, Brandy Lane, Dennis Parrish and Fred Kent provided "superb bass lines." Woodward praised Gerald Dowd for "solid drums," Angela Schaffer for "pitch-perfect" harmonies and Ann Harris for awesome strings on "I'm Sorry." Some of the album's recording was done by local musician and sound man Jamie Faw at Ravenwood Studio and local artists Martha and Warren Dayton created the eye-catching cover art.

Woodward describes his song writing process as "highly intuitive" and said he usually starts by composing the lyrics.

"We've all heard about how great songs just 'happened' very quickly to famous artists," he said. "The best lyrics come in with a rhythm to them. The words must 'move' before a rhyming pattern or a melody is present."

Woodward said he studied poetry at an early age and gained an appreciation for how great poets make the words "dance with a rhythmic flow."

"Sometimes the first draft of a song doesn't flow well and I go back and try to get it moving," He explained. "Of course, the music, which usually comes later, must harmonize with the lyrical content; together they convey the emotion."

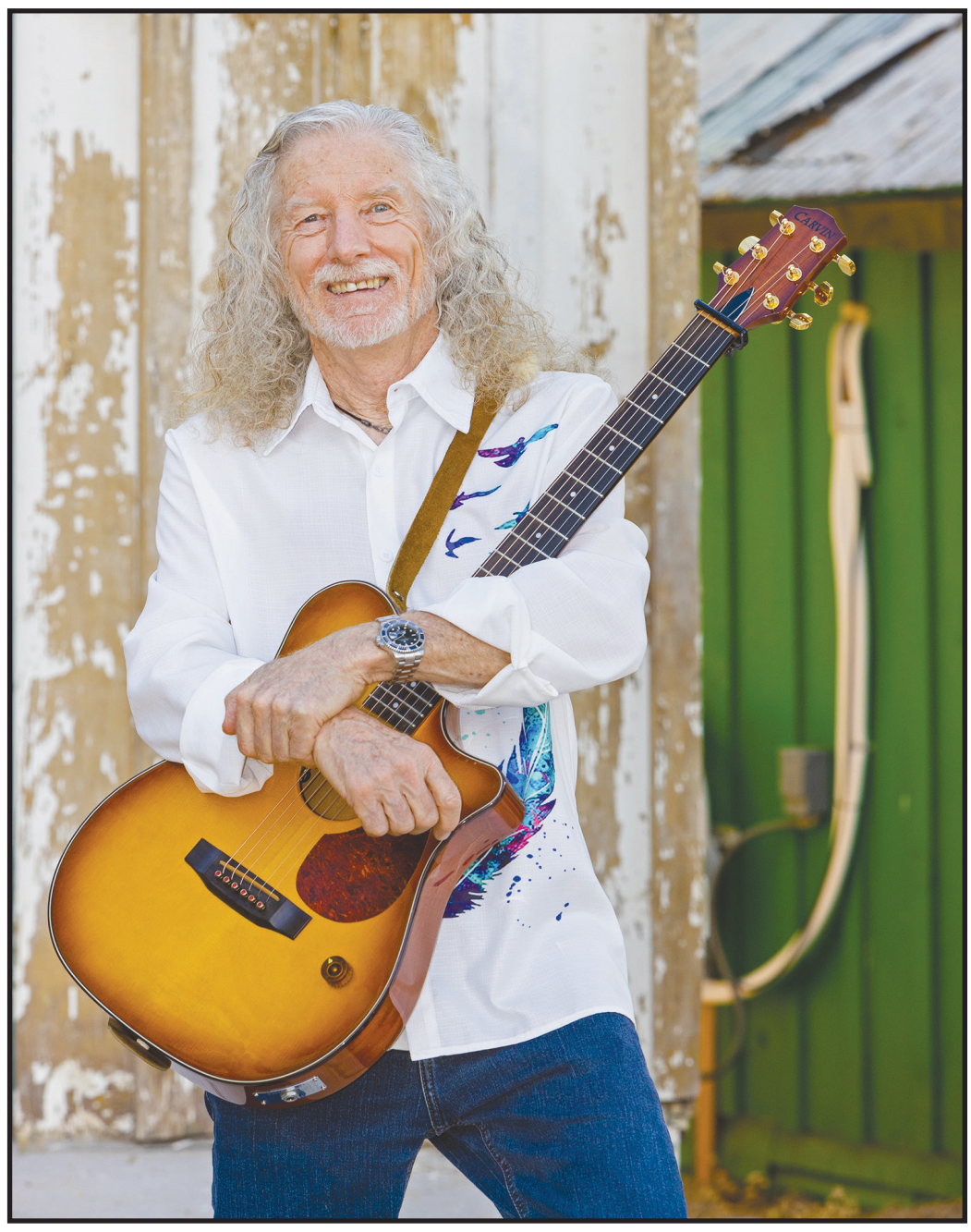
As a youth, Woodward was influenced by '60s rock including the Beatles and Bob Dylan. He said the first songs he ever wrote were influenced by John Denver, Neil Young, James Taylor, Cat Stevens, Crosby, Stills and Nash, Kris Kristofferson and other singer-songwriters of that era.

"Their songs were primarily built around an acoustic guitar and some personal lyrics," said Woodward. "That's what I had and their music shaped my early efforts."

On the rock 'n' roll side, Woodward said he was a big fan of The Rolling Stones, Creedence Clearwater Revival, The Who, Led Zeppelin and "any band with Eric Clapton." He enjoys country music, as well and his favorites include Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash, Merle Haggard and Hank Williams for songs with "heart and universal appeal." Woodward said he has a favorite musician, Bruce Cockburn, who he said, "is not as well-known as he deserves to be."

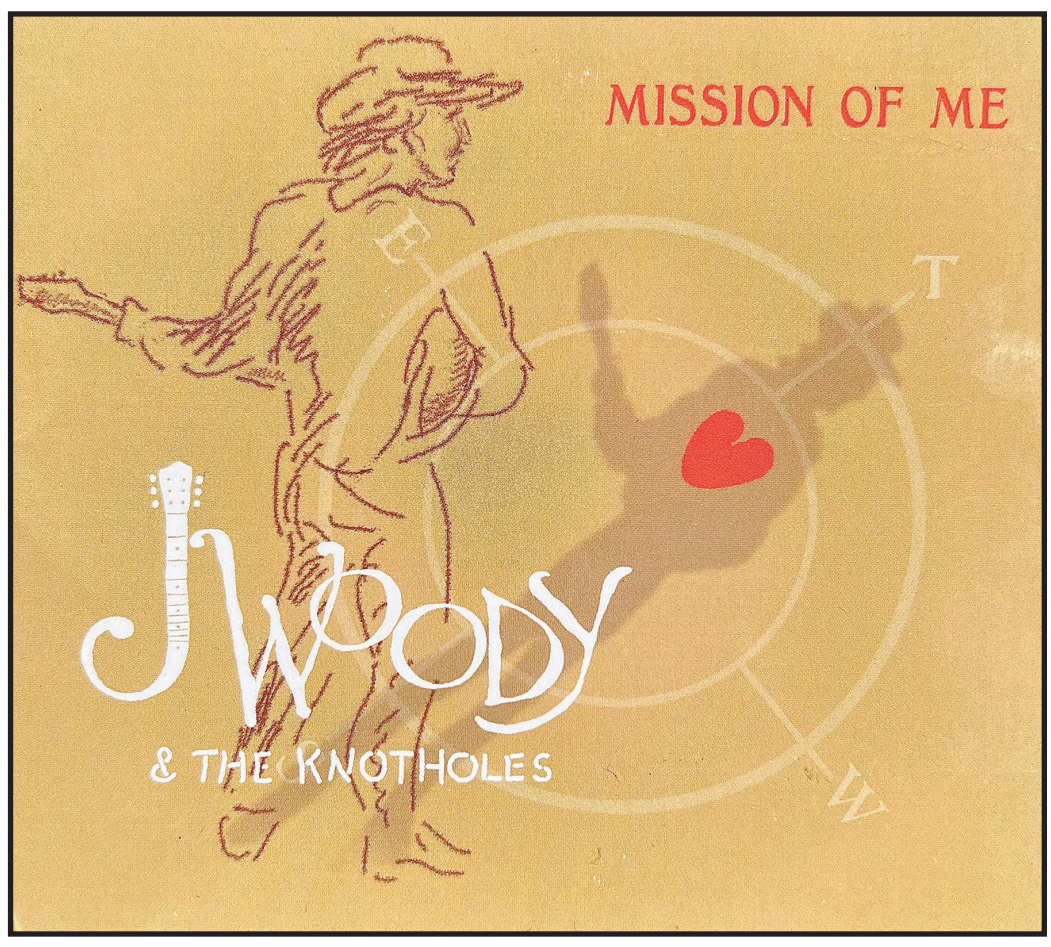
Woodward said sometimes he has an artist in mind when he writes a song but never tries to copy any of his idols.

"Maybe I can write a song that honors a performer," he remarked. "I can evoke a trace of someone who has enthralled millions of listeners and the vocal style I apply to a certain song might be a tribute in some way."



Mountain Democrat photo by Shelly Thorene

J Woody plays multiple venues in the El Dorado County region, often with friends, sometimes with the Knotholes and other times with a recorded backing track. Either way, his shows are not to be missed.



"Mission of Me" is available on all major streaming services and JWoodyMusic.com.

While Woodward may have been influenced by some great musicians, his all-original songs are uniquely his own.

Woodward often performs solo. However, at other times, he teams up with local musicians. He also has a way of performing virtually with the Knotholes, which had all the musicians in El Dorado County and in Chicago that were included in the recordings on both CD's.

"I can play with the Knotholes as they were recorded on my albums," he said. "It's called using backing tracks; the Knotholes are playing my songs just as they did in the studio. My producer stripped out my guitar and vocals so I perform live with the recorded band "backing" me. Sounds just like the recording ... cuz it is, only with J Woody singing and playing in real time."

The title track "Mission of Me" opens with Wren's soulful sounds on the pedal steel guitar leading to Woodward's soul-searching lyrics:

Divin' into the shadow, on a mission of me
Can't avoid the confusion if you wanna be free
Swimmin' in my delusions, always fightin' the tide
Found that breathin' was better, with nothin' to hide
With nothin' left to hide
Got nothin' left to hide

The Daytons created the graphics and artwork for the CD illustrating the album's title on the cover perfectly with a drawing of Woodward holding a guitar and looking into his shadow and his heart surrounded by a compass.

Both albums can be streamed on all streaming platforms and fans can listen to his music for free on JWoodyMusic.com. Live gig schedules can be found on facebook.com/JWoodyMusic.

IN THE KNOW

Stellar Students

Congratulations to **Katelyn Vaught** of Shingle Springs who was recently named to the Ohio University's Spring Provost's List.

July 24

Sherwood Demonstration Garden, 6699 Campus Drive, Placerville, is open 9 a.m. to noon, for **Open Garden Day**, Friday and Saturday. Take a leisurely stroll through all 16 themed gardens. Docents are on-site to assist you with any questions regarding the Sherwood Demonstration Garden or your personal gardens. May be closed for inclement weather or poor air quality, check before visiting at tinyurl.com/pszsfdhf.

Join American River Conservancy for **Sound Alchemy and Yoga Immersion** at 6:30 p.m. For more information visit arconservancy.org.

Join Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northern Sierra for **Picnic in the Park** at the Placerville Aquatic Center, 3071 Benham St. in Placerville from 5-7 p.m. For more information visit bbbsns.org.

The Olde Coloma Theatre presents **"The Watered Down Saloon" or "A Trip Out West"** through Aug. 23. For tickets and more information go to oldecolomatheatre.com.

Red's Blues Band will perform at 5 p.m. at HWY 50 Brewery in Camino. For more information visit hwy50brewery.com/live-music.

Ed Wilson will perform at Renegade Winery & Bistro in Mokelumne Hill from 5-8 p.m.

The Sam Chase & The Untraditional + Red Dirt Ruckus will perform, 7-11 p.m. at The Green Room Social Club in downtown Placerville. For tickets and more information visit clubgreenroom.com.

West Coast Performing Arts Concerts presents Elvis Live!, 7:30 p.m. at Harris Center for the Arts in Folsom. For tickets and more information call (916) 608-6888 or visit harriscenter.net.

July 25

Join American River Conservancy for an **Alpine Hike from Carson Pass to Lake Winnemucca** at 8 a.m. Registration required. For more information visit arconservancy.org.

Marshall Pediatrics invites the community to attend its **Kid's Summer Health Fair**, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. at 4341 Golden Center Drive, Suite A, Placerville. The health fair will be a family-friendly event, featuring health screenings, sports and annual physicals, wellness resources, community partners and activities for kids. For more information call (530) 626-2940.

Toogood Winery Tasting Room in Fairplay will host its **Wine and Cheese Celebration** with no reservations required on Saturday and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. For more information visit toogoodwinery.com.

Holly's Hill Vineyards and Brewery in Placerville will host **A Watermelon Affair** from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday featuring watermelon gazpacho, shrimp tacos with

■ See **KNOW**, page B4