

CHASE COUNTY CLOSE-UP

Flint Hills balladeer

Elmdale singer, songwriter celebrates the land, its people

By Jan Biles
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EMPORIA — When Annie Wilson and her dog go hiking in the Flint Hills, she takes along index cards and a pen.

TALLGRASS EXPRESS STRING BAND

To learn more about the Tallgrass Express String Band, its CDs and performance schedule, go to www.tallgrassexpress.com.

As she hears the killdeer calling, sees the bluestem blowing in a gentle wind or smells the spring burning, she jots down her thoughts and feelings. Once home, she begins to write the poetry that will eventually become lyrics for the songs she performs with the Tallgrass Express String Band.

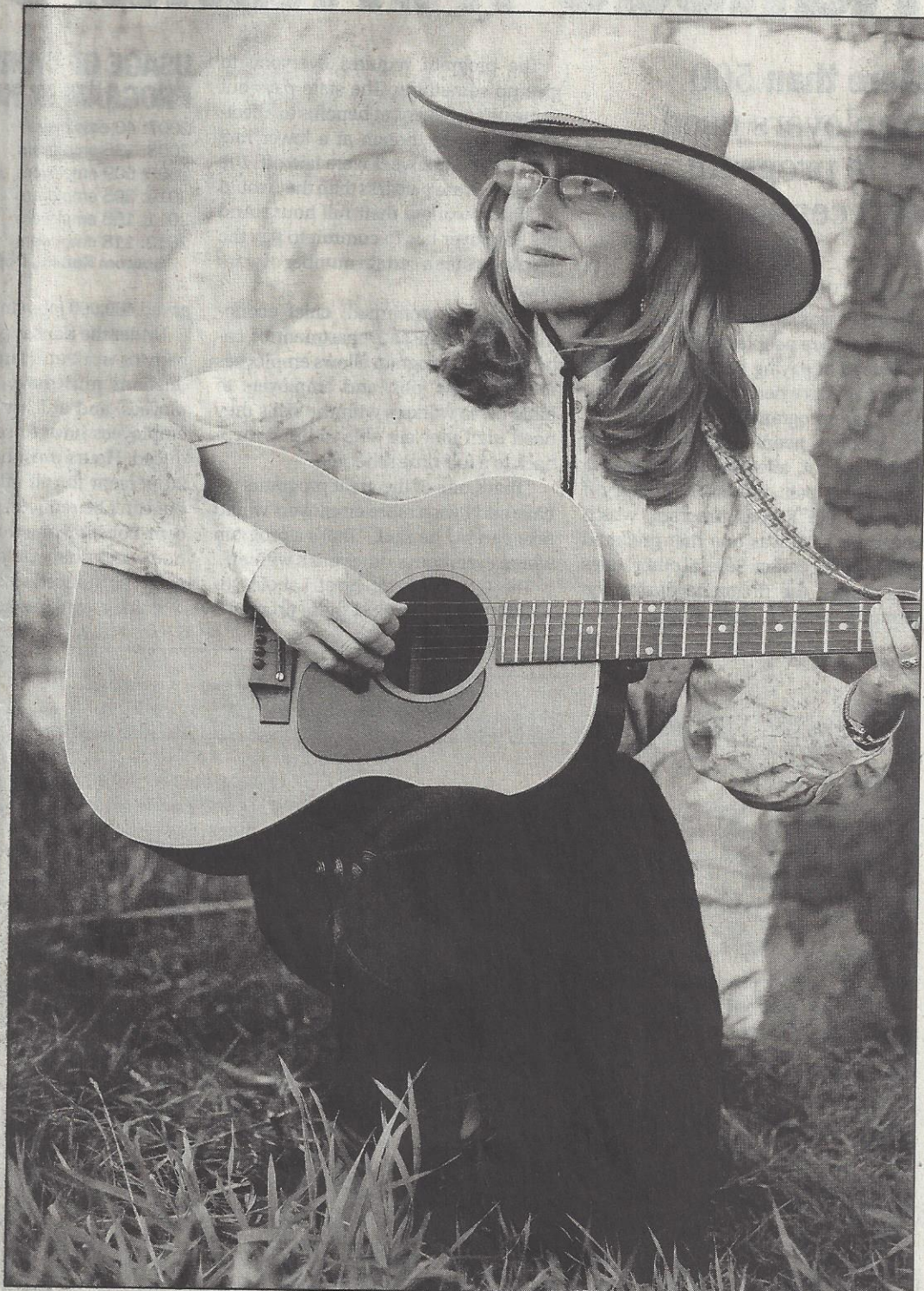
Wilson, who co-owns Five Oaks Ranch near Elmdale and teaches language arts at Emporia High School, recently received a certificate from Gov. Sam Brownback recognizing her as a Flint Hills Balladeer for her efforts to share the beauty of the Flint Hills through words and music.

"I was surprised," Wilson said of the recognition. "I am just totally amazed by it, and it's a dream come true."

The Flint Hills Balladeer concept originated with Cottonwood Falls residents Jim and Elaine Adkins and Sue and Monty Smith, owners of the Emma Chase Cafe in Cottonwood Falls, where Wilson and the others members of Tallgrass Express — Charlie Laughridge, fiddle, Carl Reed, bass, and Jim Versch, mandolin — often perform.

Wilson, who grew up in Wichita, said she was introduced to the Flint Hills as a child when she would spend summers at her grandparents' ranch west of Madison.

"I was so enchanted with the Flint Hills," she said. After high school, Wilson left Kansas to complete an undergraduate degree at Tufts University in Massachusetts and then returned to earn a law degree from The University of Kansas School of Law. She and her husband, John Wilson, moved in 1978 to the Browning Ranch near Madison. She joined Shewnaker Law Offices, a law firm practicing in Eureka and Madison.



Singer-songwriter Annie Wilson, of Elmdale, recently was recognized by Gov. Sam Brownback as a Flint Hills Balladeer for her efforts to share the beauty of the Flint Hills. SUBMITTED