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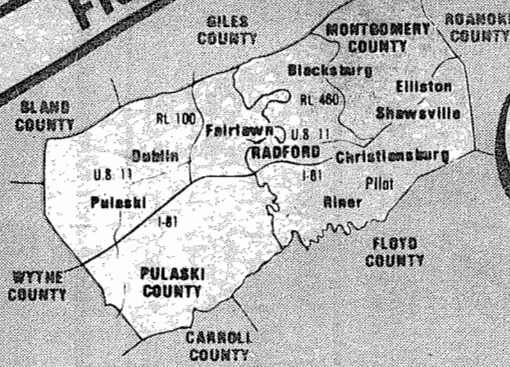
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Valley Weekly

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CAR-RT SORT
MR FLEMON PHILLIPS
CR CURRENT RESIDENT
STC ACRTH HIGH ST
CHRISTIANSBURG VA 24073



News Messenger Photo

Flemon Phillips of Christiansburg watches as 5-year-old Emily McGlothlin tries her hand at strumming the

autoharp. Phillips spent some time at the Hospitot day care center playing songs for the children.

Phillips finds his music a perfect remedy

By ELAINE J. O'QUINN
The News Messenger

CHRISTIANSBURG — "When the family was gathered making music, he was out courtin'," chuckles Flemon Phillips' wife Gertrude. "But I guess he's finally come into his own."

Phillips, who retired this year from Hercules Inc. after 39 years of service, decided about four years ago to start playing the autoharp as a constructive form of "therapy." After triple heart bypass surgery, he realized the need

for some physical as well as mental exercise, and music seemed the perfect remedy.

"I come from a family with music in their background," said Phillips. "It seemed a natural thing to do."

Commonly known as a "corded zither," the autoharp is a 36-string wooden instrument which has a scale of three octaves and is held with both hands while being picked or strummed. Phillips said that most players use three picks, but he has seen one person use five.

The physical shape of the in-

strument resembles a squared-off harp, and is hollow with a center hole just like a guitar. Different wood types used in construction produce different sounds.

The cording unit is separate and must be added from a conversion kit.

"The hardest thing about it is learning the minor keys," said Phillips.

Totally self-taught, Phillips learned to play the autoharp by ear. Considering that he wears two hearing aids, that is no small feat.

"I can tell when they're out of

tune, but I have to use a meter to re-tune them," he said, referring to the four autoharps that he now owns.

With the help of just two books, Phillips has learned how to play everything from church hymns to bluegrass and adapts what he is strumming to fit the needs of his audience.

Yes, audience.

In the brief time he has been playing, he has shared his talent with various types of music lovers.

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Smith delves into past

By ELAINE J. O'QUINN
The News Messenger

POPLAR HOLLOW — One conversation with Robert "Jake" Smith will most assuredly convince you that it is time to forget the "sticks and snails and puppy dog tails, that's what little boys are made of" stuff.

Instead, imagine curled turtle back shells, raw gemstones, encrusted ancient barnacles, shards of Indian pottery and petrified robin eggs because that is the substance of which real little boys are made.

Though one can hardly call Jake a "little" boy. At age 11 he has already participated in 12 state archeological digs — hot, tedious work that has been known to bring grown men to their knees.

Nonetheless, his involvement since the age of 8 has spurred an interest which Jake believes will remain with him throughout the rest of his life.

"I guess from the time I was old enough to walk, I would go out in the driveway and pick up rocks and bring them in to see if they were anything good," Jake said.

"He used to dig up buried dog bones and bring them to me," said Jake's mother, Ellie.

Jake, who will be a sixth grader at Shawsville Middle School this fall, credits his mom with initiating his interest in rocks and the history of the land. She presented him with her own collection of gemstones a number of years ago, and he has been steadily building on it ever since.

Working at archeological sites has been Jake's most interesting venture, but not necessarily the most rewarding as far as artifacts go. Claiming that "every time I find something, it's exciting," he is reluctant to boast about the discoveries he has made on his own.

For instance, last winter in his back yard at Poplar Hollow Jake unearthed the stock, swivel and brass butt plate of an Austrian made 1870 or 1871 rifle. Still in the process of properly preserving it and still hoping to find the rest of it, Jake intends to loan the gun parts to the Montgomery Museum when it opens its local artifacts' room.

Another chance find in Chancellor

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