

## Volunteer Spotlight: Kristina Hess

**What current volunteer role(s) do you have with MBOTMA?** I am so happy to be the Volunteer Merchandising Coordinator for all MBOTMA events

**What MBOTMA volunteer role(s) have you held in the past?** Notta one, Like I said I'm a Newbie!

**How long have you been part of MBOTMA and what brought you into the organization?** I can't tell a C from an A but as soon as my husband and I sat under the cedars and stars in 2017, we fell in love with the artistry of the music. That's what brought us here, that and my husband's new found love of pickin'. It may sound like I've been name dropping this whole survey but really, all of the people I mentioned, Vydia, Ryan, Matt, Barb, Addie, they are the reason I began and kept getting involved, and all the future friends are why I will stay. I can't wait to see who I friend next!

**How long have you been a volunteer with MBOTMA?** Since 2017, Ryan Julien (occasional festival attendee since 2000 now 1/2 stage manager, 1/2 beer slinger 1/2 biffy organizer and all around rockstar volunteer) said we should do something to help out; like an hour or two at August Fest. "Okay!" I said. We signed up for a single shift at the front gate and met the awesome Vydia (Front Gate Coordinator) who enchanted us with her winning personality. Some volunteers did not show up, and so, two shifts later and a dinner run for the yet un-relieved and starving Vydia, the experience showed us how great the need for more volunteers was. I filled out the volunteer interest form and chatted with Matt Johnson a few times before he mentioned needing a merch person for the next year's festival. We met and talked about what the merch person does. Not having a lot to go on as far as the store presentation, I just thought about the store I'd like to shop from and kind of went a li'l crazy... Now I just have fun, settin' up, sellin', chattin', raisin' money for a great cause!

**How has being a volunteer impacted you?** I always thought volunteering was just 'working for free.' Why not pay people for the work they do?! Now that I have volunteered, I understand so much more! Seeing the brain power, mighty hands and the "get it done" spirit of everyone involved, ticket prices would have to be in the thousands to afford to pay all of the hours volunteered in the effort to make this concert a success. Going to a festival, enjoying the music, is truly awesome, but to take that next step to go behind the scenes and see how it all comes to be from the volunteers that pick the bands, design the program, run the activities, spread the woodchips, that park the campers, that put up the

tents, signs, speakers, take the tickets, man booths, pickup trash. Taking part in the creation of events like this, I began to appreciate the festivals on a much more intricate level. I began to connect with them as I helped care for them. I became invested in the success not only of the festival but also in the MBOTMA organization. I knew I was hooked when I began using "we" instead of the more formal "MBOTMA" or "they." I love taking time to be bigger in this musical world and help bluegrass play on, in my own way!

**Do you have a fun story about being a volunteer?** Barb Schoemer is my fun story! She was my savior my first year running the Merch booth in 2019. Thank! God! She randomly checked in and introduced self Wednesday. I was over my head in decorations, inventory, boxes and i-pads! I'd done it to myself really. She ended up sticking around and helped me count, fold, stash, price and dress some risqué mannequins. We laughed (a lot) and just had the best time together all weekend. Without her I'm not even sure I would have been open by Sunday! With the beautiful mainstage music in the background and having productive, busy hands it was such a great time! Shout out to you Barb, you are my hero!

**Do you have a favorite festival or activity at a festival?** Oh-mah-gosh, I like them all! I love that I'm completely encapsulated by music at the winter weekend while I sit at the lobby Merch booth. At Fall jam, I love listening to my husband pick with friends in the night time jam rooms. At August Fest, so many things! Music under the stars, group cooking, of course, that guy plucking out a song in the distance as I sip my morning coffee and read by the embers of last night's campfire. What occupation did you have or do you have now? I have the honor of running three high school auditoriums for ISD728, serving Zimmerman, Elk River, Rogers and Otsego. In short, I manage the facilities, the A/V technical staff, student techie programs, rentals, and policy and create theatrically-based community education classes and engagements. You want the long version? We're gonna need coffee.

**What are some of your hobbies and interests?** I am a dabbler really. I do this-n-that. I like (though admittedly, I'm not that good at it) that mandala dot painting, straw bale gardening. Much to my husband Nate's chagrin, I like starting re-do projects around the house. I was in facility maintenance for 18 years, so, if I see something I can do, I just begin and slooowly finish. We



have a lot of half done projects around the house. Currently, it's our master closet, dining room light fixture, and possibly soon, a fence for a \*hope to be\* rescue Doberman! She's out there somewhere!

**What's a fun fact about you?** I've never done merch before. I have been facility maintenance staff, waitress, and theater set construction and faux finishing for 20+ years. No merch.

**What would you tell a new MBOTMA member/volunteer?** Don't be afraid to put your hand up and say "ya know, I'll try it." We'll train you on the task and someone will be available if you have a question. You may end up doing something you never thought you'd be interested in. I am an artist-ish and I never thought I would know so darn much about spreadsheets, profit/loss and price points! You'll surprise yourself with what you can do. I'm loving the challenge of finding that perfect item that everyone wants, finding the perfect price between profit and customer affordability, and helping MBOTMA raise some funds for the great goal of sharing bluegrass music. Step up to what you are passionate about, step up to ensure the future of bluegrass music. If you just volunteer for an hour, by the end of that hour, I bet you'll find a reason to come on back. What would I tell them? "We need you, we can't do this without you"