

By David Blackburn

Messenger-Inquirer; April 14, 2008; Owensboro, Ky.

The Persimmon Sisters band has no plans to go on the road promoting a debut album that started out as a demo tape among friends who jammed together Sunday nights.

"We're an Owensboro band," Nancy Cardwell, upright bassist/vocalist, said Sunday after a release party for "Green Persimmon Trees" at the International Bluegrass Music Museum. "We don't have any aspirations about getting a bus, quitting our day jobs and going out" on tour, Cardwell said. "We're happy being a regional band."

Part of Sunday's event was a mini-concert by the four-woman, one-man group for about 60 enthusiastic fans who filled a small performance area in the museum. The turnout surprised the band, but not the museum's executive director, Gabrielle Gray. "They thought maybe 20 or 30" people would attend," Gray said. "I knew they would draw a good crowd. They're very popular here."

Gray said she suggested to Cardwell that the museum be used for the release party after Sunday's biannual meeting of its board of trustees, of which Cardwell is a member. Other members of the band are Cathy Rogier of Philpot (fiddle); Joel Whittinghill of Bowling Green (mandolin); his sister, Anita Owens of Owensboro (guitar); and vocalist Martha Gipson of Owensboro. With banjo player Robin Roller of Nashville sitting in, the group played most of the 12 tracks on the album. Among them was the title track, which Cardwell, 49, wrote at age 20 as a homesick junior at Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville, Mo.

Cardwell lived in Owensboro from 1994 until 2003 when she moved to Nashville. She is the special projects director with the International Bluegrass Music Association. At one point, she asked Christa Walker of Owensboro, a former Girl Scout in a troop that Cardwell led, to help sing harmony on another song on the album, "Rainbow River." Walker is the daughter of Tinita Walker, one of the original band members, Cardwell said.

The group began playing together weekly at Cardwell's home when she still lived in Owensboro, she said. When they gathered at the studio of her friend, Scott Partridge, in Mount Juliet, Tenn., in February 2007 to cut a four- or five-song demo, they were familiar with the music, Cardwell said.

They figured out quickly how to arrange the harmonies and breaks, said Rogier, a band member for seven years. "We used to play together so much there wasn't a whole lot of rehearsal involved," Rogier said. After one or two takes per song, they moved on to the next one, she said.

"We just kept knocking them out," Cardwell said. "It just went really fast." They recorded the songs in two days and later added banjo, Cardwell said. But most of the tracks were done live with the members playing their instruments while gathered in a circle around microphones, giving the music "a different energy," she said. "Bluegrass music is such a great live music," Cardwell said.

The group is scheduled to play locally again May 30 as part of Friday After 5's bluegrass series. For more information about the band, visit [www.persimmonsisters.com](http://www.persimmonsisters.com).