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Guest Column

Get Your Home Ready to Beat the Heat



TONY RETASSIE

MARCH AND APRIL ARE IDEAL times to service your home heat pump system, ensuring it runs efficiently when summer arrives. Routine maintenance, like cleaning or replacing filters, checking refrigerant levels and inspecting parts, can improve your system's energy efficiency and lower your energy bills.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system uses 48% of a typical home's energy. Although most of that money is spent on heating expenses, Americans still spend \$29 billion every year

to power their air conditioners.

By addressing potential issues early, you can avoid costly emergency repairs and extend the life of your unit. Scheduling service in the spring helps you beat the peak-season rush. Also, taking these few simple steps before you crank up the AC will provide more comfort and save money:

- ▶ Check or update your insulation to keep cool air in your home and warm air out.
- ▶ When the temperature outside is 80 degrees or higher, your attic could soar to 100 degrees — maybe higher. Install a vent or an attic fan to keep hot air from building up.
- ▶ Get the air conditioner or outdoor unit ready. Clear leaves and debris from the condensing unit and replace or clean the indoor filter.
- ▶ Close curtains, blinds and shades during the day. Approximately one-third of a home's energy is lost around windows, and about 76% of the sunlight that falls on a standard double-pane window becomes heat, according to energy.gov.
- ▶ Install ceiling fans. Use them to stay comfortable on moderately warm days.
- ▶ Don't forget the original air conditioner: the window. On days when temperatures are pleasant or if there is a breeze, open a window to enjoy nature's air.

An improperly sized HVAC unit can increase your home's energy costs, too. For example, an oversized unit will cause your system to "short cycle," constantly turning off and on. An undersized unit could run constantly to try to keep pace with the thermostat. The square footage of your home can help determine the load capacity of your HVAC unit. However, this isn't the only factor you should consider when reviewing unit sizes. Insulation values, window sizes and types, and ceiling heights are a few other factors that need to be incorporated into the heat loss/gain analysis.

To schedule your pre-season HVAC checkup or ask about cooling options for your home, call 814-445-4106. A well-maintained cooling system can save energy and keep your home comfortable all summer long. 🌞

TONY RETASSIE

HVAC MANAGER

Ole 97 Member Keeps Fire Burning with Johnny Cash Tribute Band

EMILY BAER, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING & MEMBER SERVICES

ON THE NORTHERNMOST EDGE OF our service territory lives a cooperative member who can easily be mistaken for the country legend known for such songs as “Walk the Line,” “Folsom Prison Blues,” “Ring of Fire” and “A Boy Named Sue.”

During Sunday worship at his church in 2008, Randy Hunter wowed the congregation when he started singing. He recalls people commenting, “You sound just like Johnny Cash.”

At first, Randy wasn’t impressed with the compliments and instead responded with, “I’m a country music fan, but I enjoy Conway Twitty, Merle Haggard and Willie Nelson a little bit more.”

After a few months of singing and more Johnny Cash comparisons, Randy thought about forming a band. He organized a group of musicians and called the band Ole 97. He named his band after “a king of country music,” Roy Acuff, who some may compare to George Strait and Willie Nelson. Hunter enjoyed all of Acuff’s music, but one song always stood out to him: “Wreck of the Old 97,” which was about the derailment of a Southern Railway freight train, known as No. 97.

Vocalists and musicians came and went as the group

performed for free at picnics, private parties and small community events to get name recognition. It wasn’t until 2012 that a perfect blend of musicians and singers united to form the current version of Ole 97, a Johnny Cash tribute band.

Flying the black flag

The “motley crew,” as they call themselves, consists of six musicians. Hunter is the lead vocalist. Charlene “Char” Boldin, the female vocalist, portrays June Carter, Patsy Kline, Loretta Lynn, Janis Joplin, and Grace Slick and previously had her own 80s/90s hard-rock band.

Doug Nagy is a guitarist along with Joe Brucker, who originally started as a fill-in but then became a full-time member. Brucker also fiddles and can play anything with strings. Bass player Andy Heinze is a former member of the popular band Flood City Brass. Drummer and band manager Paul Carpenter joined after answering an ad in the *PennySaver*. When he replicated the authentic Johnny Cash train beat during his audition, his talent was clear.

“When I met Randy, he was a natural showman,” Carpenter recalls. “Even when we practice, he acts like he is singing in front of a 1,000 people. I knew from that moment

PHOTO COURTESY OF OLE 97



OLE 97: Band members perform high-energy, engaging and interactive entertainment for country music fans at the Indiana County Fairgrounds as the opening act for The Charlie Daniels Band.

this guy knew how to lead a band and that we would have a successful music career.”

Ole 97 started playing at VFWs, fundraising events and in front of larger crowds. In January 2012, the band started taking its music on the road. Carpenter also took steps to get Ole 97 gigs at county fairs by joining in the Pennsylvania State Association of County Fairs. The band drove to Hershey in a snowstorm for the association’s convention, where they auditioned in front of nearly 1,000 people, all there to find talent for fairs and festivals. After its performance, the band booked its first big gig with Buddy Knoebel, owner of Knoebel’s Amusement Park in Elysburg. Once the band started playing annually at Knoebel’s, its ticket was punched to the “tribute band” level, instead of the “bar band” level.

Attendance at Ole 97’s performances grew from a couple hundred people to a couple thousand. The band opened for country-western artists Aaron Tippin, Sammy Kershaw and Joe Diffie at a Fraternal Order of Police fundraiser. In 2017, the band performed for nearly 3,000 people at the Indiana County Fairgrounds as the opening act for Charlie Daniels.

“We’ve done shows in New York, Maryland, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and recently in North Carolina,” Carpenter says. “When doing a show, there are a few songs you can’t miss: ‘Walk the Line’ and ‘Folsom Prison Blues’ — two of Johnny Cash’s signature songs. And we can’t forget ‘Jackson,’ the duet with June Carter, ‘A Boy Named Sue’ and ‘Ring of Fire.’”

He says Johnny Cash recorded more than 1,500 songs in his career, so it’s hard to pick top contenders. Aside from Cash originals, the band has some originals of its own on the set list, including “Whole Lotta Cash,” and “Fruitcake.” Another original, “Black Flag,” was inspired by an airport encounter with Grammy Award winner Marty Stuart, a singer and songwriter who performed with Cash in the ‘90s.

That chance meeting led to a brief phone conversation between Hunter and Stuart, who commended the band and its lead vocalist, saying: “I could tell by your voice you sound like Johnny Cash — you keep that black flag waving for old Johnny Cash.”

In October 2019, Hunter and Carpenter drove to Cash’s boyhood home in Dyess, Ark., to attend the Johnny Cash Heritage Festival, where Stuart was performing. The pair met Cash’s sister Joanne and nephew Roy Cash. Later, after his show, Stuart and the Cashes autographed Hunter’s handwritten lyrics for “Black Flag.”

New venues, new fans

A song recorded by Cash shortly before he passed away was a cover of “Hurt,” originally performed by Nine Inch

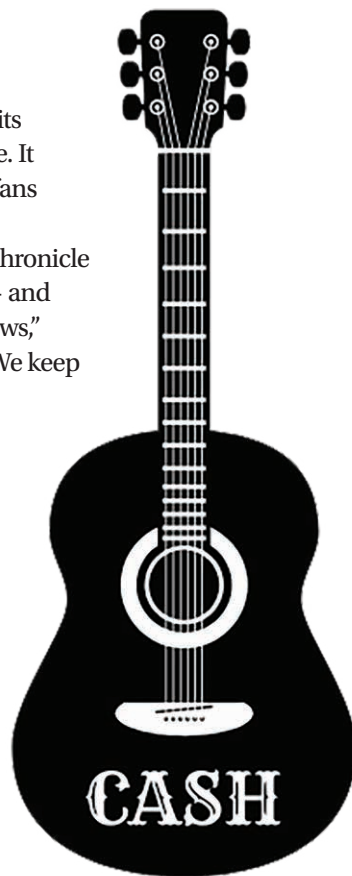
Nails. When Ole 97 added this song to its set list, the band broadened its fan base. It now has a new generation of younger fans attending its shows.

“When the movie ‘Walk the Line,’ a chronicle of Johnny Cash’s life was produced, 20- and 30-year-olds started coming to our shows,” Hunter recalls. “Our band’s tagline is ‘We keep the fire burning for Johnny Cash.’”

Ole 97 performs an average of 40 shows a year and has many loyal followers. When performing at new venues, band members say attendees often have jaw-dropping reactions when they first hear Hunter sing because he sounds so much like Cash.

“The fun part is being in a new place where no one has ever heard us perform before. We have even been accused of lip-syncing,” Carpenter adds with a laugh. “Randy always says we are too dumb to lip-sync.”

Ole 97’s prime show season is June through August, although it stays in tune by practicing at smaller venues in the colder months. If interested in attending an authentic Johnny Cash tribute concert, you can find dates and times by joining more than 8,000 followers on the group’s Facebook page,



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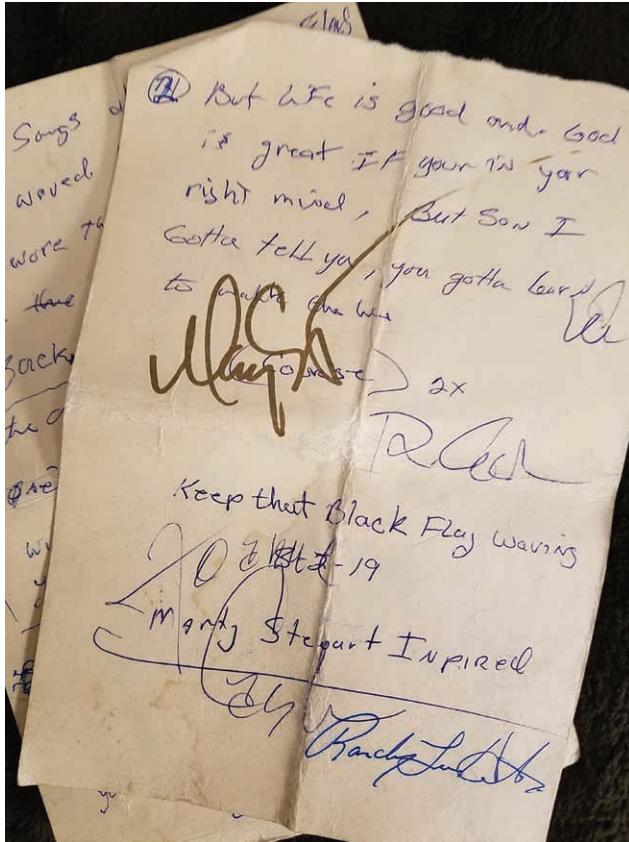
PHOTO COURTESY OF OLE 97

CASH FAMILY: Joanne Cash, Johnny’s only living sister, and Randy Hunter take a moment to share their love of music at the Johnny Cash Heritage Festival in Dyess, Ark.

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Ole 97 Johnny Cash June Carter Tribute Band.

See the band in action and keep the fire burning at one of its first local summer shows, scheduled Saturday, June 14, at the Windber Miners' Memorial Day Festival. 📍



BLACK FLAG: Randy Hunter's original handwritten lyrics for the song "Black Flag" were inspired by a phone conversation with Marty Stuart. The lyrics were autographed by Stuart and Cash's nephew, Roy and Joanne, in 2019 at a festival near Cash's boyhood home.





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