



Billie Jordan, center, and husband Russ Jordan of Green Creek are seen working at Pledge Central during the annual fundraiser at WNCW FM 88.7 National Public Radio in Spindale. At left is another WNCW radio stalwart and on-air personality from Polk County, wake-up companion Wanda Lu Greene.

Jordans' Devotion To Public Radio Began With One-Legged Dobro Player

WNCW radio and its listeners probably don't know it, but they owe a big debt of gratitude to a one-legged dobro player from Society Hill, South Carolina.

Billie and Russ Jordan of Green Creek credit him with fanning the flames of a love of music that had smoldered in both of them since childhood. This in turn led to their involvement with the innovative National Public Radio affiliate station, WNCW - FM 88.7, in Spindale.

Billie has worn many hats during her three years there and is now the station's development director, where she oversees "anything and everything to do with raising money".

Russ helps out at the station whenever needed and volunteers his time every Saturday afternoon from 1 to 4 as host of the popular Bluegrass show, "Goin' Across the Mountain".

Billie grew up in a busy family of six girls, listening to music as diverse as Big Band tunes, Elvis 45's, and Hot Tuna and Moody Blues albums. Russ and his three brothers spent their early years listening to a wide variety of music as well, including Rhythm and Blues, Rock and Roll and Beach tunes.

But the Bluegrass sound captured his ear and his heart while watching "The Arthur Smith Show" Saturday afternoons on TV. Later he went to Bluegrass festivals to hear musicians like

Bill Monroe and the Ralph Stanley Band.

Billie got her first guitar as a high school graduation present after fooling around with the baritone ukelele for a while. Russ got his first mandolin for \$100, but didn't get serious about it until he saw a man playing the instrument at one of those festivals.

"The first time I saw Red Rector, he was up on stage playing Lara's Theme on the mandolin with this real dreamy look on his face and he wasn't even looking at his fingers. It inspired me to play," Russ confesses, looking a little dreamy himself.

Later when they met and got married, their love of music continued as a joint venture with Russ concentrating on the mandolin and Billie trying out the guitar and banjo before settling on the stand-up bass. And that's where the one legged dobro player comes in. The young couple spent hours in Gary Tucker's general store in Society Hill, sitting and picking while listening to tall tales.

"Gary Tucker was a great storyteller, some may say a liar," Russ says laughing. "He was a fine old country musician who played all kinds of music on the dobro, including early country stuff and even Hawaiian music." And Billie adds, "Even back then we

thought about documenting some of his stuff. I wish we had before he died."

By the time they moved to Clemson where Russ enrolled in engineering school and Billie worked in commercial graphics, the couple was ready to do some serious picking with other musicians.

"We played with lots of folks at Clemson," they confess, "probably more than we should have."

Russ graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering and the couple eventually moved to five wooded acres in Green Creek. For the past ten years, Russ has worked from his home office there as an energy consultant for the South Carolina Governor's Office of Energy Projects.

Spontaneous music sessions have had to take a back seat as they've put hours into building their own home, pursuing careers and tending to daughters Sarah and Erin.

"I wish I had more time to play," Billie laments. "Still late at night when I can't sleep or I'm home alone, I'll pull out my guitar and play along with a tape, just to have somebody to pick with."

When their girls reached school age, Billie was eager to pursue her love of art by enrolling in commercial graphics classes at Isothermal Community College. The graphics teacher was gone the day she went to sign up, so she wandered over to the Radio and TV Department where students were doing some taping. Watching the process, something clicked. She had already done some art work for Public TV in Clemson and she realized right away that she could mix what she already knew in graphics with radio and TV production.

When she heard about plans for a public radio station at the school, that cinched it. While she was still a student in the Radio and TV Technology Department, Billie earned the respect of department head Burr Beard by doing part-time research for the proposed station. When WNCW went on-air in 1989 with Beard as station manager, Billie's can-do attitude made her a natural for a position at the fledgling station.

Russ likes to say that he ended up as volunteer host of "Goin' Across the Mountain"

more or less by default.

"I thought it was a real irony for a station in this area not to have a Bluegrass show when this region has produced people like Earl Scruggs, Bill Monroe and Snuffy Jenkins who are directly responsible for the Bluegrass sound," he says. When he voiced his concerns to station manger Burr Beard, he surprised Russ by asking if he'd like to produce a show.

"I'd never been in a radio control room before, but I figured if I didn't do it, nobody else would. Besides," he muses in his down home drawl, "where else could a guy who talks like me get to play the kind of music he loves on the radio?"

That first show was two years ago and since then the program has grown into a popular three-hour feature with listeners calling in from all parts of the WNCW coverage area.

Through the contacts he's made as host, Russ has been able to develop another interest, his love of show promotion. His most recent effort at the Old Rock School in Valdese, NC, included a bill with musicians like Doc Watson of Boone and Phil and Gaye Johnson of Green Creek.

"It was a sell-out crowd," Russ says, grinning broadly.

Billie is hoping for a sell-out of sorts in her latest endeavor too. As development director for WNCW she is responsible for those exhausting fundraisers, and it's that time again at WNCW. Everyone on staff and countless community volunteers will be putting in long days to reach their \$60,000 goal by April 4th.

Then, as soon as everything is mailed out and the last detail is taken care of, Billie might have three weeks or a month's break before she has to start all over again.

Yet when you mention the dreaded "fundraiser" word, her eyes light up. "We've got some fantastic premiums for people who pledge during this fundraiser," she enthuses. "We've got a Sigma guitar donated by Ray's Music in Lenoir, gorgeous pottery, several nights at local bed-and-breakfasts like The Grove Park Inn and The Inn at Hot Springs, and a beautiful hand-beaded silk scarf by Tracy Martin, just to mention a

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