

ENTERTAINMENT

# Fans stand for hours to see Jimmy Wayne

By TODD HAGANS  
Special to The Herald

Hundreds of people lined the aisles of Wal-Mart last Tuesday evening to get a glimpse of Nashville's most promising country star.

Jimmy Wayne Barber, known on the music scene simply as Jimmy Wayne, made a guest appearance in Gastonia as part of an autograph signing tour promoting his debut album, which hit store shelves last week. 'Stay Gone,' the first release from his album, is No. 3 on this week's Billboard country charts.

Star-crazed fans began gathering in the Franklin Square store by mid-afternoon, forming a line that stretched from the front to the rear of the building, curving through the clothing and electronics departments.

"I came to see Jimmy Wayne," said Kim Dellinger of Lincolnton, who waited in line for over two hours. "I thought I'd bring my daughter up her to see him."

Dellinger is a dispatcher at the Cherryville Police Department, where Barber's brother, Kenny Stewart, works as an officer.

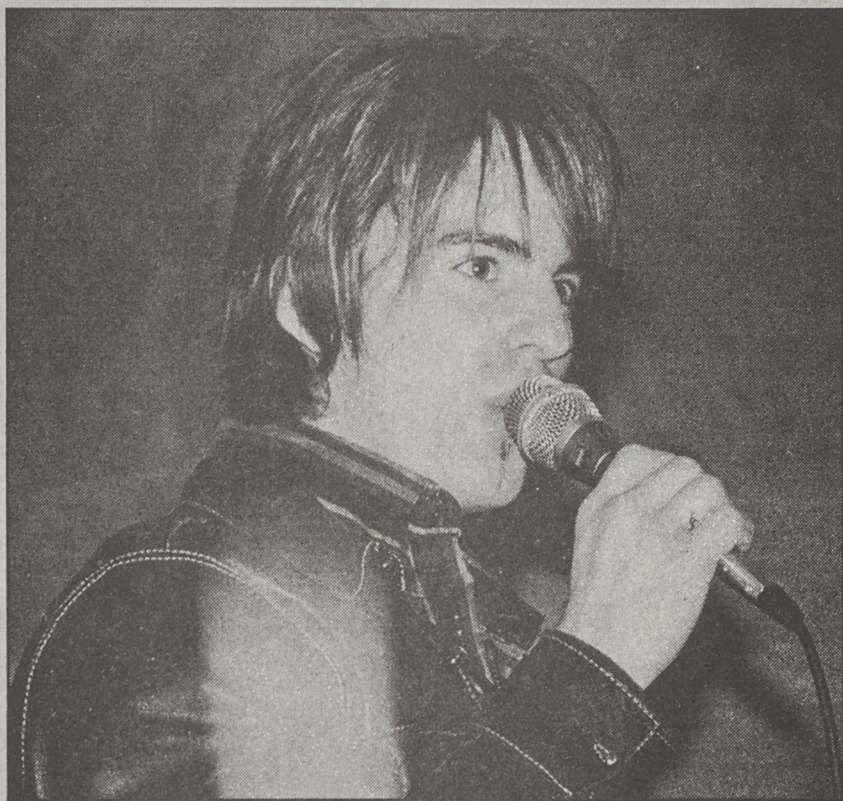
Dellinger said she talked to Barber on the phone several times when he called the station looking for Stewart, noting the he refers to himself as "brother Jimmy."

"He's real sweet," said Dellinger.

Willodean Wise of Bessemer City ventured to the store about 4 p.m., hoping to see Barber, who played in a band with her son back in the early 1990s. The band often rehearsed in the basement of Wise's Skyland Ave. home.

"I am so proud of him," said Wise, who adding that Barber's success is overwhelming. "It is unreal, from my basement to this."

Wise said she learned about a month ago that Barber would be in Gaston County the day of his album release. She said choosing Gaston County for a CD signing goes to show that Barber cares about his family and friends back home.



Jimmy Wayne speaks to the crowd during autograph signing tour stop at Wal-Mart in Gastonia.

"He's a hometown fellow who loves his family and friends," said Wise, who saw many familiar faces from Bessemer City at the somewhat chaotic event.

Jenna Ford and her mother drove from Summerville, SC near Charleston to meet Barber. Ford, a self-confessed Jimmy Wayne fan, had the country musician sign a CD and her T-shirt.

Charlotte Bell stood in line with her young daughter, Savannah. Bell said she first met Barber when she was Miss Gastonia in 1995 and the two performed at a talent show.

"We have stayed friends ever since," said Bell. "He is easy-going and easy to talk to. He has come a long way in life and he deserves the best."

Tony Baker and his wife, Donna, stood just feet away, watching Barber sign countless CD covers, the both of them obviously proud of the Bessemer City boy who has made it big. Baker, a retired vocational education teacher, taught Barber his junior and senior years at Bessemer City High School.

"He was very outgoing and did very well," said Baker. "He caught onto things very quickly. Even

then, he loved music and wanted to talk about his music."

Barber emerged from the back of the store around 6 p.m., just minutes after his 'Stay Gone' tune blared over the sound system and a handful of fans started a sing-a-long. Screams and cheers drowned out the music once Barber reached the small stage.

Standing on a chair and looking out over the crowd, Barber seemed amazed at the large number of people waving and snapping photos as he thanked them for their attendance. Barber briefly told of how he moved to Nashville five years ago to pursue his music career, mentioning that it is hard to believe he is at Wal-Mart unveiling his first album.

"I remember walking through these doors six or seven years ago to buy motor oil," said Barber, who urged record producers to schedule his album debut in Gaston County.

Born in Kings Mountain, Barber calls Bessemer City home. At the age of 16, Barber was a high school dropout looking for work. He met the late Beatrice Costner, who owned a small

woodworking shop and offered Barber a job and a place to live. Barber credits Costner for helping him get his life back on track.

He graduated from Bessemer City High School in 1992, attended Gaston College and worked at the prison in Dallas before moving to Nashville. He signed with Acuff-Rose about five years ago and co-wrote the song, 'Put Your Hand In Mine,' recorded by Tracy Byrd that reached the top 10 on the country charts.

Barber then signed as an artist with Dream Works and has been working the past several years on his first album. Record executives released Barber's 'Stay Gone' single this spring and the song gained airplay on radio stations and steadily moved up the charts.

Barber keeps in touch with friends and family in Bessemer City, but his busy schedule doesn't allow for frequent visits. He has toured the country in recent months, pushing his new album during on-air radio interviews and at public appearances.

WSOC 103.7 radio in Charlotte helped coordinate Barber's CD signing party.

## Higginbotham attends Leadership Conference

Marlowe Higginbotham recently attended the Hugh O'Brian Youth Leadership Conference and Seminar of North Carolina at NC State University.

One sophomore is chosen from their school to be an ambassador based on their academics and leadership abilities. While at the seminar she was chosen "the student with the most initiative."



Marlowe will be attending the National Leadership Forum on Defense, Intelligence and Diplomacy in Washington, DC in the Fall. She was chosen to attend for her high academic accomplishments and leadership qualities.

Marlowe was published in Who's Who for 2001-2002 and also for 2002-2003. Only five percent of high school students are asked for one year and one percent are asked for multiple years.

Marlowe won a Silver Medal and was published for an essay she wrote. The contest is the oldest writing contest in the country, The National Scholastics Writing Competition.

Marlowe is a rising junior at Gaston Day School. She is a member of the National Honor Society, Beta Club, Interact Club, debate team and is on the Knowledge Bowl team. She was elected class secretary-treasurer for her junior year.

On Awards Day, she received the Highest Academic Awards in history and chemistry and Highest Excellence award in chorus.

She is the daughter of Punkin and John Higginbotham of Gastonia.

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