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Right place, right time

Area residents help plan Pennsylvania Helping Nashville Benefit

By Susan Field, For the Mirror

POSTED: June 13, 2010

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Huntingdon residents Ralph Wilson and Tammy and Kayla Carolus were minutes from driving into devastation.

On May 1, on their way home from filming a couple of music videos in Nashville, Tenn., their video producer called Tammy's cell phone to see where they were.

"When I told him, he said, 'Oh my God - turn your car around and go back. Get a hotel, turn on the TV and see what you almost drove into,'" Tammy said.

What Wilson and the Caroluses didn't realize at the time was that severe flash flooding all over the Nashville area was flooding roadways, such as Interstate 24, which they were about to drive onto.

"I thanked God that we had stopped to eat at a restaurant (which is when the producer had called), or we wouldn't have received warning. I have no doubt that we would have been one of the cars on the road when the flooding hit," Tammy said.

They had another close call while filming the videos earlier that day when a tornado touched down 10 blocks away from where they were. The tornado caused considerable damage and killed one person.

The flooding, which continued for days, was the result of more than 13 inches of rain that fell over the weekend. According to news reports, the flooding in Tennessee caused mass devastation and killed more than 20. Nashville landmarks The Grand Ole Opry and the Opryland Hotel were damaged.

Wilson and the Caroluses stayed in Nashville an extra day before driving home safely, but their close call with disaster, and the images of those who had not been so lucky, played over and over in Tammy's mind.

One night, about a week later, Tammy went to bed, but couldn't sleep.

"I thought, 'OK, I have a ton of energy, Ronnie Millsap's old tour bus and some local musician friends. What can we do?'" Tammy said.

It was then that the idea for the Pennsylvania Helping Nashville Benefit show was born.

"I got up around midnight and posted an ad on my Facebook page, basically looking for anyone interested in helping me. Within minutes, I had responses," Tammy said.

One of the responses to the ad was from acclaimed singer and songwriter Ronnie Russell, who lives in central Pennsylvania. Russell gave Tammy the contact for Sheree Spoltore, national membership director of the Nashville Songwriters Association International.

Article Photos



Country musician Mike Short Jr. of Ottsville, Pa., (from left), and dancer Kayla Carolus and musician Ralph Wilson, both of Huntingdon, will perform at both concerts.

Fact Box

If you go

What: Pennsylvania Helping Nashville Benefit - 2 Day Mini Tour

Day one: 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. June 26 at the Roadhouse On 747, Mount Union. Talent will include: Mike Short Jr. & Downtime, FACED, Ralph Wilson, Rain Must Fall, Riley Roth, Sheri S. Beri, and a dance performance by Kayla Carolus.

Day two: 2 to 9 p.m. June 27 at Brownies 23 East, Ardmore. Talent will include Mike Short Jr. & Downtime, Chris Woodward & ShinDiggin, Craig Bickhardt, Ray Adkins Band, Rick Denzien with Debra Lee, SunSets North and a dance performance by Kayla Carolus.

Tickets: Available at the door at each concert for a \$10 donation. All proceeds will go to the MusicCares Nashville Flood Relief Fund.

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"Sheree was so amazed that we, here in PA, wanted to help that she put me on speaker phone for the whole place to hear my idea," Tammy said. "She gave me the NSAI contacts in our area of Pennsylvania, and they helped put me in touch with artists. From there, the idea for a show grew into a two-day mini tour. I hope other people hear about this and want to do similar fundraising in their towns."

Some of the show's performers have personal connections to Nashville. Jonathan Preston, drummer of Rain Must Fall, a band from Altoona, has a friend who lost his recording studio and part of his home in the flood.

Sheri S. Berry, a jazz singer from Bellefonte, has a cousin who is involved in the Nashville music scene.

"When he posted pictures of the flood damage just down the street from his house, I realized the seriousness of the situation," said Berry, who wrote a song for the benefit show called "Down Came the Rain." It tells the story of the flood.

"Music is a very inspiring, healing and moving art form. It's just so indescribable that people like Tammy are doing things like this for us," said Spoltore in a phone interview from her office in Nashville.

"We received two kinds of calls: 'we need help' and 'how can we help'? Music creators all over the world in every genre view Nashville as their second home," she said.

The Nashville flood received little national publicity, she said, because news of the BP oil leak crisis grabbed headlines.

"To put into perspective the amount of damage that was done: Hurricane Katrina created 13 square miles of damage, this flood created over 300 square miles of damage," Spoltore said. "Recovery of this nature is a long term commitment, but every little bit of help counts."

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