

Letters To The Editor



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*Submitted Article to
news@showmetimes.com*

Dyess, Arkansas - Hundreds of fans and friends joined the Johnny Cash family for a ribbon-cutting ceremony and celebration at the grand opening of the Cash boyhood home here Saturday. The ceremony crowned the restoration of the structure that was home to the Cash family from 1935 until 1953.

“If Dad walked into the house today, he would have been overcome,” said Rosanne Cash, one of Johnny’s four daughters, at the dedication ceremony.

The dedication came on the heels of the fourth annual Johnny Cash Music Festival at Arkansas State University’s Convocation Center Friday evening. The sold-out concert featured Country Music Hall of Fame members Loretta Lynn, Reba McEntire and Bobby Bare. Singer and comedian Mark Lowry served as the event emcee.

People lined up early Saturday morning at the Dyess Administration Building to board the shuttles for the short two-and-a-half mile drive to the home. A private viewing for the Cash family was first on the agenda, as members toured the five-room home newly furnished with retrieved family items and donations.

“When many people approach me about starting Johnny Cash projects, I usually say ‘no,’ Rosanne Cash explained. “But, in talking to Dr. Ruth Hawkins and Arkansas State University, I realized several things and one is that my children need to know their family legacy. It’s so beautiful.”

“From when I saw the house in 2011 and to see the progress today is overwhelming,” continued Rosanne. “Ruth and the family aimed for authenticity when it came to furnishings. When you add the pieces in the house, it gives it resonance. The whole project caused a real shift in my life.”

Following additional remarks by Dyess Mayor Larry Sims, President of the Arkansas State System Dr. Chuck Welch, a letter from Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe, Johnny Cash’s sister Joanne Cash Yates, brother Tommy Cash and others, Cash family members surrounded Joanne as she clipped the leaf garland ribbon to declare the home as officially opened. Family members then delighted the crowd by singing “Will The Circle Be Unbroken,” inviting them to join in.

Following the festivities, buses were loaded with fans to take the hourly tours of the home until late afternoon.

Hawkins, the executive director of Arkansas State’s Heritage Sites program, began work on the boyhood home project in 2009 and visualized turning the land with a dilapidated, run-down structure back into to the simple glory that was the home where one of the most talented and celebrated superstars spent his childhood and teen years. She spearheaded the development from the beginning, including the purchase of the home by Arkansas State to the final furnishing.

The Dyess Colony was created in 1934 as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal to aid in the nation’s economic recovery from the Great Depression. As a federal agricultural resettlement community, it provided a fresh start for nearly 500 impoverished Arkansas farm families, including the family of Johnny Cash.

After Rosanne expressed the family’s “tremendous gratitude,” Joanne added, “Thank you for being a part of our family—all of you.”

Tommy closed by saying, “Thank you. This is one of the greatest projects I’ve ever worked on. Growing up here, I was a happy child.”

The Historic Dyess Colony: Boyhood Home of Johnny Cash is open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. It is closed Sundays, Mondays and major holidays. Admission is \$10 and includes the Dyess Colony Museum and the Johnny Cash Boyhood Home.

Shown in the photo: Rosanne Cash, daughter of country music superstar Johnny Cash, addresses the crowd at Saturday's grand opening dedication ceremony for the Johnny Cash Boyhood Home in Dyess, Ark.

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