

## Pizza Hut Hosts Bluegrass Contest 1st Regional To Be Held In Ontario

BY EDWARD MORRIS

NASHVILLE—The newly established Pizza Hut International Bluegrass Showdown will hold the first of its six regional bluegrass band competitions Saturday (30) in Burlington, Ontario.

The winning regional bands will compete in the finals in Owensboro, Ky., Sept. 21, for a grand prize that includes a recording contract, Gibson musical instruments and strings, a series of festival bookings, and a professional photo session. The recording contract will be with Pinecastle Records, Orlando, Fla.

Sites and dates for the other regional contests this year are Boston, June 14; Victorville, Calif., June 20; Vancouver, Wash., June 27; Denton, N.C., July 9; and Ashburn, Ga., July 17-18.

Each band pays a one-time entry fee of \$50. This money, in turn, is used to cover the basic transportation costs and living expenses involved in sending each winning band to the next level of competition.

Next year, the first round of the Showdown will begin with local contests at 40 to 70 sites, depending on the number of festival promoters, radio stations, associations, and individuals that agree to act as hosts. Pizza Hut will assist the hosts with

advertising and administrative funds.

Milton Harkey, Asheville, N.C., serves as the Showdown's international coordinator.

He says the Showdown does not specify the number of members that constitute a bluegrass band: "We didn't want to limit the number of people nor the instruments played," he says. "We want to encourage all areas and all people who are playing any form of bluegrass to participate. We feel that by adding definitions, we might, in some small way, define the music. And that's not our intention."

To make bluegrass bands aware of the new contest, the Showdown has arranged for major bluegrass festival promoters to announce it in their mass mailings to bands and fans, and it has done its own direct mailing to the acts listed in the annual "Bluegrass Unlimited" talent directory. It also ran a two-page color ad in the May issue of "Bluegrass Unlimited," outlining the details of the talent search, and sent announcements to 900 radio stations in the U.S. that program bluegrass music.

Harkey says more than 250 bands requested registration forms within the first two weeks after the contest was formally announced.

Showdown personnel will approve the judges for each level of

the competition and provide them with specific and uniform criteria by which to make their choices. The judges will be required to write and provide each band a detailed appraisal of its performance.

Although the finals will take place at the beginning of the International Bluegrass Music Assn.'s trade show and Fan Fest in Owensboro, Harkey stresses that there is no connection between the IBMA and the Showdown.

Registration forms can be secured from Harkey at P.O. Box 7661, Asheville, N.C. 28802-7661. He says the forms should be completed and returned at least a week prior to the contest the band is applying to enter.



**A Hank Of A Greeting.** Hank Williams Jr., second from right, and Jeff Cook, VP, promotion and marketing, Capricorn Records, right, greet backstage guests at the Omni in Atlanta during a recent stop on Williams' Budweiser Rock'N Country Tour. Pictured with Williams and Cook are WKHX Atlanta morning personality Moby and his wife, Kelly.

## Country-Music Mobile Takes Position On Race-Car Circuit

NASHVILLE—Country Music joined the NASCAR racing team May 3 at the Winston 500 in Talladega, Ala. Charlotte, N.C.-based Corporate Expressions Group Ltd. and Lakeland, Fla.-based AVT Sports Marketing, in association with 13 country stars, launched a "Country Music Stars Racing" trailer that will travel the NASCAR circuit's 21 remaining stops this year. Next year, the trailer will make the complete circuit of 29 races on the Winston Cup schedule.

Artists tying in include Billy Joe Royal, Alabama, Billy Dean, Doug Stone, Earl Thomas Conley, Joe Diffie, McBride & the Ride, Pirates Of The Mississippi, Ricky Van Shelton, Tanya Tucker, Wynonna Judd, Tracy Lawrence, and Sammy Kershaw.

A separate "Country Music Stars Racing" logo appears on the car driven by Derrick Cope. "Country Music Stars Racing" is a co-sponsor, along with Bullfrog

sun block, of the Bob Whitcomb race team and its Puralator-sponsored automobile.

Auto racing fans will be afforded the opportunity to purchase novelties such as T-shirts, key chains, hats, autographed photos, and posters that are typically available only at the participating artists' concerts. The items will be housed in the "Country Music Stars Racing" trailer.

According to one of the organizers, T-shirts are priced between \$17 and \$22, while many other items remain at \$10 and below. A royalty of approximately 10% is paid to the artists, in many cases, at the time of purchase from the distributor of the items (included in the selling price from the distributor). A separate line of items with the "Country Music Stars Racing" logo will also be available.

As an added bonus, the trailer will carry a big-screen television and speakers where the artists' latest videos will be shown. Don Callicutt, VP of operations, Corporate Expressions, says eventually the videos will be made available for purchase. Currently, organizers are working to secure guest appearances and autograph sessions by the artists.

DEBBIE HOLLEY

## Plenty Of Inspiration For Indie Hopefuls Oh Boy, Step One Share Secrets Of Their Successes

**THE INSPIRATION SQUAD:** If there is a sudden flowering of new independent record labels during the next few months, you may be able to trace the phenomenon to an enthralling panel discussion that took place at the recently concluded Music Row Industry Summit. It was both a textbook exercise in the power of positive thinking and a documented reminder that formulas can never supplant imagination and enthusiasm in the business of selling music. Represented on the panels were leaders of labels that are thriving and labels still striving. But they had two very obvious elements in common: an unshakable belief in the talent of their artists and a joy in chasing success their own ways.

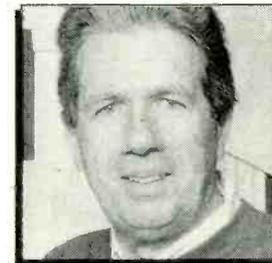
"A while back, we decided we weren't politically correct for the majors," joked **Al Bunetta** in explaining why he set up Oh Boy Records eight years ago. The label was initially established to market the music of singer/songwriters **Steve Goodman** and **John Prine**, both of whom had earlier recorded for major labels. In spite of low budgets and bad advice from experts, the label persevered through sheer trial-and-error. Prine's newest album, "The Missing Years," has sold nearly 300,000 copies in its first eight months, Bunetta proudly reported—a fairly heartwarming amount, even by major standards.

**Ray Pennington**, president of Step One Records, and **John Lomax III**, owner of SFL Tapes & Discs, recounted how they had learned the basic rights and wrongs of the business from indie pioneers: Pennington from King Records' founder, **Syd Nathan**, and Lomax from **Jack Clement** at JMI Records, where **Don Williams** got his start. Pennington told how he had established Step One by signing well-known acts that were no longer courted by the majors—among them **Ray Price**, **Faron Young**, and **Floyd Cramer**. Building on that base, he said, the label eventually earned enough to field new acts. One of those acts, **Clinton Gregory**, has gained substantial airplay and video exposure, Pennington said. He added that Step One has sold 140,000 copies of Gregory's current album, "Freeborn Man," in the three months it's been out.

Lomax detailed the intricacies of maintaining a label whose flagship artist is a dulcimer player. He noted, however, that **David Schnauffer** is a player of such stat-

ure that **Chet Atkins**, **Mark Knopfler**, **Mark O'Connor**, and **Albert Lee** were all happy to perform on his albums when asked. "You don't know what's going to happen until you try," Lomax pointed out. And Bunetta noted that **Bruce Springsteen**, **Bonnie Raitt**, and **Tom Petty** had done similar guest spots for Prine out of their respect for his artistry.

**Cliff Schultz**, a regional manager for American Gramophone Records, reeled off one success story after another about the Omaha, Neb.-based label that helped transform **C.W. McCall** from a character in a regional ad campaign into a national recording act. This is also the label that created **Mannheim Steamroller**. In an inspired marketing ploy meant to help both parties, the label made a deal with the U.S. Park Service to promote Mannheim Steamroller's 1989 album,



by Edward Morris

"Yellowstone: The Music Of Nature." So far, the album has sold more than 400,000 copies and raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to help in the restoration of Yellowstone Park following the disastrous fires there.

Time after time, the indie reps stressed the necessity of acting imaginatively to promote the records and artists one believes in. And to the degree that their efforts in this regard were undertaken with passion and hope, even their failures sounded like success stories.

**MAKING THE ROUNDS:** **John Conlee** is back—not on records, alas, but in a TV commercial for Ford Trucks. That's him singing "Hit The Ground Runnin'." The tune was written by **Bobby Fischer** and **Rick Giles** and was a Conlee single in 1989... The W.O. Smith Community School and Leadership Music in Nashville have won grants in the Grant/Research Opportunity Program sponsored by NARAS, the recording academy... Emerald Entertainment has announced it will phase out its network division at the end of this month. Gone will be the syndicated music programs "Saturday Night Party," "Nashville Live," and "Country Star Tracks." The phaseout, Emerald says, is because the division wasn't self-supporting.

**SIGNINGS:** **Marshall Tucker Band** to a recording contract with Cabin Fever Music... **Lorie Ann** to Prizm Records, Jacksonville, Fla.

Country music vids are getting new avenues of exposure. See story and The Eye, page 36.