

PATSY CLINE HOUSE PROJECT OUTLINED

By Stephanie M. Mangino

The Winchester Star

Winchester — “Come on in and sit right down and make yourself at home,” Patsy Cline sang on the 1956 single “Come On In.”

The line is serving as inspiration for the effort to turn her onetime home at 608 S. Kent St. into a special kind of place — one that will give fans a unique and personal insight into the singing star’s short life, according to JudySue HuyettKempf, president of Celebrating Patsy Cline Inc.

Cline died in a 1963 plane crash at age 30.

CPC launched its capital campaign Friday, announcing that it needs \$198,500 to restore the historic home, where visitors will feel as though Cline is “right there beside you,” Huyett-Kempf said.

CPC hopes to have the house open to the public within six months — a goal that building committee chairman Scott Andres said at a Friday news conference may be optimistic, “but we’re shooting for that.”

Restoration work may be able to start when roughly one-third of the total needed is raised, he added.

KEE Construction of Winchester is the project contractor, CPC announced at the Friday event, held outside Cline’s former home.

The project is a special one for KEE for a couple of reasons, said its president Danny McKee.

First, the company likes to restore old homes. Secondly, it feels as if Cline always has been part of his family, he said.

McKee’s sister Sherrie Bloomfield often sang Cline’s songs while growing up, he said. Bloomfield did the same Friday on Cline’s onetime front porch, treating those gathered to renditions of the Cline hits “Crazy” and “Walkin’ After Midnight.”

Shelda Longerbeam, coordinating the fundraising effort, said she is hopeful about meeting the organization’s goal fairly soon.

A veteran area fundraiser, she is new to the CPC effort, but said she was drawn to it.

Her husband Jim was in the military service and their travels took them around the country — and Cline is beloved all over, she said.

Longerbeam, who counts herself a Cline fan, said she will approach people for funds for the project and will “try and get some other people to do the same thing.”

Once the work is complete, visitors to the historic home will hear songs Cline heard growing up and even see the porch glider where she sat, Huyett-Kempf said.

Cline lived intermittently at the Kent Street home between 1948 and 1957. She signed her first record contract while living there, and it was from that house that she prepared for a 1957 star-making appearance on the “Arthur Godfrey Talent Scouts” television show.

The home was where Cline — born Virginia Patterson Hensley Sept. 8, 1932 — developed as a singer.

“Her career was formed from there,” Huyett-Kempf said.

It was also where her mother stitched her stage costumes on a sewing machine CPC now possesses.

Armed with photos of the home provided by Cline’s husband Charlie Dick — along with his memories — CPC will re-create Cline’s world.

Some demolition work will be needed to bring the home back to Cline’s era.

For example, two upstairs bedrooms and a bathroom weren’t part of the home where Patsy lived. Instead, she, her mother Hilda Hensley, and her two siblings shared an upstairs room, HuyettKempf said.

“It makes you realize ... how little they had,” she said. “It’s an eye-opener.”

Her words were brought to life Friday when house historian Douglas Gomery — a University of Maryland professor emeritus — led a tour around the home, noting the cramped conditions in which the family lived.

“This is what she grew up in,” he said as he stood in the bedroom, which he termed a “community sleep room.”

Cline had her own area in the room, as did her brother. Her mother and youngest sister shared a double bed, he said.

Downstairs, as he pointed at a plug in the living room, he noted the family’s television sat.

It was placed on a swivel, so it could be seen in the living room and parlor areas.

It is likely that in a corner of the tiny living room, Cline sat and listened to the radio, Gomery added.

The demolition work will include the removal of the upstairs rooms Hensley later added to the home, Huyett-Kempf said.

Cline bought the home for Hensley in 1957, Gomery said. Hensley rented out the home for many years, but continued to live in another home on the street until her 1998 death.

Other interior construction work must be done to re-create Cline’s world.

A wall between the parlor and kitchen will reappear, and a tiny downstairs bathroom will also be re-established.

A hallway leading from the front door to that bathroom will also be brought back, Huyett-Kempf said. “Everything has to be authentic.”

The organization isn’t starting out from rock-bottom with its fundraising, having recently established a Brick-A-Thon campaign — selling commemorative bricks to be used in the sidewalk outside the home.

The engraved bricks cost \$100 for one name line and \$150 for two name lines.

CPC’s board members have sold more than \$10,000 worth of the bricks, the group’s fundraising committee chairman Ernie Ryles said.

A new event will also raise money for the historic house. The first “Boots and Hats for Patsy Cline” will be held from 9 to 11 p.m. Sept. 4 at The George Washington Hotel.

The evening, which will have a country theme, will include light refreshments, a cash bar, country music, and contests for the attendees with the best outfit, best hat, and best pair of boots.

The tickets will cost \$50.

For more information, contact CPC toll-free at 888-608-2726.

www.celebratingpatsycline.org

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