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### Remembering Patsy Cline

**50 years ago Sunday, a young country singer belted out tunes to a small audience at a popular park in Coopersburg. No one knew then, but two years later she would be a huge star.**

By John J. Moser

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On Memorial Day 50 years ago Sunday, a rising young country music star arrived at a pool park in Coopersburg to give two shows the owner hoped would bring in more patrons.

The attractive singer had a hit on the country charts two years earlier, but she was still two years from a commercial zenith that would make her a legend. And less than four years from her tragic death in a plane crash.

The singer was Patsy Clark, and today she is an icon whose songs, including her biggest hit, "Crazy," have remained beloved. In fact, a finalist on the popular Fox TV show "American Idol" sang her "Walking After Midnight" this year.

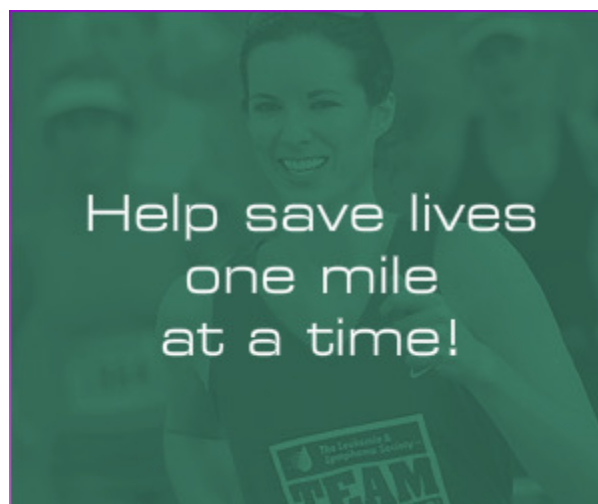
But while the sparsely attended Coopersburg show on May 31, 1959, remains largely forgotten, an area fan and piano entertainer has brought attention to its 50th anniversary.

Coopersburg resident Joe Lazorik, 53, says he first became aware of Cline's Playland Park show when he saw a poster advertising it -- one of the few printed for the show -- 15 years ago at a Patsy Cline tribute in Quakertown, where it was being raffled off. Lazorik didn't win it, but in 2006 he bought another on eBay for \$58.85.

Recently Lazorik tracked down Playland Park's owner Milton Kurteson and put together pictures and stories he'll share at his piano gig tonight at Center Valley Tavern.

Playland Park opened in 1958 along Peppermint Road in Coopersburg. Its main attraction was a one-acre, million-gallon pool, built at a time when personal swimming pools were a luxury and area private and municipal pools drew crowds of more than 1,000 a day.

Kurteson added bath houses, a children's playground and a food stand, and charged admission of 25



cents for children and 50 cents for adults.

Kurteson, now 93, and living in Coopersburg, says business was good -- averaging about 450 patrons a day. He says he and his wife, Elizabeth, ran the attraction themselves -- maintaining the grounds, parking cars and even acting as lifeguards and swimming instructors.

Lazorik was a patron in the mid-1970s.

"A girl I was dating who lived nearby took me there," Lazorik says. "My biggest memory was this huge old-fashioned swimming hole with a huge dock you could jump off. ... It was a far cry from the inner-city rectangular cement pools we had in Bethlehem."

Kurteson says that soon after the park opened, he added a pavilion that could seat 1,500. And for the end of the park's second season, he says an agent persuaded him to book a national act to draw a crowd on Memorial Day crowd.

Kurteson says he had never heard of Patsy Cline, but agreed.

"She wasn't much of a personality at that time," Kurteson says. "She was just a young girl then and had not made a name."

The Virginia-born Cline, then 26, had a booming voice and had played in clubs and bars for nearly a decade before she scored a No. 2 country hit with "Walking After Midnight" and made a series of appearances on the CBS-TV show "Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts" in 1957. But she had not had another hit and had recently switched record companies.

Kurteson says he paid \$900 to put on the show with Cline and other acts -- among them Lehigh Valley polka legend "Jolly" Joe Timmer.

But the show was not the hit he envisioned.

"Hell, I lost money," Kurteson says.

He blamed the agent, who he said didn't fulfill his promotional promises and simply printed up a handful of posters that failed to get out the word.

"There was hardly any crowd," Kurteson says. "Nobody knew about it."

Timmer, whose band was a supporting act that day, agreed the show wasn't "a big ha-de-do."

"There wasn't much to it," he says. "You have to remember, she wasn't the star she became later. She was just a young singer."

Timmer says five decades has faded his memory, but remembers Cline as "a very likable person, she got along well with us, and the people loved her."

Kurteson says Cline played two shows, the first at 7:30 p.m., the second for only about a dozen stragglers.

"She was here a couple of hours, she performed and she left," he says. "She performed nicely, though -- I listen to her." And, he says, "she was a really pretty lady."

Less than two years later, Cline's debut for Decca Records shot her to stardom with the song "I Fall to Pieces," which hit No. 1 on the country charts and also hit the pop and adult contemporary charts. Her chart-topping follow-up, "Crazy," written by Willie Nelson, became her signature song.

Cline's second album in 1962 had another cross-over hit, "She's Got You," and four more country hits.

But Cline was killed the next year at age 30. She was flying home after a March 3 show in Kansas City to be with her two children when her plane crashed in a forest near Camden, Tenn.

Cline had a string of posthumous hits and was the first woman inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Playland Park never had another headliner concert. Kurteson says he hired local acts to play there for about a year, but attendance was poor.

The park remained open for more than 20 years. When it closed, Kurteson raised Christmas trees on the property, then retired for good in 2000. The pavilion area was torn down that year; the original building remains. Kurteson's wife died in 1998.

Lazorik says Kurteson told him the attention Cline's concert is getting now is probably more than when it happened.

Lazorik says he told Kurteson, "Who would have thought that the worst business decision of his life 50 years ago would be" fondly remembered now.

"He let out a loud laugh and said I was right," Lazorik says.

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