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Jim Denny Prepares To Sign Off At WFMS Indianapolis.

Jim Denny concludes a 44-year career on Friday, retiring from Cumulus Media WFMS Indianapolis (95.5) where he has spent the last 22 years co-hosting mornings alongside Kevin Freeman and Deb Honeycutt. Denny was named the CMA Broadcast Personality of the Year in 2007, 2009, 2018 and 2022, and the ACM Radio Award On-Air Personality of the Year for 2006, 2018 and 2021. So what's the first thing Jim Denny will do after he hangs up the headphones on a career that led him to the Country Radio Hall of Fame? (Continued on Page 4)



COUNTRY INSIDER TOP 5:

- ★ Women's Music Business Association Honors BBR Music Group's Ellen Mundy Ford.
- ★ WPOC Baltimore Kicks Off Its Fifth Annual 'Michael J's Toy Mountain' Campaign.
- ★ After 22 Years In Nashville, Kelly Sutton Says, 'This Town Is 'The Hunger Games.''
- ★ 'Let Your Boys Be Country' Getting 'Your Music First' Treatment From Cumulus Media.
- ★ The CRB Reveals Its New Faces Lineup For 2024.

BASTE RECORDS

Chad Prather

If I knew where all the bad girls lived, I'd be Jolly too!

LISTENERS LOVE IT!



My First Night In Nashville: WSM-AM's Kelly Sutton

Twenty-two years ago, when Kelly Sutton began her job co-hosting "The Ralph Emery Show" on Nashville's "Fox 17" WZTV, she had chicken salad and crackers in her refrigerator. Sutton and husband Paul Benton had moved from Owensboro, KY, and had rented a space on the southwest edge of the city. Benton stayed in Kentucky to try to sell their house. Sutton's mattress was on the bedroom floor.

It was Sept. 10, 2001.

The next day, Sutton and her crew had just wrapped the show's second episode and were combing through footage in the WZTV break room when they turned on a television. A plane had flown into New York's World Trade Center. Ten minutes later, a woman threw open the break-room door and said: "Another plane has hit. It's an attack. We need Kelly now."

Sutton was the only reporter at the station.

On her second day on the job, Ralph Emery's sidekick climbed into a news truck and sped to the airport to interview people as they disembarked from grounded planes. She called her parents on the way to BNA for news updates and learned a third plane had struck the Pentagon. Sutton was nervous.

"What is the story? What is the focus?" she remembers asking herself. "Obviously, we're going to talk to people who are coming in and have been grounded and find out what their reaction is," she tells *Country Insider*. "Another part of me is like, 'What if people start targeting airports?' 'I'm like a sitting duck, and we're running right into it.'"

At baggage claim, Sutton met a man whose flight from New York had just landed. She remembers him being shell-shocked. "He said, 'I work in the Towers; I just transferred jobs; I know all my friends are dead,'" she recalls. "I didn't ask another question. I just let him talk because he just had to talk."

The man named his colleagues, telling Sutton who made the morning coffee, where people sat, and what their morning routines were. "He said, 'I know what floor they're on, and I know that's exactly where it hit. So I know they're all gone,'" she says.

Sutton spent several years in mornings at Fox 17, but she doesn't believe Emery's light-hearted show ever recovered from the hard slam into tragedy it took during its second day on the air.

Sutton now spends her mornings co-hosting "Coffee, Country & Cody" on Ryman Hospitality WSM-AM Nashville (650). The show broadcasts from Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center, a place she often visited during her childhood. She has a picture of herself standing in front of the Opryland sign from a trip she took with her grandparents. She returned multiple times for cheerleading competitions. She later worked for the company that hosted those competitions and met Benton, who had also been a cheerleader, on a subsequent trip.

"The serendipity of it," she says. "We met there, then he went back to his college. I went back to my college."

The couple dated long distance before Benton moved to Indianapolis, where Sutton was living, and then to Owensboro, where they bought their first home. When the Ralph Emery opportunity came up, they relocated again, but Nashville had never been on their dream board.

Sutton had her first quintessentially Nashville experience when Keith Urban held the door for her at The Pancake Pantry. Soon after, Emery invited Sutton to an event at the Grand Ole Opry. She drove her car through the backstage entrance and was awestruck as she walked through the artists' entrance and stood sidestage to watch the show. Later, Ricky Skaggs waved as he drove away in his minivan. She immediately called her dad on her flip phone to tell him.

Sutton is now a regular Opry host in addition to her morning duties on WSM-AM. She also hosts an Amazon Music podcast called "Country Heat Weekly" with Amber Anderson. Earlier this year, she received a CMA Award nomination for her weekly syndicated radio show "Y'all Access with Kelly Sutton."

"I just keep bouncing," Sutton says. "I say that this town is 'The Hunger Games.' You just outlast everybody. If you're still standing, they're like, 'Oh, wow. She's still around. Let's get her a job.'" — *Cindy Watts*

