

Winter 2022

# Sageland

Celebrating Jefferson County

## Artist with a camera

Edward Heath: Nature  
and his family inspire  
self-taught photographer

## Historic House

Ranch group  
hopes to put  
Gates House  
on register

## KJIV groove

Jeff Cotton's lively spirit  
drives the quirky, unique  
Madras radio station

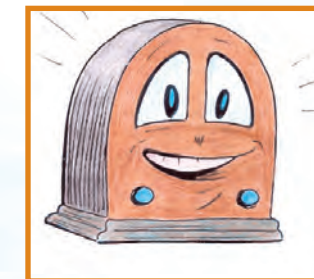
## North Unit's crazy year

Irrigation district had  
unforgettable season

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Cool, different, unique, quirky ...



# Music from the Mountain

**Jeff Cotton & KJIV**  
Eclectic tunes from atop Grizzly







**By Jane Ahern**

## In Madras, the JIVE is LIVE.

Publicly they describe it as “schizoclectic.” Among themselves, its aging staff call it “geezer radio,” but regardless of the label, Madras radio station KJIV is a gift to music lovers in a large swath of the high desert, from Mount Hood down to La Pine and from Sisters to Prineville.

With no ads and minimal talk, the nonprofit station pours out a lavish assortment of music from the top of Mount Grizzly, making commercial and subscription radio stations seem comparatively barren.

That’s partly because KJIV -- which can be tuned in at 96.5 FM -- is fueled by a massive database of more than 300,000 songs by upwards of 10,000 different artists and an unusually large playlist.





On page 33, Jeff Cotton, atop Grizzly Butte, there to check on his transmission equipment, some of which is shown above. Cotton's KJIV, a nonprofit station, has a unique, varied playlist they describe as "schizoclectic."

"A typical Sirius XM playlist, like Crossroads Country, they have a playlist of maybe a thousand songs, so you'll listen for a few weeks, and you'll start hearing repeats. Our play list is close to 10,000 songs, so you should not hear the same song twice in months," says Jeff Cotton, director of Open Sky Radio, the 501 (c)3 organization which owns KJIV.

The other trait that sets KJIV apart from other stations is the type of music it plays — or make that types of music. Unlike most radio stations, KJIV and its sister stations, which are collectively known as "Jive Radio," eschew genres. "Schizoclectic" is one term for it. Others include "genreless" "roots music" or, a name borrowed from the defunct but still legendary radio station KFAT that was based in Gilroy, California: Americana.

Americana encompasses jazz, blues, R&B, bluegrass, country, rock, folk, zydeco, swing, salsa, and more. On Jive Radio, the styles are all intermixed, veering from a bluegrass cover of Bob Marley's "One Love/People Get Ready," to "Sunny Afternoon" by the Kinks, to a country song called "The Gothest Girl I Can" by Corb Lund all in the space of 30 minutes.

One thing you won't hear much of on Jive Radio, according to Cotton: "We don't play hits. We avoid any of the big megahits."

That's not strictly true. It's possible to catch hits from past decades on Jive Radio. It's more accurate to say that KJIV plays new songs, and it plays plenty of well-known songs, and it plays songs by some of the biggest musical stars, but it doesn't play songs that are all three at once. It also stays away from pop music. In other words, lis-





**Cotton first became interested in sound and light equipment at Homestead High in Sunnyvale, California, the same high school where Apple founders Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak met and graduated two years after Cotton.**

ten elsewhere for the latest Adele album.

Ironically, radio stations have been some of the biggest purveyors of musical genres. Cotton explained, “The pigeon-holing and the genre naming is really sort of a thing that comes from radio because they need to define, but a lot of the artists that we play on Jive Radio might play straight-ahead blues for three tracks on an album, might play reggae, so Jive Radio is really genreless or borderless . . . Most of the musicians I’ve worked with really just can’t stand the pigeonholing.”

When it comes to big-name artists, KJIV makes a point of playing their lesser-known songs. Cotton’s wife, Sheila, an Open Sky Radio board member, says of Cotton’s music selection, “He presents these artists on the radio with the same respect he gave them as a concert producer. He plays the “B side” you never hear on mainstream radio; he goes deep in their libraries, he discourages our DJs from playing the “hits.” He wants the audience to be surprised. He hopes they are every time they turn on Jive Radio and hear the artist work their craft.”

### **Did she say, “concert producer?”**

Cotton, 68, founded Jive Radio, along with his wife, Sheila, and DJ Bruce Van Dyke, after a long career in the music

industry, first as a roadie and later as a concert producer in Reno, Nevada.

Cotton first became interested in sound and light equipment in high school. He attended Homestead High in Sunnyvale, California—the same high school where Apple founders Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak met and graduated two years after Cotton.

“The Steves” and Cotton all benefitted from their association with electronics teacher John McCollum and the equipment he used in the classroom. Cotton said of his high school experience, “The school also had the most sophisticated closed circuit TV production system in the world. We’d have CEOs and world dignitaries touring our ‘class’ studio regularly. I took four years of TV/AV & three years of electronics.”

After high school, Cotton continued to learn on the job about sound, lighting, video and staging. He worked at a lot of different jobs both in Reno and in San Francisco until, in his mid-20s, he landed a great opportunity to work for Bill Graham Productions.

Bill Graham was a famous concert promoter whose early venues, the Fillmore Auditorium and the Fillmore West in San Francisco, were ground zero for the psychedelic era. Graham produced concerts by the biggest musical acts starting in



Jeff Cotton Photo

At a concert in Reno, Cotton, right, with Joan Baez, who had just taken a mud bath in a nearby ditch, and Steve Earle.

the 1960s up to the early 1990s, when he died in a helicopter crash. Working with bands such as the Grateful Dead and Jefferson Airplane, Graham played a role in creating the iconic look and the sound of the 1960s.

Cotton was hired for his knowledge and experience, but also, he says, for his physique.

"I was 6'3", and a fairly fit 190 pounds. I had interviewed on a Monday, so my resume was on the top of a big pile, and two days later a crew member pulled a double hernia trying to save a runaway amp rack from coming off a truck ramp. The dude was small. My new boss opted for heft and what would be obedience."

When Cotton was hired in 1977, he was immediately sent out on tour with the Grateful Dead, setting up and taking down concert equipment at the shows. He didn't hobnob with the band, though.

"It was sort of unspoken etiquette to leave the cats alone. We often ate together. I never saw (lead guitarist and vocalist

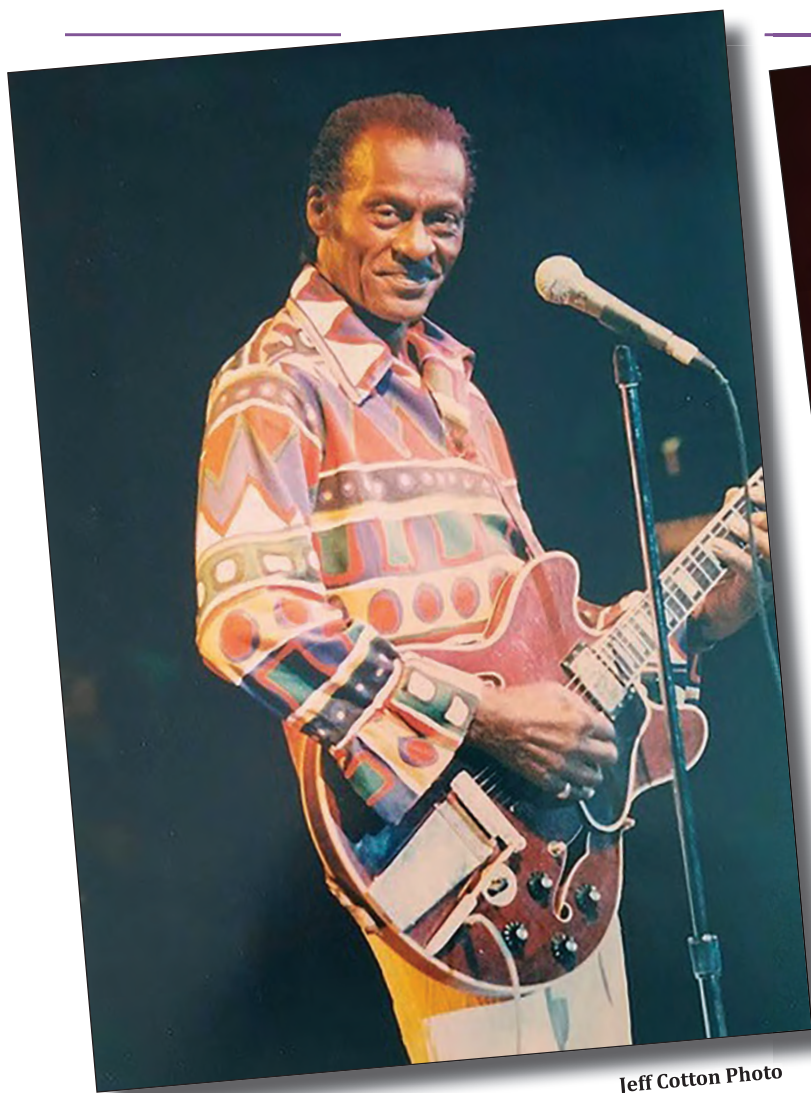
Jerry) Garcia come in for a meal without a guitar on. Usually an unplugged electric, which made no sound, and he fingered on it ceaselessly. He'd only set it down to eat," Cotton said.

Cotton stayed on with Graham until 1979, working numerous concerts and touring with other bands like Heart, Jefferson Starship and the Commodores.

He has especially good memories of his time with Jefferson Starship. "The Starship tour (promoting the *Earth* album) was golden. We got a premium rental car for every two guys and flew in a four-engine turboprop. That was the group's last cohesive tour, with Marty, Paul, Grace, David and Peter. It was an ensemble that really packed a wallop of pure American rock and roll," he said.

Working for Bill Graham was rewarding, though not always easy. "He was my mentor and somewhat father figure," Cotton said. "I had several one-on-one chats with him, a couple where he screamed me stupid, as he was famous for, and which I took as a badge of honor. I learned that a bad, shrewd





Jeff Cotton Photo

**His career in music production gave Cotton great stage access, and allowed him to photograph Check Berry, left, and Tom Petty.**



Jeff Cotton Photo

dude is good to have on your side.”

After a little less than two years with Graham, Cotton was ready to move on. Cotton explained, “I closed Winterland (Another of Graham’s venues. If you like rock-and-roll history, do an internet search on the closing of Winterland), there were no good tours on the books, and I wanted to mix. I never got to mix in the big world. I moved to clubs. More fun, less work, more mixing. Any clown can plug stuff together. Concert mixing is an art. A good sound man is ‘the fifth musician in a four-piece band,’” Cotton said, quoting an old adage.

Next, Cotton moved to Reno and began producing concerts himself. Sheila says that Cotton applied what he gleaned from Bill Graham in his own concert productions.

“He learned how Bill Graham treated the artists and the audience with respect — to make sure the sound and lights were just right so everyone had a comfortable seat where they could see and hear, to promote the shows so the venue was full and if the artist wanted blue M&Ms in the green room

... well he did his best,” said Sheila.

The available venues in Reno were smaller — anywhere from 75-150 seats — but Cotton was able to bring in quality performers.

“I wasn’t really into pop music. I’m still not. So, we did people like John Prine, Taj Mahal, a lot of blues and roots acts,” Cotton said.

In his last eight years producing concerts, Cotton contracted with Washoe County to put on concerts at its 800-seat Hawkins Amphitheater. There he was able to attract performers such as Los Lobos, Joan Baez, David Byrne, Randy Newman, Bela Fleck, Madeleine Peyroux, Kris Kristofferson and more.

Throughout his career in the Bay Area and in Reno, Cotton says he worked on thousands of concerts and yet he doesn’t consider himself to be musical. “Can’t sing, can’t carry a tune, but I think I have a good ear,” he said.

Radio was an important partner for Cotton in promoting his shows. He worked to get local stations to play the artists’ work



in the weeks running up to the show and now he finds himself queuing up many of the same artists for his own radio station.

### The birth of Jive Radio

Cotton's nonprofit is called Open Sky Radio Corporation. He is the director and one of the three founding board members, along with his wife, Sheila, and Bruce Van Dyke, a former disk jockey from the defunct Reno radio station KTHX.

Van Dyke still records shows for Jive Radio, which are broadcast from 6-9 a.m. on weekdays.

Open Sky's five terrestrial radio stations, together known as Jive Radio, can be streamed live at [jiveradio.org](http://jiveradio.org) or accessed the old-fashioned way on the FM radio dial.

The first Jive Radio station was KDUP, founded in 2008, in Cedarville, California, which is in the same sparsely populated Surprise Valley where the Cottons live. Next was KLAP in Gerlach, Nevada, in 2010, followed by KJIV in Madras in 2018, KJYV in The Dalles in 2019 and KDAN in Marshall, California, in 2020.

Open Sky Radio started up KJIV in Madras because an FCC license for shuttered radio station KSQI was available and about to expire and because Cotton has a personal connection with Madras. He has been visiting Madras regularly since the 1970s when he helped the Prince family move here from Sunnyvale, California. Cotton and Jim Prince met in high school and are still close friends.

Another reason was because he thought there was a need.

"In the Madras area, there weren't any other stations on the dial that were doing what Jive Radio does," he said.

KJIV is unique among the stations of Jive Radio in that it has its own live radio program, Live Jive by DJ Jim Good-



**The lighthearted, humorous Jeff Cotton takes a moment to pose on Grizzly Butte, where the transmission equipment for KJIV is situated. Cotton also operates a nonprofit station in the Gorge.**

win every Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 9 a.m. to noon. Granted, Goodwin is located in Sisters, but the show is nevertheless Madras-centric.

"We've been pushing out the Madras name-brand to our worldwide audience every-hour-on-the-hour for over three years. That's close to 30,000 mentions of Madras. All on a smaller budget than most broadcasters spend on office furniture and break room coffee," Cotton said.

KJIV has a partnership with the Madras Pioneer in which the Pioneer runs a regular ad for the radio station and Goodwin highlights interesting stories from the Pioneer on his show.

If you want to get an idea of how many people are learning about little ol' Madras during the program, you can take a look at the streamer map at [jiveradio.org](http://jiveradio.org). It shows the location of all the listeners who are streaming Jive Radio at that moment. They are all over the United States and in foreign countries too.

Unfortunately, there is no way to know how many listeners are tuning in on FM radio.

Another special feature of Goodwin's show is his "Locals at Eleven" in which he plays music by local and regional musicians. Cotton is especially proud to showcase local artists because there are so few radio stations doing that anymore.

"We play more local artists, I think, than virtually all the other stations on the dial put together, I would venture to guess," he said.

The other seven Jive Radio DJs record and submit their shows digitally. Jive Radio does not have a studio at any of its stations. All the DJs need to do their shows is a good microphone, a laptop, internet access, and a whole lot of music.

The DJs choose their own content with few strictures. "They are all selected because they do what they do, which is unique. They're there because they fit into the Jive psychology, for lack of a better term," said Cotton.

Two of the DJs, Sully Roddy and "Sister Tiny," are veterans of Gilroy, California, radio station KFAT, which is credited with coining the term "Amer-





icana” to describe the type of music it played. Each of the women has been in radio for 40 to 50 years and their experience shows, according to Cotton.

“Tiny is in her 70s and she’s better than she ever was,” Cotton said. “She’s as good as anybody in the nation in my opinion. She’s really talented.”

What makes a good DJ? “Somebody who can wander through a massive library and pick out great music and stitch it together in a way that makes it flow . . . DJs are really curators, just like in a museum or gallery. They have an in-depth knowledge of the field they work in, and they go through and curate, pick out the good stuff,” said Cotton.

“I’ve never had the freedom to play all this different music and put it together like an art form,” says DJ Sister Tiny. On her show, she solicits feedback about the music. “Most of the time the listeners tell me they love the programming and appreciate the amount of music, new and old, with the mixed genres that just seem to go together.”

She welcomes negative feedback too. “I’ve asked them to tell me if a song is so irritating they would change the station, or to let me know if I’m getting boring, and I’ve not only gotten a response; I’ve discharged a song from the library because of it,” said Sister Tiny. “I need their feedback because I’m doing this for the listeners first, then the music and me.”

Despite Cotton’s dedication and the high quality of its DJs and musical offerings, Open Sky Radio struggles to keep KJIV on the air.

### **“And boy are we good at not profiting”**

The fine print at the bottom of Open Sky Radio’s home page identifies the station as a nonprofit followed by the above quip.

As a nonprofit, Open Sky Radio relies on underwriting and listener donations to support its operations. Overhead is low at the three stations in California and Nevada because they don’t have to pay rent; community supporters donate space and even electricity for them.

By contrast, the two Oregon stations in Madras and The Dalles do have to bring in enough to cover rent. Another major expense for all the stations is music royalties, which runs about \$2,000 per year per station, for a total of \$10,000. Then there are DJs to pay and equipment to purchase and maintain.

KJIV gets an assist from Bend-based Yellowknife Wireless, which provides KJIV’s internet service and has been a KJIV supporter from the start. Such in-kind and listener donations, plus a dose of COVID money from the government in 2020, have kept KJIV going, but just barely. To make a go of it, Open Sky Radio will have to find some underwriters, a task that has proved confoundingly difficult.

KJIV covers a larger area, with a larger population, than

most of the other Jive Radio stations, but it is also farther from Open Sky Radio’s home base.

“The lesson I’ve learned in the three years that we’ve been on the air is if you don’t have somebody local, it’s really hard. It’s almost impossible to sell underwriting,” said Cotton. “We had a little bit of underwriting coming in, then COVID hit, and we lost everybody.”

Usually, the nonprofit would pay a local representative in commissions for underwriting contracts, but Open Sky Radio is considering the more drastic step of hiring an employee to look for underwriting. “It’s getting to be existential at this point. We have to figure something out by next year,” said Cotton.

It is difficult to gauge the extent to which competition from other radio stations affects KJIV’s income. According to radio-locator.com, there are 35 stations in Central Oregon. They are a broad mix of commercial and nonprofit with a surprising number of Christian/religious stations. KJIV appears to be the only station that exclusively plays Americana music.

According to Cotton, the stations of Oregon Public Broadcasting are the “big gorilla” in the nonprofit arena. “Then you have KWSO (in Warm Springs) and KPOV. These are heritage stations. They have 15-30 years, so they have local people and local footprint and decades of time under their belts,” he said.

As for Sirius radio, Cotton says that KJIV is so far down the food chain that Sirius XM is not even a factor. “The commercial guys feel that crunch more than we do,” he said.

Even amid its ongoing financial hardships, Open Sky has begun an initiative to upgrade its facility on Grizzly so that it reaches into the center of Bend. Right now, reception in parts of the city is blocked by Awbrey Butte. Cotton expects the project will be complete by the end of the year.

### **Will KJIV be able to hang on?**

Cotton sums it up best: “I’m actually getting a fair amount of peer pressure to retire and join them in the RV park with the tiki torches, cheap beer and beanie weenies. I’m not there yet. KJIV could sail with a local ‘bull by the horns’ sales manager, but that’s a longshot in this labor environment. We’ll keep kicking the rented mule that is KJIV as long as we can feed it, or a nice, caring adoptive parent comes along.”

*To support Jive Radio, look for the “donate” link at [jiveradio.org](http://jiveradio.org). Stream it live on the website or tune in at 96.5 FM. For underwriting or other inquiries, contact Cotton at [laz@jiveradio.org](mailto:laz@jiveradio.org).*

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