

Providing the Stage for the Stars

By Randy Olson

Dale Carter of Fairfield describes himself as your “typical down home local friendly country boy.” Talking to him in person leaves you with that impression. But Dale and his wife Sandy operate a nationwide service business that has provided staging equipment rental on the concert tours of many of the biggest names in Country Music, Contemporary Christian artists, as well as a variety of rock and pop acts. Perfect Moment Staging, also known as PMS Staging, has put Fairfield on the map throughout the United States.

From Maine to California and several points in between, Carter has driven his semi-truck full of stage gear, rented it out and provided professional set-up for shows by acts including Brooks & Dunn, Willie Nelson, Sawyer Brown, Oak Ridge Boys, Kenny Chesney, Charlie Daniels, Travis Tritt, Neal McCoy, John Berry, Styx, REO Speedwagon, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Kansas, Eddie Money, BB King, Nelly, Destiny’s Child, Third Day, Newsong and Point of Grace just to name a few. “Other than Garth or Reba, it’s tough to name a country artist that we haven’t set a stage for,” said Dale.

The Carter’s fell into the staging business by accident while volunteering for many years on behalf of the Fairfield Mulebackers, who used to promote country music shows at Fairfield High School as fund-raisers for the athletic programs at the school. The Mulebackers began producing shows at Fairfield High School in the early 90s, and continued until the late 90s. They first built a wooden stage that would jet out from the main gymnasium stage, giving the acts more space and enabling the artists to be seen easier by the ticket-buying public. Several volunteers from the organization took to the road with the stage to bring in revenue. Eventually, manufactured portable stage decking replaced the wooden one.

When the Mulebackers could no longer make a profit on their concerts due to rising artist prices and lagging ticket sales, Dale and Sandy decided to continue on their own. In 1997, Perfect Moment Staging, Inc. was born. “We felt that the knowledge we had gained through the Mulebacker shows was worth something to others who would might need a stage for their events, whether it be fall festivals, concerts, political rallies, church revivals, talent shows or any event



inside or out,” said Dale. “After years of volunteering, we felt like we were ready to begin getting paid for our services.”

The Carters haul their equipment in a semi-truck and trailer. “It takes a pretty secure guy to pull a semi-trailer with a very large pink PMS on the side,” said Sandy. “He gets some pretty funny comments from people on the road.” Some local people including the late Claude and Bill Clifton, Ron Gain, Johnny Smith, Clifford Reeve and Louis Jolly have also been involved with PMS Staging.

Word-of-mouth has brought them a variety of business throughout the Midwest. Today, business is conducted coast-to-coast. PMS Staging has their own Web site and they own 260 pieces of stage decking which can be made into a 104’ x 40’ stage, or manipulated into smaller stages or risers. They also have a 35’ x 45’ truss roof that rises high above the stages they set, as well as a variety of smaller “quick-set” stages and a roof for smaller community events in the area. They also recently acquired 90 par can lights and a large multi-channel lighting control board. “Many promoters, fairs, festivals and artists are looking for one-stop providers that have everything,” said Dale. “We get asked so often about lighting that I think the investment will pay for itself because of the increased bookings it should bring us.”

When asked about any other unusual events that PMS Staging has served, Sandy Carter talked about providing staging for the Pope’s visit to St. Louis a few years back, as well as a political rally and speech by former Vice-President Al Gore in Burlington, Iowa. “We also provided staging for a unique New Year’s Eve event in San Francisco this

past year,” said Sandy. “Dale just recently returned from providing stage gear for the Winter-X games in Aspen, Colorado.”

The Carter’s stated that winter is usually the slowest time for their business. They also provide smaller stages for local events in southern Illinois such as Grayville Days, Godstock and the Fairfield Fall Fun Fest. “We are willing to go just about anywhere for a variety of events,” said Dale. “We welcome inquiries from anyone for any special event that requires a stage or risers.” At age 62, Carter is often asked what keeps him motivated to do this work all over the country. “It’s an adrenaline rush every time we successfully set a stage and the show or the event goes off without a hitch,” said Dale. “We’ve gotten the opportunity to see many parts of the country and meet a lot of wonderful people in our line of work, I really enjoy it.”

One promoter recently flew Carter to and from a west coast event, which was the first time Carter had flown in his life. He said he enjoyed flying and hoped to do more in the future.

In addition to their semi-trailer, PMS Staging also utilizes a 6,000 square foot warehouse to store their stage gear and separate it out as needed. The electricity for the warehouse is provided by Wayne-White Counties Electric Cooperative. “We appreciate the service provided by the cooperative,” said Dale. “It has been dependable for our needs.” For more information about staging or lighting needs for a special event, call 842-9328 or visit their Web site at www.pmsstaging.com.



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