

June 22, 2025

Bell Tower Park Property Owners' Association

BELL TOWER NOTES II

Published by your Bell Tower Park Communications Committee.

A CASE of TALENT

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*It impresses me how many interesting life stories there are among the 478 households in BTP. Some months ago, Bell Tower Notes II published an article about a former trapeze artist living among us! ([Click HERE](#) to **view that piece.**) While writing that article, we were told that just a couple doors down Bently Circle from the trapeze guy was a guitar player who might be worth the time for an interview. That story is almost more worthy of a book! **YOU** be the judge!*

Kenny Case, born in 1938 in North Carolina, has lived an extraordinary life filled with music, entrepreneurship, aviation, humor, and dedication to his passions. On the "humor" side, Kenny likes to say he was born in the meat locker of a Piggly Wiggly, because the meat locker marks the exact spot of the no-longer-existing house where his birth took place. (Kinda' like the Abe Lincoln log cabin story, we think.)



Early Life and Education

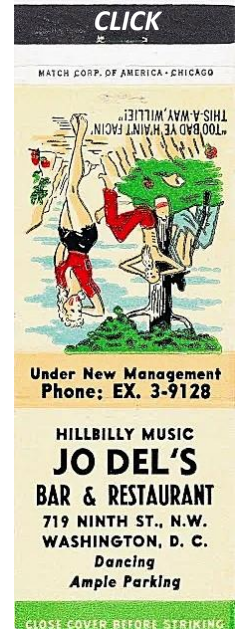
At the tender age of five, Kenny ended up in Maryland, settling in a suburb on the east side of Washington, D.C. His father, involved in the production of musicals, sparked Kenny's lifelong interest in music. This early exposure to the arts became the foundation of a journey that would intertwine creativity with a variety of careers.

Kenny's childhood in Maryland was steeped in musical inspiration. By the age of 14, he was already calling square dances, showcasing an innate sense of rhythm and performance.

At 15, he picked up the guitar, successfully teaching himself to play, and began performing in clubs across Washington, D.C. During this time, he built relationships with notable, but unknown musicians such as Roy Clark and Jimmy Dean. It was Kenny's father who encouraged Roy Clark to move to Nashville, a decision that would launch Clark's successful career in country music.

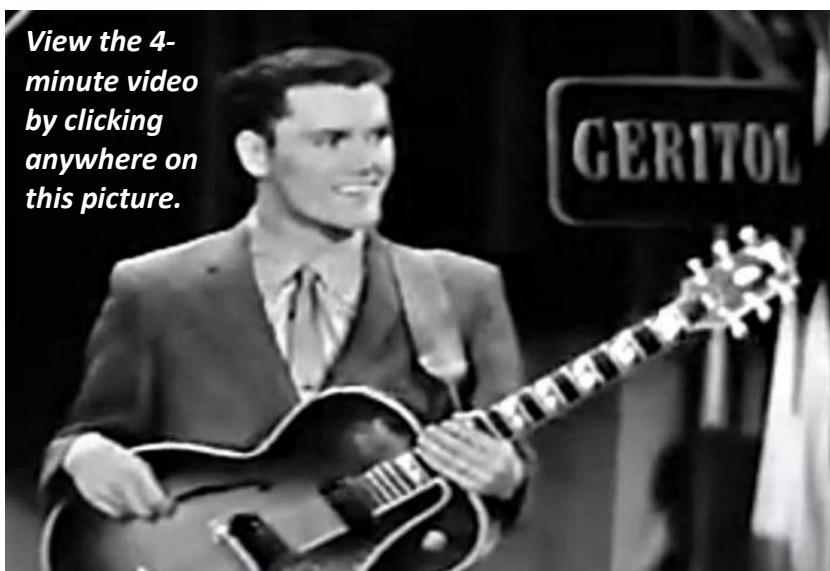
Beyond high school, one of Kenny's first jobs was as a draftsman for the Naval Gun Factory at 18 years of age. The pay was low, so he soon left there and found other income partly by driving trucks and playing his guitar at Washington-area clubs. At one of those D.C. clubs -- the Jo Del Bar near 9th and H Street -- Kenny remarkably escaped an early demise. He and his brother, Jimmy (also a guitar player), considered the place a dive and moved on to better places. *Lucky for them!!* Some weeks later in late 1957, two disgruntled patrons murdered the owner and one of the musicians. The blind piano player was also shot and died two months later. The drummer, a waitress, and the bartender escaped by hiding out in the basement.

[Click anywhere on the match book cover at the right for the gory details!](#)



Kenny continued his academic pursuits, which were extensive, eclectic, and not with much of a plan or money to support them. A large part of his post-high school education came from devouring books on subjects that interested him. At various times, he took classes at American University, the University of Maryland, George Washington University, and the Capitol Radio Engineering Institute (CREI). CREI was growing at the time to become the Capitol Technology University in Laurel, MD.

[A Rising Star](#)



In 1959, at the age of 21, Kenny's talent gained national recognition when he appeared on **Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour** on CBS at the Ed Sullivan Theater. His performance was a hit, earning him the most votes for at least one week and leading to an encore appearance on the show. A YouTube video still preserves this moment, capturing the charm and skill that won over audiences.

Despite his growing love of music, Kenny also worked in diverse professions such as a schoolteacher specializing in electronics. At 24, he landed a decent paying job in the NSA/DoD.

That NSA job opened another chapter in his life -- It gave him access to the military flying club at Andrews AFB, just east of Washington. In the flying club, Kenny earned his private pilot's license in the T-34 Mentor, which had been the primary flight trainer for many military pilots in the 1950's.



Later on, he used his electronics knowledge to found his own business of repairing 2-way radios used for dispatching vehicles for all sorts of companies in the suburban Maryland area.

Musical and Entrepreneurial Ventures

After years of performing in Washington, Kenny relocated to Cocoa Beach, Florida, in 1968 to work with the Calhoun Twins (Jack & Jerry). This professional association lasted 20 years and evolved into an entrepreneurial venture that would define a significant change of direction for Kenny. The Calhouns were not only a well-known country music recording duo, they also had a completely separate career in the home-building business. Jerry Calhoun was also a pilot, using several personal aircraft in managing business and getting band members to performances.



Beginning in 1979, Kenny partnered with the Calhouns in the transportation business (Entertainment Coaches of America), leasing buses to transport musical acts across the country. The company provided logistical support for some of the most iconic names in the music industry, including Willie Nelson, Tina Turner, KISS, Prince, Dolly Parton, Patsy Cline, Conway Twitty, Webb Pierce, Herbie Hancock, and more.

Glenn
Campbell



During his first few years with the Calhouns, Kenny actually drove the bus on tours for many big names in music. One of those trips was a 3-week tour for Glenn Campbell. Kenny recalls that Campbell was donating the money raised on the tour to Native American schools. One evening, most of the band and Kenny were waiting on the bus for Glenn to return. They were “jamming” and knowing that Kenny played the guitar, they invited him to join in. When Glenn returned, they stopped, and one of them said to him, “Come in here and listen to *this* guy play!” After hearing Kenny perform, Glenn exclaimed “If you only had long hair, beard, mustache, and a dirty shirt, you could be a real guitar player!”

Coincidentally, a growing problem in the touring music business was the lack of dependable and comfortable transportation for acts going from venue to venue. Buses were widely used, but they were notorious for air-conditioning problems and breaking down altogether, stranding performers in the middle of nowhere.

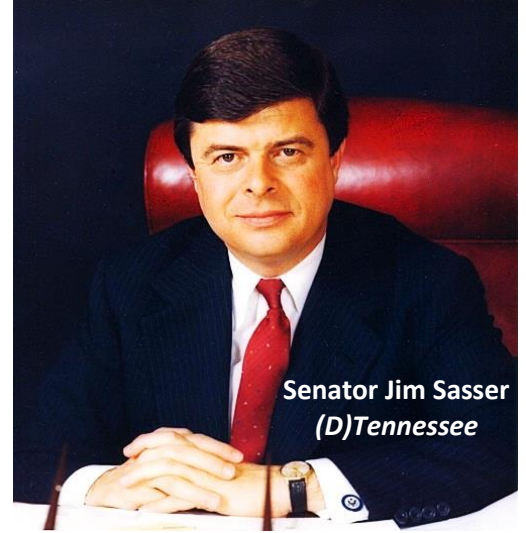
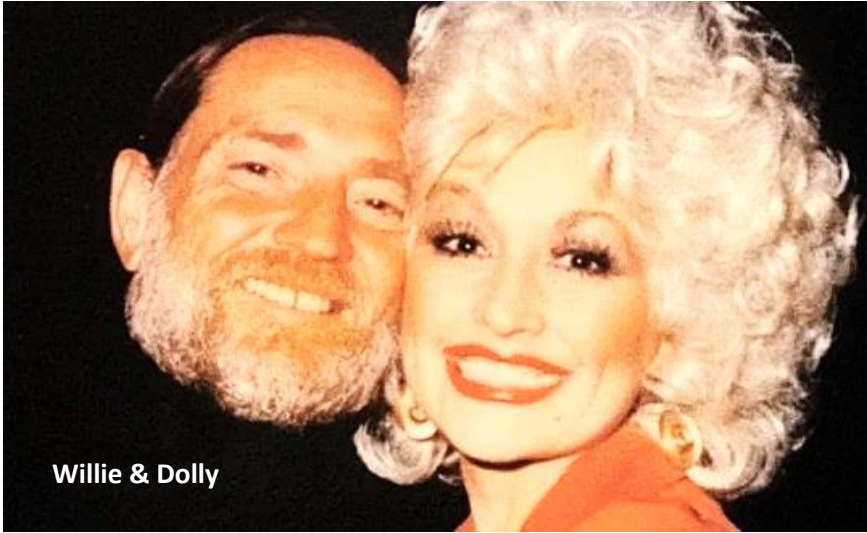
Recognizing the frequent air conditioning issues with buses and a shortage of repair stations across the country, Kenny took a proactive approach by enrolling in and graduating first in his class at the Carrier air conditioner factory.

During this time Kenny built his flying time and experience in flying the Calhoun airplanes such as the Beechcraft Bonanza and twin-engine Baron. Oh, by the way, somewhere in here he found time to invent and earn a patent for an electronic guitar tuner!

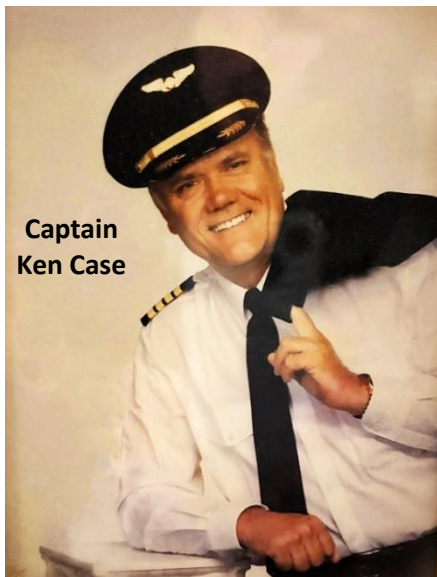
Eventually, Kenny and the Calhouns, using their home construction talents, began custom building buses for the many famous acts. Soon, demand for comfort and reliability caused Kenny to invent the longest custom buses ever built – **45 feet in length!**



Because that length made the vehicles *not* “street-legal” in California and some other states, Kenny put on a lobbyist hat to get the regulations changed and standardized everywhere in the country. He recalls sitting next to Dolly Parton and Willie Nelson in 1990 across the desk of Tennessee Senator Jim Sasser. The Senator was Chairman of the Budget Committee, which allowed him to influence the needed extension to 45 feet. Kenny’s hands-on expertise and leadership helped the custom coach-building business flourish on into the 1990’s.



In the late 1980’s, another customer searching for a comfortable bus arrived in the form of a member of the Saudi Royal Family. Prince Sultan Al Jabeer took a liking to Kenny and Kenny’s knowledge of aircraft. On Kenny’s advice, Prince Sultan eventually purchased a Cessna Citation 500 and sent Kenny and another pilot to Cessna’s Citation school at the factory in Wichita. This led to Kenny being type-rated in the Citation and flying as Captain of the Prince’s airplane from 1990 to 1996



Later Years and Personal Life



Kenny & Jimmie Lue

In 2010, Kenny's life took another joyful turn when he met his wife, Jimmy Lue, through a dating service. Jimmy, . . . and, "Yes", she says -- that is *exactly* what her mom and dad named her! . . . originally from Alabama quickly became a steadfast partner and source of inspiration. The couple has been happily married for 13 years.

During season, Kenny remains actively involved in music, performing every Friday morning (9:30 to 11:30 a.m.) with a 13-member swing band at the Cape Coral Community Center – they are inactive now until September. Many couples make good use of the large dance floor. Kenny's passion for music continues to bring joy to audiences, a testament to his enduring love for the art form. My wife, Marian, and I attended a recent performance, and we heartily recommend it to others. It's only \$3 each to get in, plus the bridge toll, of course.



Cape Coral swing band led by Dave McDonagh. Click this play button to see Kenny performing with the band



Legacy

Kenny is proud to mention that his granddaughter, Jessi Case, is starting a career in entertainment as an actress. She recently played the role of eldest daughter to Dennis Quaid’s character in the movie “On a Wing and a Prayer”, a story told in the backdrop of Marco Island and Southwest Florida.



Dennis Quaid

Jessi Case



Kenny Case’s life is a remarkable tapestry of talent, hard work, and resilience. From his early days in Maryland to his prominent role in the music and transportation industries, he has left an indelible mark on those who know him. Whether strumming his guitar, managing a fleet of buses, or entertaining fans in his swing band, Kenny’s story is one of boundless energy and a commitment to living life to its fullest.



[Link to 3-minute video of Kenny riffing on guitar a few days ago](#)



At home on Bently Circle