

The Bakersfield Californian

Bakersfield's
country music
legend dead at 76

Goodbye, Buck

FELIX ADAMO / THE CALIFORNIAN

Rebel pioneered own sound

BY ROBERT PRICE
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Buck Owens, a Texas-born fruit picker who made the name of his adopted hometown synonymous with a distinctive brand of country music, died early Saturday morning at his ranch just north of Bakersfield. The cause of death was heart failure. He was 76.

Owens, born in near-poverty just south of the Texas-Oklahoma border and raised from the age of 8 in the Phoenix area, moved to Bakersfield at age 21, hoping to make it as a club musician. He died the multimillionaire king of a regional radio and media empire, renowned as one of country music's most influential artists and undoubtedly Bakersfield's most famous citizen.

"I bet it's twangy in heaven tonight," said country-music star Brad Paisley, who telephoned Saturday night from a tour stop in Iowa.

Owens had endured a string of medical setbacks in his last dozen years. He underwent throat cancer surgery in 1993, was hospitalized with pneumonia in 1997, suffered a minor stroke in 2004 and checked himself into a Los Angeles-area hospital in February with an unspecified illness. He had previously been treated for heart arrhythmia and lung problems.

Family spokesman and longtime Bucka-



PHOTO COURTESY OF KERN COUNTY MUSEUM

From the cover of "I Don't Care (Just as Long as You Love Me)" in 1964 are, left to right, Doyle Holly, Willie Cantu, Tom Brumley, Don Rich and Buck Owens.

roo band mate Jim Shaw said Owens was rushed to Bakersfield Memorial Hospital sometime after 4:30 a.m. Saturday but could not be revived.

Funeral plans had not been determined as of Saturday.

The father of the Bakersfield Sound had performed just the night before at his Buck Owens Boulevard dinner club, the Crystal Palace, closing his 90-minute portion of the show with his 1969 hit "Big in Vegas."

But during an unprecedented run of success in the 1960s and early '70s, Owens was big everywhere, from Japan to the White House, and from New York's Carnegie Hall to San Francisco's Fillmore West. Those who didn't know him from his string of No. 1 hits learned his name from "Hee Haw," the long-running comedy-variety show he co-hosted with Roy Clark.

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■ Columnist Robert Price remembers the "consummate" musician and businessman

■ Reaction from entertainers and fans from around the world

■ Timeline of Owens' life and career

■ Complete list of albums

■ Lyrics to "Streets of Bakersfield"

ON BAKERSFIELD.COM

■ Exclusive online-only story: "On the Road with Buck Owens, 1964"

■ Local tributes in Talk of the Town blog

■ Audio and video interviews with fans, "Buckarette" Kim McAbee and Californian reporter Robert Price

■ A comprehensive multimedia history of the Bakersfield Sound

Buck Owens' No. 1 singles

Country charts, as determined by Billboard Magazine (except where noted). Includes 19 consecutive No. 1's. Buck Owens also had 12 albums go to No. 1.

"Foolin' Around" 1/30/1961

"Act Naturally" 4/13/1963

"Love's Gonna Live Here" 9/21/1963

"My Heart Skips a Beat" 3/28/1964

"Together Again" 4/4/1964

"I Don't Care" 8/29/1964

"I've Got a Tiger by the Tail"*

1/23/1965

"Cryin' Time"* 1/23/1965

"Before You Go" 5/15/1965

"Only You" 7/31/1965

"Buckaroo" 10/30/1965

"Waitin' in Your Welfare Line" 1/22/1966

"Think of Me" 5/21/1966

"Open Up Your Heart" 9/3/1966

"Where Does the Good Times Go" 1/14/1967

"Sam's Place" 4/1/1967

"Your Tender Loving Care" 7/15/1967

"It Takes People Like You"*** 10/14/1967

"How Long Will My Baby Be Gone" 1/27/1968

"Sweet Rosie Jones"*** 4/20/1968

"Who's Gonna Mow Your Grass" 2/1/1969

"Johnny B. Goode" 5/24/1969

"Tall Dark Stranger" 8/9/1969

"Made in Japan" 4/29/1972

"Streets of Bakersfield"*** 7/16/1988

* Also rose to No. 25 on the pop chart; "Cryin' Time" was the B-side of "Tiger by the Tail."

** No. 1 in Downbeat magazine but No. 2 in Billboard magazine

*** With Dwight Yoakam

WEATHER



High **67**
Low **44**

Air quality: Moderate, **54**
Complete weather, **B12**

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INSIDE

Immigrant rights rallies on the rise

Immigration rights advocates, more than 500,000 strong, marched in Los Angeles, demanding that Congress abandon attempts to make helping illegal immigrants a crime. The massive demonstration was one of a half dozen around the nation in recent days. **Page A14**

COMING MONDAY

Counting on calories

Even washing the dog burns calories. In the 10 minutes it takes to read Monday's article in the Get Fit section, you'll expend about 15 calories — assuming you're sitting upright and weigh 150 pounds. Scientists have assigned a calorie value to a dizzying array of activities. Read the story and start burning calories.

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GOODBYE, BUCK

LOCALS REACT



— Brad Norris, 52, retired



— Steve Mullen, 21



— Nancy Carol, 50, art teacher



— Edna Hunton, 47, USDA program technician



— Megan Mayfield, 27, works at Thomasville Home Furnishings



— Jonathan Taylor, 21, Bakersfield College student



— James Lipford, 69, retired



— Marlene Lipford, 68, works for the Boy Scouts



— Kathryn Lucas, 20, Tahoe Joe's waitress

OWENS: Great contributor ‘showed us the way,’ Haggard says

Continued from A1

Lost on many of those television viewers was the fact that Owens was an innovator who gave commercial country music a creative edge that served it well through two decades of change and growth.

“Buck was one of the greatest entertainers of the century,” fellow Country Music Hall of Fame performer Merle Haggard said by telephone from Mississippi, where he is on tour. “He influenced everybody from me to the Beatles. He was recognized in rock, in country, in rockabilly and in bluegrass.

“It’s a sad day in country music,” said Haggard, a native of Oildale himself. “Buck was a powerful figure in the industry and just a great, great contributor to the music. In a lot of ways, he showed us the way.”

In the course of things he boosted the careers of numerous singer-songwriters, among them Red Simpson, Tommy Collins, Dallas Frazier and Homer Joy, who wrote “Streets of Bakersfield,” Owens’ last big hit.

“I had a career ’cause he gave me one,” Joy said Saturday by telephone from Dallas. “I got my break ’cause he took a chance.”

Among Owens’ enduring contributions to Bakersfield is the Crystal Palace, a museum and dinner club that probably represents the city’s best-known tourist attraction. It’s on Buck Owens Boulevard, near the headquarters of Buck Owens Productions and next to the bright yellow, 30-foot-high “Bakersfield” gateway arch that Owens commissioned as a re-creation of the city’s old Union Avenue footbridge.

Owens, who fronted the Buckaroos, recorded 25 No. 1 songs, including a string of 19 in a row between 1963 and 1967. Twenty-six of his other songs made the top 10 between 1963 and 1974, and he capped his career with one last chart-topper, a remake of “Streets of Bakersfield,” recorded as a duet with Dwight Yoakam in 1988.

His career slowed dramatically in 1974 when Don Rich, Owens’ lead guitar player and high-harmony vocalist, was killed in a motorcycle accident. Owens stopped recording for years, turning his attention to his numerous business interests, including KUZZ radio. Owens admitted that he never really got over the death of his chief musical collaborator.

Paisley said he and his band mates had worked up an impromptu tribute to Owens that they planned to unveil Saturday night in Cedar Falls. At one point, Paisley said, they would flash a photo of Owens and Rich on the big screen alongside the title of the Owens hit, “Together Again.”

“He’s up there with Don Rich now,” Doyle Holly, who played bass on the Buckaroos’ biggest hits, said by phone from Nashville. “He lost his harmony singer too soon, but he doesn’t have to replace him now. Rest in peace, chief.”

The honky-tonk sound

Owens was one of the primary authors of the Bakersfield Sound, a twangy, rock-influenced interpretation of hard-core honky-tonk that emerged in the early 1960s.

The electrified, treble-heavy sound, produced in the studios of Hollywood’s Capitol Records with the Fender Telecaster solid-body guitar as its instrumental backbone, was the antithesis of the Nashville Sound.

At the time, Nashville recordings featured lush orchestrations and a roster of stars backed by the same studio musicians; the Bakersfield Sound was almost tinny by comparison. Owens was proud of his independence and his music’s harder edge, and he seemed to revel in the rivalry of Nashville and his “Nashville West.”

Owens’ distinctive “shuffle” style of music fell out of fashion in the mid-1970s. But a decade later the Bakersfield Sound enjoyed something of a renaissance, with performers like Yoakam, the Mavericks and the Derailers borrowing heavily from Owens’ signature style.

Owens, who admired the work of Hank Williams, Chuck Berry and Little Richard, got into trouble with the Nashville establishment because of his broad interpretation of what constituted “country music” — his rendition of Berry’s “Johnny B. Goode” especially inflamed the critics.

But Owens didn’t care much; in fact, like his contemporary Merle Haggard, Owens seemed to cultivate a career-long love-hate relationship with Music City.

“My problem with Nashville was simple,” Owens told *The Californian* in 1997. “I don’t like the way they do talent, and I don’t like the way they cut records.”

In the end, they forgave each other. Owens was elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1996.



Felix Adamo / The Californian
 Buck Owens, with friend Karen Rotan, finishes performing the song “Streets of Bakersfield” with local residents during a 2005 taping for a show that aired on CMT saluting the top 20 songs about cities.

Hard work and big dreams

Alvis Edgar “Buck” Owens, who at age 4 nicknamed himself after the family mule, was born Aug. 12, 1929, in Sherman, Texas, a town about 65 miles north of Dallas. He was the second-oldest of four children and the oldest of two boys born to Alvis and Maicie Owens. Life was difficult, but Maicie Owens enlivened the household with her piano; gospel music echoed through the house regularly.

Owens’ father, a sharecropper, intended to move the family west from the Red River region in 1937, but the Owenses’ trailer hitch broke in Phoenix, and there they remained for more than a decade. Buck and his siblings worked in the fields as soon as they were old enough, and the hardscrabble life left a lasting impression on them all, Buck in particular.

“That was where my dream began to take hold, of not havin’ to pick cotton and potatoes, and not havin’ to be uncomfortable, too hot or too cold,” Owens told biographer Rich Kienzle. “That in itself had driven me to try to find some better way of life. I remember as a kid being cold a lot, and hungry sometimes. We’d go to bed with just corn bread and milk, and I remember wearing shoes with holes in the bottom. I remember having twine for shoestrings: You take old black Shynola polish and try to make ’em look black, and that only makes ’em look worse. I remember the hand-me-down clothes.

“But most distinctly, I remember always saying to myself that when I get big, I’m not going to go to bed hungry, I’m not going to wear hand-me-down clothes. I’m not going to have homemade haircuts done by my mother; she cut our hair until we were about 12 or 13 years old. Just the fright of having to live a life through that ... although even then, I was cognizant that half the people I went to school with were just exactly like me.”

Buck and Bonnie

In 1945, he met 15-year-old Bonnie Campbell at the Mazona Roller Rink in Mesa, Ariz.

“He was a pretty good roller skater,” she told *The Californian* in a 1997 interview. “But I liked him because he played guitar.”

The two dated, but Owens, who was six weeks older, was surprised nonetheless when he showed up for his daily 15-minute radio show, “Buck and Britt,” co-starring Theryl Ray Britten, and there was Bonnie. “What’re you doin’ here?” he asked, assuming she’d come to watch him. “Singin’,” she answered. He didn’t even know she could carry a tune.

By January 1948 they were married and within two years they had two baby boys. Buck picked oranges; Bonnie stayed home with the kids.

But by 1951 it became evident that the marriage wasn’t working. Bonnie and the two boys left for Bakersfield, moving in with Buck’s favorite aunt and uncle, Vernon and Lucille Ellington. Buck arrived soon afterward, closely followed by his parents.

Dim lights, thick smoke

Buck set out to look for work in the local saloons, and it didn’t take



John Harte / The Californian
 Buck Owens, with wife Jennifer, shows off the sign bearing his name used when Pierce Road became Buck Owens Boulevard, which is home to the Crystal Palace, Owens’ museum and supper club.

long for him to hook up with steel guitarist Dusty Rhodes and, four months later, Bill Woods and the Orange Blossom Playboys. He earned \$12.50 a night, enough money to make a dent in his bills for the first time in his life.

Bonnie took a job car hopping at a hamburger joint at Union and Truxtun avenues. They remained legally married, though they were separated, because neither could afford a divorce.

At first, Owens played a hollow-body Gibson guitar. But, short on cash one day, he hocked it for \$10. When he came back to get it, it had been sold. Fellow musician Lewis Talley offered him a used Fender Telecaster — a new, innovative but not-yet-fully appreciated solid-body electric guitar — for \$30. Owens bought it, and American music was never quite the same.

That type of electric guitar, created just three years earlier by Leo Fender, gave Owens’ music a distinctively raw edge that set apart both the guitarist and, more significantly, the musical flavor of his adopted city.

But fame and success were still several years away.

For years, Owens labored at the Blackboard, a rowdy honky-tonk on Bakersfield’s Chester Avenue that featured many of country music’s West Coast pioneers. Wednesdays and Thursdays were guest-star nights. George Jones played one night, Glen Campbell another.

The Blackboard, in fact, was the must-stop spot in Bakersfield for Bob Wills, Roger Miller, Patsy Cline, Little Jimmie Dickens, Connie Smith, Tex Ritter, Dallas Frazier, Ferlin Husky, Lefty Frizzell, Tommy Duncan, and, until he went to prison for stomping his wife to death, Spade Cooley.

It was at the Blackboard in 1956 that singer Wynn Stewart introduced Owens to Harlan Howard, the man with whom Owens would co-write such songs as “Excuse Me (I Think I’ve Got a Heartache)” and “Foolin’ Around.” Howard, quoted in Nicholas Dawidoff’s “In the Country of Country,” remembers watching Woods smoke his pipe and flirt with girls, while Owens



Felix Adamo / The Californian
 Buck Owens and his late lead guitar player, Don Rich, launched the Fender Telecaster into the international spotlight in the 1960s. Here, Owens plays his weekly gig at the Crystal Palace with a modified signature Fender Telecaster.

was “working his ass off getting a menial wage.”

His big break

On Aug. 30, 1957, Capitol Records producer Ken Nelson signed Owens to a recording contract. He’d known Owens for some time before that from Owens’ guitar-playing sessions in Hollywood behind Tommy Collins, the Farmer Boys and others. Owens had tried long and hard to get himself a contract, but when rival Columbia Records came calling, Nelson changed his tune. Owens recorded two singles; both fizzled.

In January 1958, Owens moved to Tacoma, Wash., and took over one-third interest in 250-watt radio station KAYE, 1450 on the dial. “If you had a really good radio,” he said later, “you could pick it up in the station parking lot.” More importantly, he learned the radio business.

A few months later, he was back in Bakersfield, and on Oct. 9, 1958, he cut four original songs, includ-

ing the ballad “Second Fiddle,” in the “shuffle” style popularized by Ray Price in songs like “Crazy Arms.” By the following spring, it had reached No. 24 on the Billboard charts.

But Owens remained in Washington, where in 1959 he was hosting his own live TV show on KTNT. Among the local talent was a housewife-turned-singer named Loretta Lynn. Then there was a teen fiddler from Tumwater, Donald Eugene Ulrich. Later known as Don Rich, he would become Owens’ musical alter-ego and a major contributor to his best recordings.

The success of “Second Fiddle” led to another session, this one for “Under Your Spell Again.” It was his first Top 10 record, in the fall of 1959. In June 1960, riding that record’s success, Owens sold his share of the radio station and moved back to Bakersfield for good.

It was a great year. Harlan Howard gave Owens his share of Blue Book Music, a music publishing company that would later fetch huge returns. Don Rich, bored with college, joined Owens in December 1960. And Billboard magazine named Owens its “Most Promising Country and Western Singer of the Year,” based on a poll of country disc jockeys.

The Bakersfield Sound

It seems unlikely that Owens realized it at the time, but the Buckaroos were creating an appealingly raw, stripped-down sound — the Bakersfield Sound.

It was a hard-driving style, full of Telecaster twang, prominent steel-guitar leads and bold, dominant drums.

“The Nashville Sound was always more formulaic,” said Paul Wells, director of the Center for Popular Music, an independent music archive and research center based at Middle Tennessee State University. “There was always more of a self-consciousness about trying to reach a broader audience, about trying to make new (commercial) inroads. With Buck and Merle (Haggard), they were just doing *Please turn to OWENS / A7*

GOODBYE, BUCK

Hero revered in life and death

Many express sadness at passing, pride at local icon's longtime ties to city

BY LISA SCHENCKER
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Buck Owens might have felt humbled had he been able to walk the streets of Bakersfield hours after his death Saturday.

Word of the country singer's death spread quickly. Owens died early Saturday morning at his ranch just north of Bakersfield. By mid-morning Saturday much of Bakersfield already knew.

Throughout Bakersfield, friends and family — many of whom had never even met the man — called one another to tell of his passing.

"I definitely feel affected by it more than just the loss of a celebrity," said Megan Mayfield at her job at Thomasville Home Furnishings at The Marketplace. "He was a major legend.

"People who didn't even listen to country liked Buck Owens," she said.

Mayfield said Owens' death was the topic of conversation at the shopping center all morning.

"We grew up listening to all that music," said Mayfield's coworker Carrie VanDerHorst. "It was just like, 'Whoa, Buck Owens died!'"

Many said they loved Owens' music. Other said they weren't big country fans.

Almost everyone in Bakersfield though — country music fans or not — knew who he was. Almost everyone had been to Buck Owens' Crystal Palace, Owens' famous restaurant and museum.

"I think Bakersfield should be sad because he's such an important part of our city," said Gina Guinn as she shopped Saturday morning. "He's really put Bakersfield on the map."

Many others echoed Guinn's feelings.

"He is an icon to the community," said Randy Guthrie as he ate lunch with his wife.

"You knew him especially growing up from the 'Hee Haw' show," said equipment operator Paul Wagner. "He was just a major symbol."

"Ever since I was a boy, he's always made me proud to be from Bakersfield," said forklift driver Gabriel Soria.

Many said Owens not only made Bakersfield famous. He also did much for the community.

"As a tourist attraction, he's brought revenue into the city," said retiree Cora Klein.

Kathryn Lucas, 20, said Owens made Bakersfield a national destination.

"He kind of brought the community together and brought famous



Cousins Rebecca Freedlund, left, and Michelle Hernandez set a couple of red roses in front of the Crystal Palace along with other flowers and notes after learning of the death of Buck Owens on Saturday. Hernandez remembered when she attended Standard Elementary School and Buck Owens would drive by everyday in his white Cadillac and honk and wave at the children. Owens' studio used to be on North Chester Avenue across from the school.



Flowers and balloons were placed in front of the Crystal Palace after fans found out about the death of Buck Owens.

people here," Lucas said.

Steve Mullen, 21, said he admired the way Owens restored the Bakersfield sign to the city.

Mullen was one of the few who hadn't yet heard the news Saturday afternoon.

"Wow," Mullen repeated several times upon hearing of Owens'

death. "That's a hard hit to Bakersfield."

Those who hadn't heard of Owens' death expressed surprise. Even though Owens was 76 and suffered from health problems during the last decade, he seemed to many like a permanent part of Bakersfield.



Amanda Acosta, a Buck Owens fan, takes a few photos of the flowers in front of the Crystal Palace on a rainy Saturday afternoon from her vehicle after she heard the news of Owens' death. Acosta said she was sad because she remembers him from a long time back.

FRIENDS REACT



"I will cherish, forever, the musical moments he graciously shared with me during his life. I will be eternally grateful

for his fatherly chastisements, encouragement and, ultimately, his friendship and love."

— Dwight Yoakam



"I bet it's twangy in heaven tonight."

— Country star Brad Paisley



"Buck was one of the greatest entertainers of the century. He influenced everybody from me to the Beatles. ... In a lot of ways, he

showed us the way."

— Merle Haggard



"When people start looking back on his career, they are going to be surprised by the number of things he did first. He left a great legacy in country music."

— Guitarist Roy Clark, Owens' co-host on "Hee Haw"



"I think the reason he was so well known and respected by a younger generation of country musicians was because he was an innovator and rebel. He did it out of the Nashville establishment. He had a raw edge."

— Buckaroos keyboardist Jim Shaw



"I had a career 'cause he gave me one. I got my break 'cause he took a chance."

— Homer Joy, who wrote "Streets of Bakersfield"

"He's up there with (former Buckaroo) Don Rich now. He lost his harmony singer too soon, but he doesn't have to replace him now. Rest in peace, chief."

— Doyle Holly, who played bass on the Buckaroos' biggest hits

OWENS: Star also known for his charitable works

Continued from A6

what they did. Of course they wanted to reach a broad audience, but they did it on their own terms."

Starting with "You're for Me," in 1961, Owens and Don Rich — by now the band's lead guitar player — put to vinyl a clean, clear sound that hit listeners, as Owens liked to say, "hard as a freight train."

"Their vocals were always up front, shoved along in two-by-four rhythm by regular doses of steel, nervy electric guitar runs, and more drums than anyone else in country music was using," Davidoff wrote in "In the Country of Country."

"There was no thought put into it," Owens told Davidoff. "The sound just came about. I had a big old Fender Telecaster guitar, the walls of the buildings were hard, the dance floor was cement, the roof was sheet metal. There was considerable echo in there. ... It was just the sound that people wanted."

Buck the TV star

By 1963, Owens was big enough to land guest appearances on national TV appearances — first on ABC's "Jimmy Dean Show" and then NBC's "Kraft Music Hall."

In 1966, Owens forged a deal with two wealthy country music patrons, Oklahoma City furniture-store owners Don and Bud Mathes, to create a new, syndicated show. Dubbed "Buck Owens' Ranch," the

half-hour program was taped before a Spanish hacienda backdrop at Oklahoma City's WKY-TV. Owens developed a system: Starting in 1969, he and the band would record the instrumental tracks at Buck Owens Studios in Oildale, then do the singing in Oklahoma City, with the boys "air" strumming in the background.

At its peak, the "Ranch" show was in 100 markets around the country, 52 weeks a year. It ran until 1973 — some 295 original shows plus dozens of additional programs repackaged with new and previously broadcast performances, totaling 380 shows in all.

In Bakersfield on a late-'60s Saturday afternoon, a country-music couch potato could watch Owens' "Ranch," the Louvin Brothers' show and then Porter Wagoner (featuring Dolly Parton), culminating that evening with "Hee Haw."

"Hee Haw" eventually proved to be the undoing of the "Ranch" show.

When Owens renegotiated a new deal with Young Street Productions, which then owned "Hee Haw," the producers made him quit. They'd noticed what everybody in the band knew all too well: Owens was playing the same thing in both shows — literally.

"It had become painfully obvious," said Jim Shaw, Owens' keyboardist. "Very often we'd do the same song on the 'Ranch' show and then 'Hee Haw.' We'd use the exact

same instrumental tracks (usually recorded at Buck Owens Studios on North Chester Avenue in Oildale) and Buck would just sing them fresh at the taping. They got aggravated. They said, 'Hey, you're competing against yourself.'"

And of course they were right.

The legacy of 'Hee Haw'

"Hee Haw," first telecast on June 15, 1969, was more than enough for Owens anyway. Until he left the show in 1986 (it went on without him until 1993) the show in one way or another occupied a substantial portion of his life.

Owens signed with Warner Bros. Records in 1975. He had little success, however, and "Hee Haw" hadn't helped; although it had been tremendously profitable (he earned \$400,000 per year for just 20 days of work), Owens seemed to be increasingly viewed as a overall-wearing caricature.

"I kinda just prostituted myself for their money," he told Kienzle, the biographer. "My music, which I loved, had suffered badly and I knew what it was from: too much 'Phift! You Were Gone.'"

The rest of his life, of course, was business. He bought KUZZ radio (named after Cousin Herb Henson, the singing TV show host who had served as general manager of the station, then at 800 AM) in 1966. A year later he purchased 107.9 FM, which he turned into KBBY, a rock

station. The FM station went country in 1969, reverted back to rock in 1977 and finally became KUZZ's primary dial location in 1988.

Over the years Owens owned several radio stations playing various formats, and some of them earned him millions.

In 1999, Owens' family-owned company sold its two Phoenix stations to Jacor Communications for \$142 million.

Owens dabbled in television in the early 1990s, too, with Bakersfield's KDOB-TV, Channel 45, named for his late sister Dorothy Owens, the station's original general manager. (It later became KUZZ-TV and now, no longer connected to the company, it is KUVI-TV). Today, his broadcast empire is just KUZZ AM, KUZZ FM and KCWR FM.

Another run at the big time

In 1986, a newcomer named Dwight Yoakam had his first hit with a driving revival of Johnny Horton's 1956 hit "Honky-Tonk Man." A revival of interest in Owens' music was starting to rumble.

"People would be sending me interviews from newspapers where they interviewed Dwight," Owens told Kienzle. "I kept seeing' these things and he would say, 'All you guys forgot about Buck Owens. Do you know who Buck Owens is?' Then all of a sudden he releases a

song called 'Little Ways,' sounded exactly like me. It started takin' off here."

The two singers met and they performed at the Kern County County Fair in 1987. Then they sang Owens' 1972 recording of "Streets Of Bakersfield" together on a 1988 CBS-TV special. They toured together that summer and for the first time in years, audiences saw Buck Owens as the honky-tonk singer he once was. The two re-recorded Owens' "Streets Of Bakersfield" and it hit No. 1, Owens' first time there since 1972.

Owens' dinner club-museum, the \$6.7 million Crystal Palace, opened in October 1996. The concert hall, with its huge collection of photos and country-music artifacts, helped put Bakersfield back on the country music map.

In 2001, Owens appeared on two recordings that were nominated for the Country Music Association awards as "vocal event of the year": "Alright, I'm Wrong," Owens' tejano romp with Yoakam; and "Too Country," Paisley's tribute to tradition, featuring George Jones, Bill Anderson and Owens. Paisley's song won.

Owens was married three times, to Bonnie Campbell (1948); Phyllis Buford (1956); and Jennifer Smith (1979), and had a brief, annulled marriage to fiddler Jana Jae. He was divorced at ▲ time of his death.

Owens had two sons with his first wife: Alan Edgar "Buddy" Owens, a country singer himself who used the stage name Buddy Alan, and Michael Lynn Owens; and one son with his second wife: Johnny Dale

Owens. He also raised a stepson and stepdaughter with his second wife.

Owens gave generously to charity, especially local charities. He established a nonprofit that gave scholarships to music students at Bakersfield College's music program. For years he sponsored a Toys 4 Tots event at Bakersfield Convention Center. He hosted the annual Buck Owens Rodeo and a celebrity golf tournament that attracted people like John Wayne, Mickey Mantle, Willie Mays and Efrem Zimbalist Jr., all for charity.

"The golf tournament was tremendously time-consuming," said Shaw, Owens' longtime keyboard player and company lieutenant. "The thing people may not realize is, when these people agreed to come in, Buck then owed them. He'd have to go out on the road to appear at their events. He had staff working out all the arrangements six months out of the year."

"One time I said to him, 'Gee, Buck, wouldn't it just be easier if you just wrote a couple big checks and forgot all this hassle? What's the difference?'"

"He said, 'The difference is, the whole community is involved this way. Hundreds of people are getting involved and feeling like they're part of it.' He thought that was far better than just writing a check."

As significant as the community contributions were, though, it's the musical legacy that will last.

"That's the beauty of this," Paisley said. "We are left with so much. That's the great thing about a music career. It's eternal. It's up to us to make it eternal, anyway. Buck's done his part."

GOODBYE, BUCK

Timeline

- 1929 — Born Alvis Edgar Owens in Sherman, Texas.
- 1937 — Settled with his family in Mesa, Ariz.
- 1946 — Performed on the “Buck & Britt” radio show on Mesa’s KTYL.
- 1948 — Married Bonnie Campbell.



Buck says a few words during a 1982 press conference.

- 1951 — Moved to Bakersfield; formed the Schoolhouse Playboys, and played saxophone and trumpet.
- Mid-1950s — Played lead guitar in recording sessions with Tommy Collins, the Farmer Boys, Wanda Jackson, Sonny James and Faron Young.
- 1955 — Recorded rockabilly songs for Pep Records as “Corky Jones.”
- 1956 — Married Phyllis Buford.
- 1957 — Signed with Capitol Records.
- 1959 — Had his first national hit with the self-penned “Under Your Spell Again.”

Buck Owens and Lisa Todd, aka Sunshine Cornsilk, in promotional photo for "Hee Haw," circa 1976.



FELIX ADAMO / CALIFORNIAN FILE PHOTO
Dwight Yoakam and Buck sing “Streets of Bakersfield” in 1988.

‘Streets of Bakersfield’

(Homer Joy)
Recorded by Buck Owens (1972)
and Dwight Yoakam with Buck Owens (1988)

I came here looking for something
I couldn't find anywhere else
Hey, I'm not trying to be nobody
Just want a chance to be myself
I've done a thousand miles of thumbin'
I've worn holes in both my heels
Trying to find me something better
On the streets of Bakersfield

(Chorus)
You don't know me, but you don't like me
You say you care less how I feel
But how many of you that sit and judge me
Have ever walked the streets of Bakersfield?

Spent sometime in San Francisco
Spent a night there in the can
They threw this drunk man in my jail cell
Took fifteen dollars from that man
Left him my watch and my old house key
Don't want folks thinkin' that I'd steal
Then I thanked him as I was leaving, and
I headed for the streets of Bakersfield

(Chorus)
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You say you care less how I feel
But how many of you that sit and judge me
Have ever walked the streets of Bakersfield?
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Buck Owens catalog highlights

- “Under Your Spell Again” (1959). Also recorded by Ray Price (1959), Waylon Jennings and Jessi Colter (1971)
- “Love’s Gonna Live Here” (1963)
- “My Heart Skips a Beat” (1964)
- “Together Again: (1964). Also recorded by Emmylou Harris (1976), Kenny Rogers and Dottie West (1984)
- “I’ve Got a Tiger By the Tail” (1965). Co-writer: Harlan Howard
- “Waitin’ In Your Welfare Line” (1966)
- “Sam’s Place” (1967). Co-writer: Red Simpson
- “Where Does the Good Times Go” (1967)



FELIX ADAMO / CALIFORNIAN FILE PHOTO
Buck talks to the press in 1982.

Doing it his way until the end

It was a few minutes till show-time Friday night and Buck Owens was starting to have second thoughts.
He was tired. A touch of a cold, perhaps, or maybe just feeling the weight of his 76 years a bit more than usual.

Nope, he wouldn’t go on. The Crystal Palace, his Bakersfield dinner club, had packed them in again, but some things just couldn’t be helped.

Then he bumped into some people from Bend, Ore. — fans who said they’d driven all the way down just to see him play.

“Aw, man,” Buck said.
And the black-hatted hall-of-famer summoned up the will to go on. Those people had paid good money, invested a lot of time. They deserved a show. Some things just couldn’t be helped.

It wasn’t his best performance. His voice was thin, his stage presence a little weak, but he stayed up there for 90 minutes.

Then he went home for the last time.

Buck Owens, who died of heart failure early Saturday morning at his ranch north of Bakersfield, was both performer and businessman, and he took those roles seriously until the very end.

He didn’t need to perform anymore — those days had long since passed. But he pressed on because he loved the stage, because he figured his adopted hometown needed it, because deep down in his craw he believed Bakersfield still harbored sparks of the old magic that the world needed to appreciate.

He was a one-man propaganda machine for the city he loved. He built the Crystal Palace dinner club, which became far and away the city’s most sought-out tourist attraction. He commissioned a recreation near the Palace of the



Robert Price

STAFF COLUMNIST
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“Bakersfield” gateway arch that had spanned Union Avenue for decades.

One of the most telling indications of Buck’s affection for Bakersfield was the Legends in Bronze collection of statues he unveiled last year — 9-foot-tall renderings of 10 country music giants, including his Oildale-bred compatriot, Merle Haggard.

Buck commissioned those statues, he told me once, because he knew he wouldn’t be around forever to command that stage. He wanted people to keep coming west in all those RVs with Oklahoma and Missouri plates. He wanted the mecca of rebel country to always be Bakersfield, whether he was here to personally see to it or not.

Because, though Buck was the consummate businessman, the



FELIX ADAMO / THE CALIFORNIAN
Buck Owens performing at the Crystal Palace.

consummate performer, he still fancied himself a rebel.

He liked to talk about his behavior at stoplights in the old days. He’d pull up to the red light in his Ford convertible, country twang blaring from his tinny AM radio. Then, sensing the disapproving glares of respectable folk in the car next to his, he’d reach over to the radio ... and turn it up full blast.

That rebelliousness, that willingness to take convention and turn it on its ear, is what made him who he was.

Why couldn’t he use his own band in the studio? Why couldn’t he turn up the treble? Why could-

n’t he record the songs of Chuck Berry if he wanted to? Why couldn’t he use a fuzz-tone guitar like the rock bands were doing? Why couldn’t he start his own music publishing company and keep more of the proceeds for himself? He could, and he did.

Most of the innovators have moved out of Bakersfield now, or otherwise moved on.

Somehow we hadn’t really expected it of Buck, though. He’d always been here, solid and unchanging as Kern Canyon.

Robert Price’s column appears Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays. Contact him at rprice@bakersfield.com or 395-7399.

GOODBYE, BUCK



Homer Joy and Buck in Scottsdale, Ariz., in 1997.

Timeline (continued)

- 1963-67 — Had 15 consecutive No. 1 records and a total of 19 No. 1 records between 1963 and 1972; 20 other singles made the top 10
- 1966 — Bought KUZZ-AM in Bakersfield and started a new station, KBBY-FM, later to become KKXX-FM.
- 1966-73 — Hosted his own nationwide TV show, “Buck Owens’ Ranch.”
- 1968 — Played for President Lyndon Johnson at the White House.
- 1968 — Played two shows at San Francisco’s Fillmore Auditorium, the premier rock concert hall in America.
- 1969-86 — Co-hosted the television series “Hee-Haw.”



- 1972 — Toured Japan and released “Made In Japan,” the final No. 1 record during the height of his career.
- 1974 — Lost his lead guitarist and high-harmony collaborator, Don Rich, to a motorcycle accident.
- 1979 — Married Jennifer Smith.
- 1988 — Made a comeback with “Streets of Bakersfield,” a remake with Dwight Yoakam of Owens’ 1972 hit.
- 1996 — Inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame.
- 1996 — Opened the Crystal Palace museum and dinner club.
- 2006 — Died in Bakersfield.

Sources: Nashville Songwriters Foundation and The Californian

Weblog: Response to death of Buck Owens

These are some of the dozens of comments posted Saturday to the Talk of the Town blog on bakersfield.com in response to the death of Buck Owens. Join in the discussion from around the world at www.bakersfield.com/blogs:

Even the Beatles covered Buck Owens. What a legacy!
Posted by: Adam Payne

I am a former Bakersfield resident now living in Orange County. I was saddened by the death of Buck Owens.
I’ve never ever been a fan of country music. In fact, it gives me a headache. I do appreciate the art, stories and message country music has to offer. But I have always enjoyed the lively, energetic, wholesome and personable music of Buck Owens. I love the fact that he enjoyed all genres of music. That is what makes a musician a true musician.

He was a great man and musician that helped put Bakersfield on the map. His tunes will continue to play on, all over the world.
Posted by: Jonathan

Buck Owens was and always will be what America is. He was hard as nails and soft as velvet. He stood up, and got kicked down and stood up again. He symbolized Americana. Poor boy makes good is one thing, but Buck made people who didn’t like country music like “country people.” ...
Posted by: Andy

Another remnant of my childhood gone.
Buck made a good career for himself in Bakersfield, and had the decency to give back to Bakersfield when he became a big star.
I can’t say I liked his music but there is no doubt he was talented. Adios Buck
Posted by: Audrey Baker

The original “outlaw” to the Nashville music industry and inventor of what Dwight Yoakam affectionately refers to as “The Buckersfield Sound,” which stripped off all the “slick” (and expensive!) over-production. Inscription on my Rhino box set: “To Pat the Hat from Buck



JOHN HARTE / THE CALIFORNIAN

A tribute to Buck Owens was up Saturday at his old recording studio on North Chester Avenue. This was Owens’ headquarters before the move to Sillect Avenue and the Crystal Palace on Buck Owens Boulevard.

Owens — Hope you like my music.” Naw, Buck. I LOVED it! You will be sorely missed.
Pth
Nashville, TN
Posted by: Pat ‘the Hat’

From Buffalo, NY. ... The music of Buck and Don and the Buckaroos has been part of my life since 1964. We, the Stone Country Band, perform their songs every Thursday night at Buffalo’s legendary Sportsmans Tavern. This Thursday will be special. I am deeply saddened by Buck’s death. At wherever we go from here, at least Buck and Don are “Together Again.”
Posted by: Carl Eddy

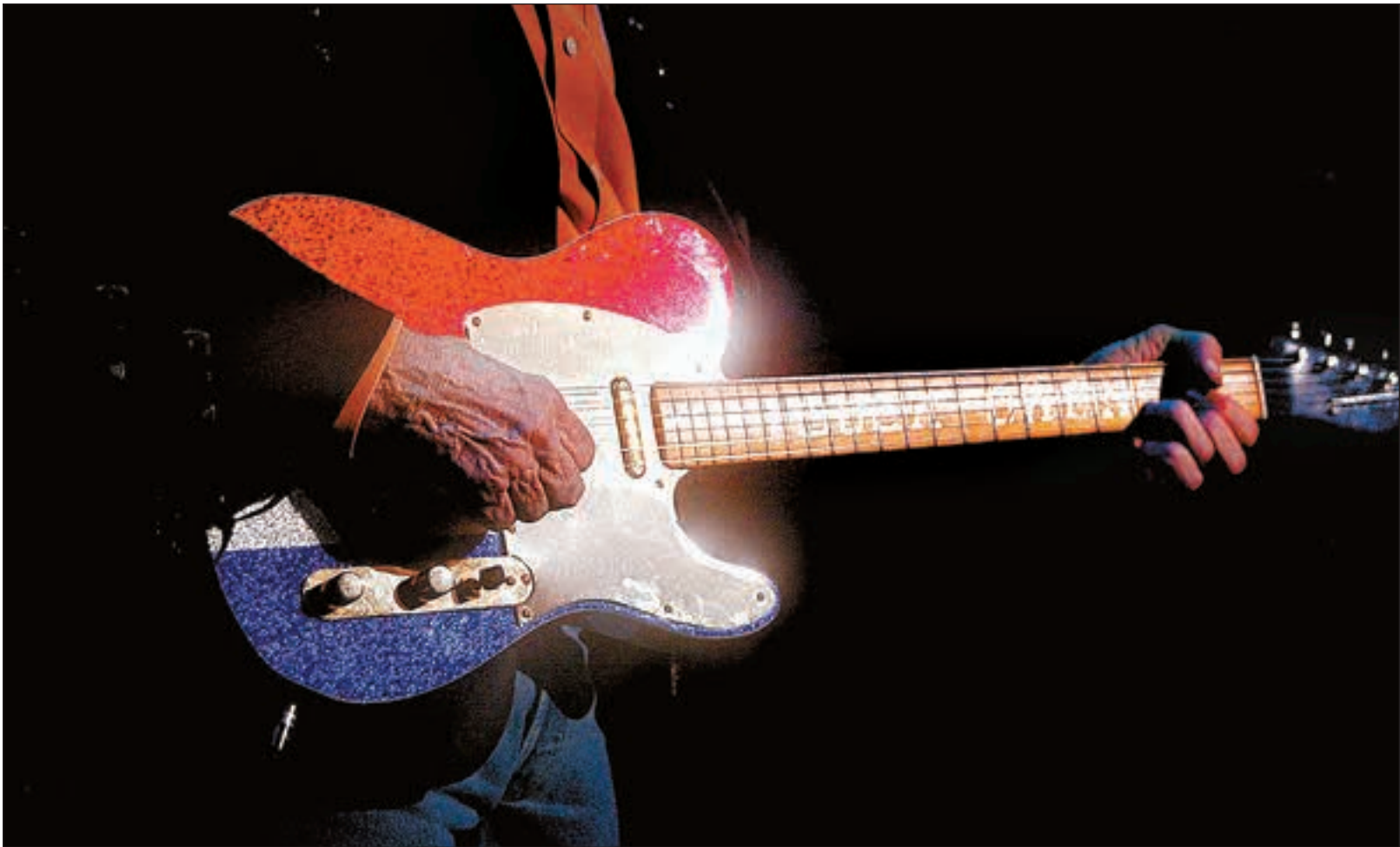
Reg from AUSTRALIA Your greatest fan from across the sea. ... I hope one day to meet you in another world. ...
Reg
Melbourne AUSTRALIA
Posted by: reginaldwarnes

Alvis has left the building ... God Bless!!!



CASEY CHRISTIE / THE CALIFORNIAN

Two guitars grace the doors on The Buck Owens Family plot at Greenlawn Southwest Mortuary and Cemetery. A few bouquets of flowers along with notes were placed near the plot Saturday after fans found out about the death of Buck Owens.



JOHN HARTE / THE CALIFORNIAN

Buck Owens performs at the Crystal Palace in August 2002.



Buck Owens discography

- Buck Owens “Under Your Spell” (Capitol, 1961) [DT 1489]
- Buck Owens "Buck Owens Sings Harlan Howard" (Capitol, 1961) [ST 1482]
- Buck Owens "Buck Owens" (Capitol, 1961) [T 1489]
- Buck Owens "You're For Me" (Capitol, 1962) [ST 1777]
- Buck Owens "On The Bandstand" (Capitol, 1963) [ST 1879]
- Buck Owens "Sings Tommy Collins" (Capitol, 1963) [ST 1989]
- Buck Owens "Together Again" (Capitol, 1964) [ST 2135]
- Buck Owens "I Don't Care" (Capitol, 1964) [ST 2186]
- Buck Owens "I've Got A Tiger By The Tail" (Capitol, 1965) [ST 2283]
- Buck Owens "Before You Go" (Capitol, 1965) [ST 2353]
- Buck Owens "The Instrumental Hits Of Buck Owens And His Buckaroos" (Capitol, 1965) [ST 2367]
- Buck Owens "Christmas With Buck Owens" (Capitol, 1965) [ST 2396]
- Buck Owens "Roll Out The Red Carpet..." (Capitol, 1966) [ST 2443]
- Buck Owens "Dust On Mother's Bible" (Capitol, 1966) [ST 2497]
- Buck Owens "Carnegie Hall Concert" (Capitol, 1966) [ST 2556]
- Buck Owens "Open Up Your Heart" (Capitol, 1966) [ST 2640]
- Buck Owens "In Japan" (Capitol, 1967) [ST 2715]
- Buck Owens "Your Tender Loving Care" (Capitol, 1967) [ST 2760]
- Buck Owens "It Takes People Like You To Make People Like Me" (Capitol, 1968) [ST 2841]
- Buck Owens "Sweet Rosie Jones" (Capitol, 1968) [ST 2962]
- Buck Owens "Christmas Shopping" (Capitol, 1968) [ST 2977]
- Buck Owens "Guitar Player" (Capitol, 1968) [ST 2994]
- Buck Owens "I've Got You On My Mind Again" (Capitol, 1969) [ST 131]
- Buck Owens "Tall Dark Stranger" (Capitol, 1969) [ST 212]
- Buck Owens "In London" (Capitol, 1969) [ST 232]
- Buck Owens "Big In Vegas" (Capitol, 1970) [ST 413]
- Buck Owens "Your Mother's Prayer" (Capitol, 1970) [T 439]
- Buck Owens/Susan Raye "We're Gonna Get Together" (Capitol, 1970) [ST 448]
- Buck Owens "Kansas City Song" (Capitol, 1970) [ST 476]
- Buck Owens "Merry Hee-Haw Christmas" (Capitol, 1970) [ST 486]
- Buck Owens/Susan Raye "Great White Horse" (Capitol, 1970) [ST 558]
- Buck Owens "I I Wouldn't Live In New York City" (Capitol, 1970) [ST 628]
- Buck Owens "Bridge Over Troubled Water" (Capitol, 1971) [ST 685]
- Buck Owens "Ruby" (Capitol, 1971) [ST 795]
- Buck Owens/Susan Raye "Merry Christmas From Buck And Susan" (Capitol, 1971) [ST 837]
- Buck Owens "Live At John Ascuga's Golden Nugget" (Capitol, 1972) [ST 11039]
- Buck Owens "Live At The White House" (Capitol, 1972) [ST 11105]
- Buck Owens/Buddy Alan "Too Old To Cut The Mustard" (Capitol, 1972) [ST 874]
- Buck Owens "In The Palm Of Your Hand" (Capitol, 1973) [ST 11136]
- Buck Owens "Ain't It Amazing Gracie" (Capitol, 1973) [ST 11180]
- Buck Owens/Susan Raye "Good Old Days" (Capitol, 1973) [ST 11204]
- Buck Owens "Arms Full Of Empty" (Capitol, 1973) [ST 11222]
- Buck Owens "It's A Monster's Holiday" (Capitol, 1974) [ST 11332]
- Buck Owens "41st Street Lonely Heart's Club" (Capitol, 1975) [ST 11390]
- Buck Owens "Hot Dog" (Capitol, 1988)
- Buck Owens "Live At Carnegie Hall" (Capitol, 1989) Re-release
- Buck Owens "Act Naturally" (Capitol, 1990)
- Buck Owens "Kickin' In" (Capitol, 1991)

“Best of” compilations

- Buck Owens "The Buck Owens Collection" (Rhino, 1992)
- Buck Owens "The Best Of Buck Owens, v.1" (Capitol, 1964) [ST 2105]
- Buck Owens "The Best Of Buck Owens, v.2" (Capitol, 1968) [ST 2897]
- Buck Owens "The Best Of Buck Owens, v.3" (Capitol, 1969) [SKAO 145]
- Buck Owens "The Best Of Buck Owens, v.4" (Capitol, 1971) [ST 830]
- Buck Owens "The Best Of Buck Owens, v.5" (Capitol, 1974) [ST 11273]
- Buck Owens "The Best Of Buck Owens, v.6" (Capitol, 1976) [ST 11471]
- Buck Owens/Susan Raye "The Best Of Buck And Susan" (Capitol, 1972) [ST 11084]
- Buck Owens "The Very Best Of Buck Owens, v.1" (Rhino, 1994)
- Buck Owens "The Very Best Of Buck Owens, v.2" (Rhino, 1994)
- Don Rich & The Buckaroos "Country Pickin'" (Sundazed, 2000)
- Various Artists "Country Pickin' " (Texas Round-Up, 2002)