

October 2010

Johnson County

L I F E S T Y L E

The Cosgrove Family

It's a family business
for nationally
renowned children's
entertainer,
Mr. Stinky Feet



The Trip of
a **Lifetime**

Adventures in
Lawrence

Happy Birthday
Overland Park

Meet the Stinky Feet Family

The Cosgroves are in the business of entertaining children and they couldn't be happier about it.



Article Susan Motley | Photography Paul Versluis

The audience is getting restless. Anticipation fills the air. When the musicians take the stage, the crowd goes wild.

A rock concert at the Sprint Center? No, the scene is a performance of Jim Cosgrove & the Hiccups at the annual

Jiggle Jam Family Fest at Crown Center. At a Memorial Day Weekend concert, 1,500 adoring fans came to see local celebrity and nationally known children's entertainer, Jim 'Mr. Stinky Feet' Cosgrove.

This show kicked off a summer tour consisting of 95 shows in 90 days. Jim and his family drove thousands of miles to rock out with audiences in Nebraska, Iowa, Colorado, New Mexico, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma. The Cosgrove "road crew" includes Jeni, affectionately known as Mrs. Stinky Feet, Lyda, who just turned 6, and little sister Willa, 3.

Now, after a crazy, busy summer, Jim is back in Kansas City and ready for the October release his eighth CD, *Swimming in Noodles*.

On a rare quiet day at home in Prairie Village, the family had a chance to catch their breath and reflect on the summer and their life in the entertainment business.

"Well, the tour was exhausting at times," Jim said. "But we still loved it. I have been doing this for 12 years and every show is still new. Connecting with the kids is the greatest feeling."

Jim's zany, high-energy style and his songs about the simple joys of childhood, make it easy for kids of all ages to connect with him.

"I want parents to experience shows with their kids," Jim said. "I usually get a lot of children and parents up on stage to play instruments and help me with a song."

The Cosgroves give new meaning to the term "family business." In addition to traveling together, Jeni serves as tour manager and booking agent, and Lyda has been joining her dad on stage since she was two and a half years old. Willa just got into the act this summer. Jim's brother, Dan Cosgrove, is his business manager.

"It's so cool to have our family life and work life as one," Jeni said. "Not all couples could spend this much time together, but it works great for us because Jim and I really like each other!" She began homeschooling Lyda this fall so they can continue traveling together.

According to Jeni, she always imagined herself married to a musician, although she admits her vision was more of a rock star than a children's musician!

Jim, on the other hand, never planned to be an entertainer. He started out as a journalist, did a stint in corporate PR, and then became a national public speaker.

He'd taught himself to play the guitar in college and began writing silly songs to entertain his nieces and nephews. Growing up the youngest of eight children in Kansas City, he had a ready audience.



Jim is following up an exciting summer tour with the release of his eighth CD, *Swimming in Noodles*, out October 5.

In 1998, a friend who worked at Barnes and Noble in Leawood asked him to come sing a few songs at story time. He enjoyed it but was surprised when parents started asking where they could buy his CD. It sparked an idea.

"I had recently received a \$1,000 inheritance from an aunt and thought it would be fun to use it to record some songs," Jim said. With the help of friends, his first CD was recorded in a garage studio in Lawrence. *Bop Bop Dinosaur* was a hit with his growing fan base.

The next year, he released his second CD, *Stinky Feet*. At that point, he gave up his day job and found himself with a new career, and a new name—Mr. Stinky Feet!

Through grass root efforts, Jim began booking shows at schools, libraries, parties and bookstores across the Midwest and beyond. Children everywhere began to fall in love with Mr. Stinky Feet.

But Jim was falling in love too. In 2001, at that same Barnes and Noble where it all began, he met employee Jeni Schmidt, daughter of Gene and Peggy Schmidt. She had grown up in Leawood and attended KU before starting her job at the bookstore.

In November 2002, Jim and Jeni were married and she eventually left her job to work with Jim.

According to Jim and Jeni, the past eight years have been an exciting ride. Averaging about 250 shows a year, they have traveled across the United States and into Canada. Jim even played at military bases in Italy, Spain and Germany. In 2005 and 2006, he performed at the White House Easter Egg Roll.

Jim released five more CDs. And, of course, they added two beautiful daughters to their travel crew.

One of their crowning achievements was helping to create Jiggle Jam three years ago. It has quickly become the Midwest's largest family music festival. This year, the two-day event included dozens of family friendly acts and attracted more than 25,000 attendees.

"Kansas City has one of the best family music scenes in the country," Jim said. "A number of great acts are based here, we have great venues, and the community embraces this type of entertainment."

"Really, the people of Kansas City have been very, very good to me. I couldn't do what I do without their support."

The community of children's entertainment is close-knit. "We all help each other," Jeni said. "If one of us can't do a date, we pass the opportunity on to another performer. We all want the same thing, for the family music scene to continue to grow."

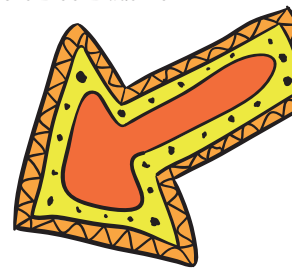
In the last few years, Jeni has become the booking agent for five other Midwest acts, including Funky Mama, Dino O'Dell, and the Doo-Dads from Kansas City.

Jim also has a side job—talking to adults. He created a corporate message called "Live like a child, succeed like a child" designed to inspire business audiences to take a more childlike approach to life.

"I've done the presentation for educator groups, a software development company and a medical convention, among others," Jim said, "and it has been well received."

As all this reflecting was going on, Willa played contently on the floor. But Lyda waited patiently for her turn to talk about the family business. "I like singing with my dad, but my favorite part is signing autographs." She recently learned to write her name in cursive for just that purpose!

"I definitely feel blessed. I'm doing what I love with my family at my side." Jim said. "In this business, it's never boring, never the same. Always memorable." *JCL*



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