

Our



Over Lee DeWyze Sr.'s 25-year career as a letter carrier, May 26 was ordinarily just another day of delivering the mail on his route in suburban Chicago.

But this year, the Arlington Heights, Illinois Branch 2810 member spent the evening of May 26 in Hollywood, California, joining a live studio audience and millions of Fox television viewers nationwide to proudly watch as his son, Lee Jr., was crowned the latest winner of the popular television talent show "American Idol"—a trip west made possible by the generous help of his fellow letter carriers at his Elk Grove Village postal station.

Lee Sr.'s co-workers pitched in by drumming up as many call-in votes as they could in support of his son throughout the five-months-long singing competition, and also by donating money to help their fellow carrier and his wife, Kathy, pay for travel between Los Angeles and their home in Mount Prospect, Illinois, where Lee Jr. grew up.

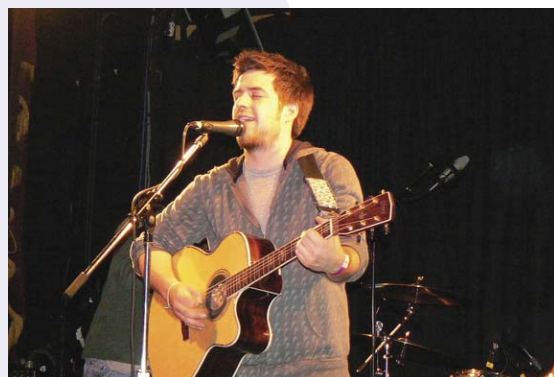
And letter carriers and other Elk Grove Village postal workers showed their support for Lee Jr. back home by sporting T-shirts that read "Vote 4 Lee" and "A DeWyze Choice" at off-the-clock "American Idol"-themed get-togethers.

While the Elk Grove carriers wore their pride for Lee Jr. on their sleeves—and their backs—they say Lee Sr. let his son do most of the talking, both on the television show and during concerts.

"(Lee Sr.) was very modest," said shop steward Murray Rafolowitz. "He

Below: Letter carriers and other co-workers of Lee DeWyze Sr. at the Elk Grove Village postal station cheer for the Arlington Heights, Illinois Branch 2810 member's son, as the winner of this year's "American Idol."

Right: Lee DeWyze Jr. performs on stage.



would let us know the songs that might be coming up.

"There's nobody who has more integrity," said Rafolowitz. "He's a very devoted family man."

Elk Grove carrier Judy Silander, who first started passing the hat to help defray the DeWyze family's travel expenses, said at first her support of Lee Jr. was really geared more toward helping out a co-worker—that is, until she tuned in to an "American Idol" episode and heard him sing.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LETTER CARRIERS

"I was going to vote for him regardless, but he was really good," she said. "I realized how stunning this is for him, to come out No. 1 out of 10,000 contestants."

"They've been very, very kind and supportive," said a proud Lee Sr. of his co-workers. "A lot were wearing the T-shirts before it was the 'in' thing."

Journey to stardom

Just a few months ago, a 24-year-old Lee DeWyze Jr. was working at Mount Prospect Paints by day and playing occasional concerts in local bars at night. He also squeezed in some time after his long hours at work to record two albums, "Slumberland" and "So I'm Told."

Initially, Lee Jr. told his father that he was reluctant to audition for "American Idol" because he doubted he would advance far through the run of the show, which just completed its ninth season as one of the highest-rated shows on television. The program's contestants are eliminated over the course of several months, both by judges and by viewers who cast their votes for their favorite artist through phone calls and cell phone text messages.

Lee Jr.'s doubts were quickly put to rest, however, as he rapidly ascended through the ranks in a competition that began last fall with tens of thousands of hopefuls auditioning in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Los Angeles and Orlando.

Though Lee Sr. gave his son his first guitar, he says his son's musical ability comes from his mother's side. "He didn't get his talent from me," he said.

Even so, Lee Jr. credits his father for some of his taste in music, not to mention his dogged determination to pursue his dreams. The young singer/songwriter even had an arm tattooed with lyrics from "Father and Son," a song by Cat Stevens and one of his father's favorites.



A springtime rally for the two DeWyze men at the Elk Grove station was part of the frenzy of attention that was focused on the "Idol" hopeful when he advanced to the final round of competition in late May. His hometown of Mount Prospect sponsored a "Lee DeWyze Day," which featured an outdoor concert that gave Lee Sr. and Kathy a chance to watch their son perform before thousands of adoring fans.

"The young girls were screaming, 'I love you, Lee!' and it was like a Beatles show in the late '60s," said Elk Grove letter carrier Jeff Wehrmeister. "I can only imagine how his dad must have felt."

The DeWyzes were mobbed by well-wishers as they rode in a Mustang convertible in a parade staged just for Lee Jr., and the future "American Idol" winner was honored to throw out the first pitch at a Chicago Cubs baseball game against the Pittsburgh Pirates May 14 at Wrigley Field.

Now, thanks to his "American Idol" victory, Lee Jr. has a new, lucrative record contract, and his life has become a steady stream of concert and talk show appearances. "We're told we're not going to see him until October," said Lee Sr. "He really has an incredibly busy schedule.

"He works really, really hard; I'm very proud of him," said the elder DeWyze of his son. "He sure looks like he's in his element." ✉

You can hear Lee DeWyze Jr.'s music at leedewyze.com.

Lee DeWyze Jr. thanks the crowd at the Lee DeWyze Day concert in Mount Prospect. DeWyze Sr. (l) was on hand to experience the phenomenon surrounding his son.