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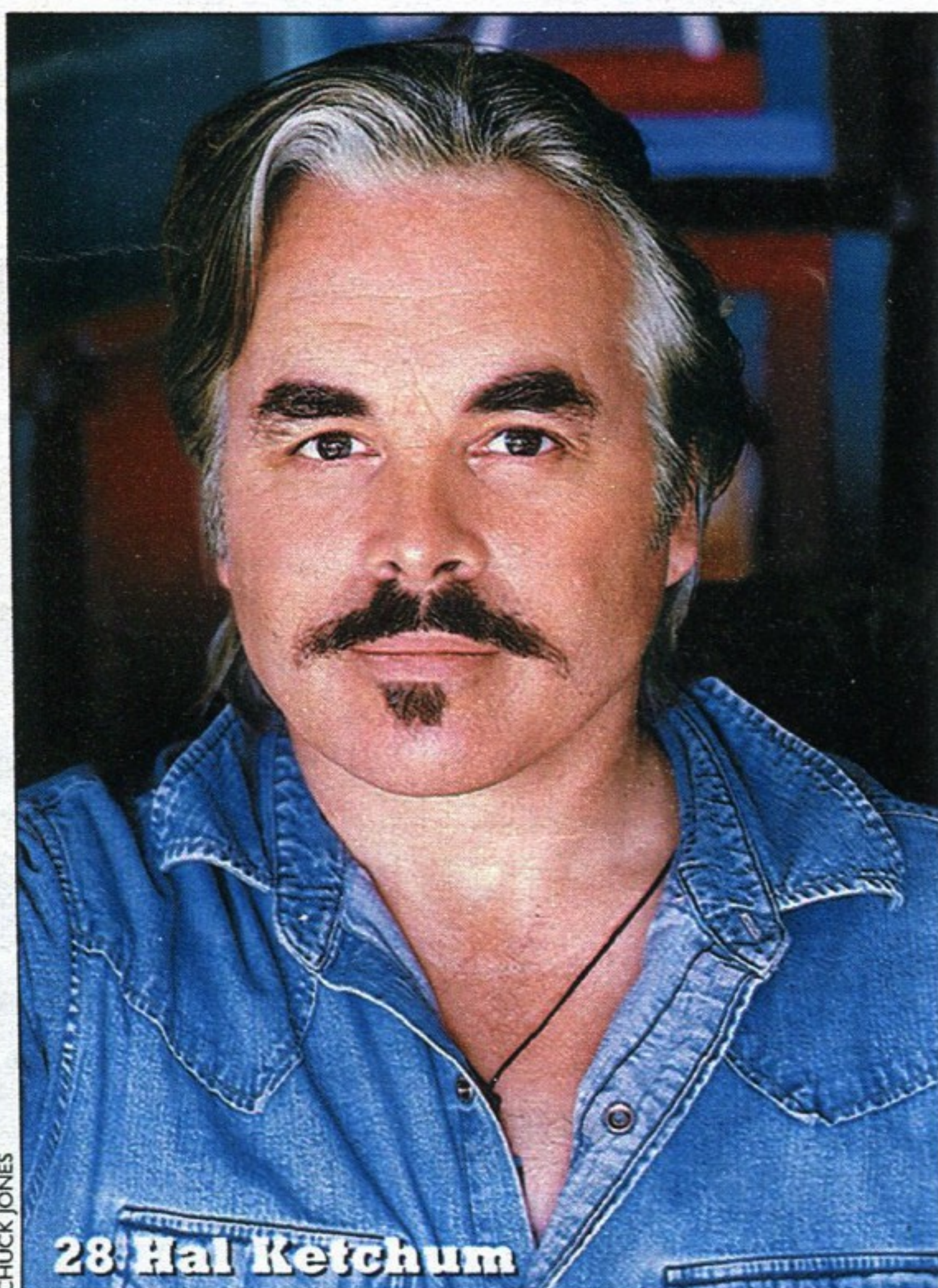
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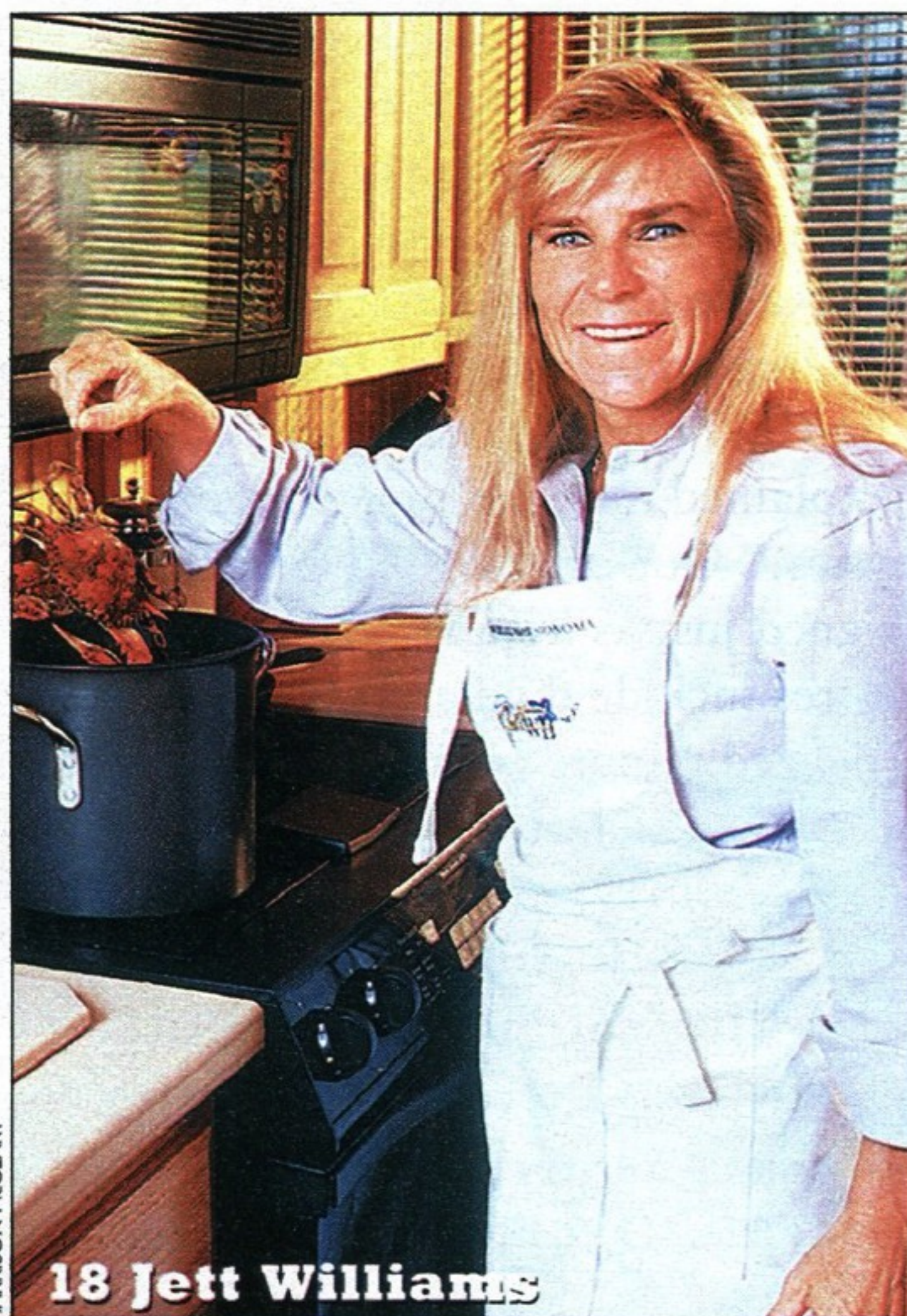
CURTIS HILDUN

42 Blake Shelton



CHUCK JONES

28 Hal Ketchum



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# WE GOT IT

# ALL

**Blake Shelton has wedding plans with a longtime sweetheart, another hit with "The Baby" and a hometown full of fans**

**"E**very memory I have is here," declares Blake Shelton as he relaxes in the den of his mother's home in Ada, Okla. "From the time I was born till the time I moved away, this is where everything in my life happened.

"I've got a lot of friends here, but what makes it special is this is still where all the family lives – cousins and aunts and uncles and parents. I know that I'm welcome at any of those people's houses. It's just something I don't have anywhere else."

In spite of his incredible success – including a No. 1 hit with "Austin," the first single from his self-titled debut album; the follow-up hits "All Over Me" and "Ol' Red"; and a current Top 10 hit with "The Baby," the first single from his second album, due in February – Blake's feelings about his hometown aren't much different than those of other country boys who've moved away from home.

But what *is* different is the way the hometown folks feel about *him*. His friends and family can't mask the pride on their faces when they're around him. But that doesn't mean they're above dishing out a little good-natured ribbing.

They especially like to remind Blake of the pranks he loved to play!

**Story by David Scarlett**

**Photos by Morrison/Wulffraat**



Blake, holding his mom's new puppy, a Chihuahua named "Baby," is surrounded (clockwise from left) by sister Endy, stepdad Mike Shackelford, mom Dorothy, and fiancée Kaynette Williams.





Taking a break under the watchful eye of Mercury, the school mascot, while visiting his old Ada High stomping grounds



Joining buds Eddie Sadler, Cory Cogburn and Jayson Tray at the Village Inn, where Blake got his start singing karaoke and playing guitar



## BLAKE SHELTON

“Blake and a buddy found a deer one day that’d been run over, and they brought it to school and put it in this guy’s pickup,” recalls Blake’s high school shop teacher, Richard Truitt. “Put it up behind the steering wheel and made it look like it was driving!”

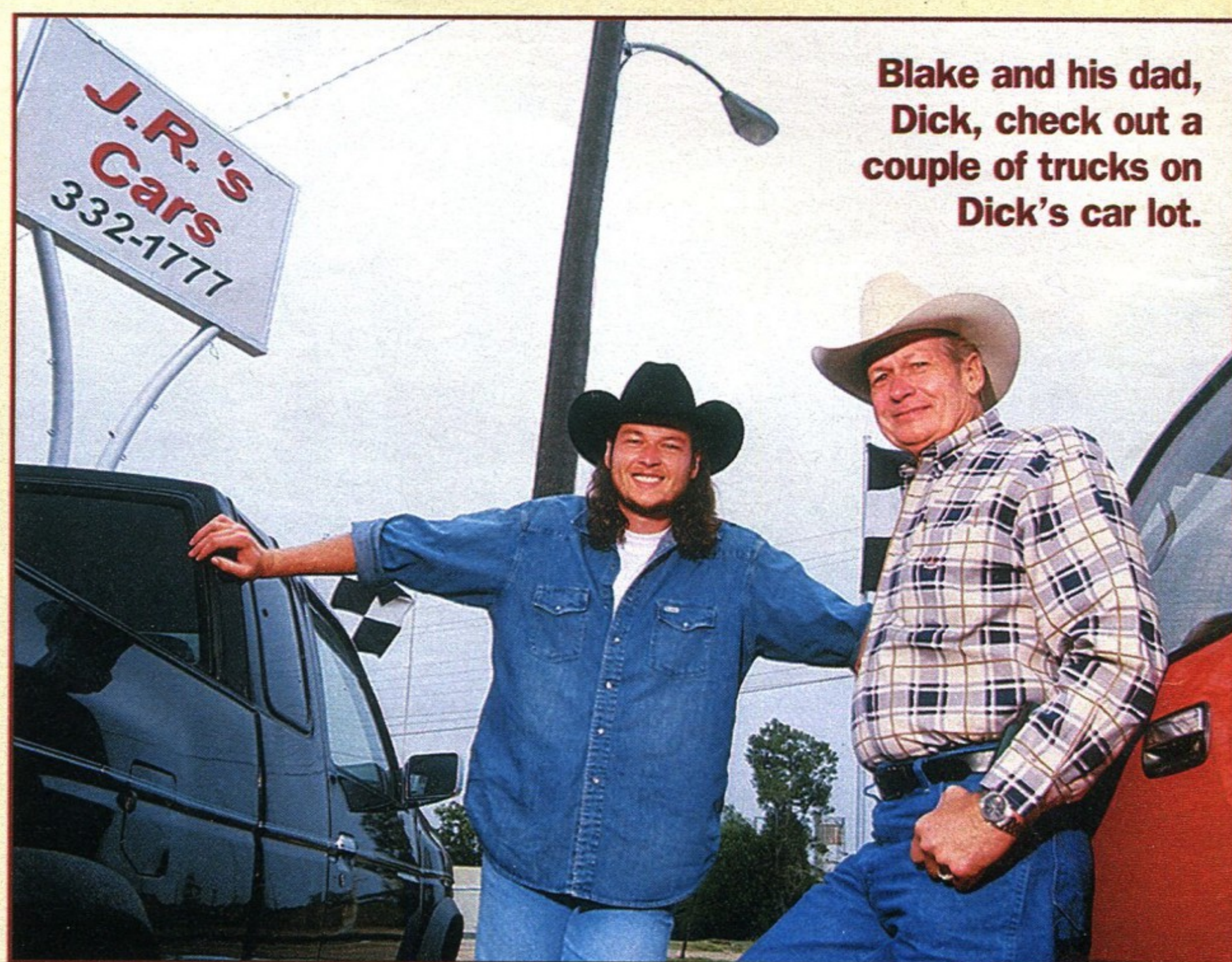
“That sucker was four or five days old,” laughs Blake. But he and his friend didn’t put the deer in just *any* truck. They decided to give the driving doe to a friend.

“Well, he *was* a friend,” grins Blake.

As Blake recalls another prank, the look on the face of his mother, Dorothy, says loud and clear that she’s hearing about *this* escapade for the first time.

“A friend of mine, Cory Cogburn, was a baseball player,”

Blake and his dad, Dick, check out a couple of trucks on Dick’s car lot.



recalls Blake. “And I didn’t play sports. So during football season, while our other friends were busy, he and I hung out together every day. It was a holiday season, from October to Christmas, and it was so fun to steal people’s yard ornaments, their pumpkins and stuff, and take ’em two blocks away and arrange ’em in somebody else’s yard or on their porch ... *neatly!* And we *knew* they were thinking when they woke up in the morning, ‘Where’s my hay bales and pumpkins?’

“And we did that with those light-up Santa Clauses. We’d take them across town to somebody else’s yard and plug them in. But it wasn’t as *mean* as it was stupid. Really more *relocating* than stealing! But we had fun with that. Never got caught. Until *now* – I’ll probably go to jail now!”

**B**lake probably doesn’t need to worry about getting locked up for his mischief. But he *is* looking forward to doing some serious time because of another theft – that of his heart by a hometown sweetie. He and longtime girlfriend Kaynette Williams became engaged in early December.

“Thanksgiving I took off a lot of time,” he recalls. “We just kind of stayed around the house and went huntin’ and my dad came up and visited for a couple of days. And I just got my priorities in order and decided that it was something I needed to do soon. We’ve been together close to six years now since we first started dating.”

He and Kaynette met when she was a photographer’s assistant and young Blake came in to show her boss a baby wild hog he’d caught. Not exactly a storybook beginning, but now they can both laugh about it.

“And there’s just a connection there, it’s more than you can explain. It’s just *easy*,” he smiles. “We understand each other without even saying a word. It’s just one of those things you know is supposed to be.”

So how did he pop the question?

“We had an ice storm here in Nashville and I had the day off. And I’d already bought the ring for her and decided that last Wednesday would be a good day to ask her because the weather was bad and there wouldn’t be much happenin’ around the house that day.

“So I had the ring in my pocket and when she woke up I asked her to marry me. And she *immediately* jumped back under the covers ’cause – you know how girls are – she was embarrassed.”



The happy couple hasn't set a date yet, but Blake says it'll be sometime in the next year, and probably a low-key event that people will hear about only after it's happened.

In the meantime, he's got his new album to focus on. And he couldn't be happier with how it's turned out.

"Man, I think it's three times what the first album was, I really do," he exclaims excitedly. "And I was proud of the first record, but I think this one's just so much better. And I've been kinda sweatin' out how I'd be accepted this second time around. But

**If you don't have a goal that you're fightin' for, you're gonna end up wastin' your life away, and that's probably what I would've done.**

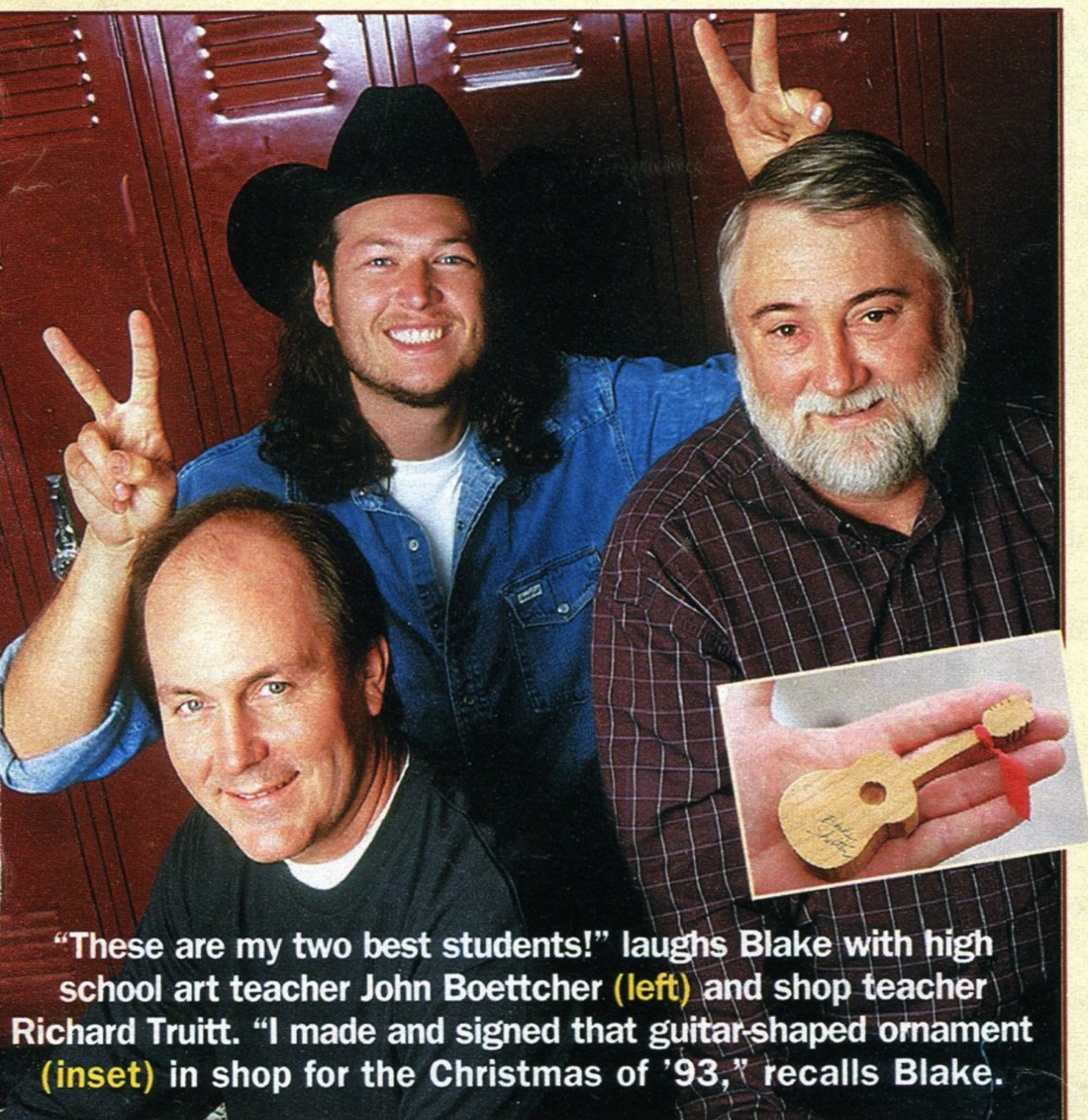
with 'The Baby' doin' well, everything's good right now."

Yep, Blake's come a long way since his days of singing karaoke and playing his guitar at the Village Inn in Ada when he was just 16.

"Actually, my mom owned the karaoke machine there and hired me to come in and try to get people to sing," he explains. "Eventually I'd sit down there and play guitar when I'd come back in town to see the family. I'd do a show, kind of for my buddies. It was a lot of fun."

The show he's doing later this particular evening is going to be substantially larger – at the 1200-seat Legends club. It's his first big show in town since "Austin" hit the charts, and he can't wait.

"The fun is gonna be not what I'm doing, but what's going on out there amongst the people," he laughs. "I'll



"These are my two best students!" laughs Blake with high school art teacher John Boettcher (left) and shop teacher Richard Truitt. "I made and signed that guitar-shaped ornament (inset) in shop for the Christmas of '93," recalls Blake.

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## BLAKE SHELTON

probably do an extra long show tonight. Seeing who shows up. That's what I'm looking forward to."

Before the show, he takes time to visit his dad at his used-car lot and spend the afternoon with his mom, stepdad, sister, uncle and others at his mom's house. It's obvious he appreciates not just his family, but the place he comes from and the good fortune and hard work that have enabled him to live his dream. Because he knows things could've been different.

"If I weren't playing music I would still be here," he declares quietly. "I really didn't have a lot of interest in anything, outside of huntin' and fishing, and you can't make a livin' there. So I probably would've ended up gettin' in trouble. I hate to say it. If you don't have a goal that you're fightin' for, you're gonna end up wastin' your life away, and that's probably what I would've done."

"My teachers were saying, 'Thank God he had the music.' Well, I feel the same way, because it's the only thing I wanted to do. Luckily, I just stuck with it long enough."

And for Blake, that doesn't just mean hit records. It means the security of having his own place to put down roots.

"My ultimate goal was to own some property somewhere," he explains. "A farm or somethin'. And I didn't have another avenue to make money. So through this I was able to get to the ultimate thing. I've got that farm in Tennessee now. And that's *it* to me. I've been fortunate enough to do what I love *and* attain the ultimate goal that I wanted, too."

"That feels pretty good."

Uncle Dearl Newby (above) taught Blake his first guitar chords. Mom Dorothy (below) couldn't be happier for her baby, but never thought he'd be a singer! "He just loved to be outdoors," she smiles. "I thought he'd be a zookeeper or a veterinarian or a forest ranger."



CW!