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To mark his 38th birthday last week, WUSN-FM (99.5) host John Howell was surprised on the air by calls from three lifelong heroes—country superstar Waylon Jennings, retired radio legend Larry Lujack, and his father, Chuck Howell.



Big John Scores A Hat Trick

Finally, WUSN/Chicago afternoon driver "Big" John Howell had the thrill of a lifetime Friday (9/4) morning. He was filling in for the vacationing Ramblin' Ray when he had calls from as he called 'em... "three of my biggest heroes". First, his dad called. While a surprise, that could have been expected, since Friday was also John's birthday. But then came a couple of surprise calls from folks who rarely call any radio folks these days. Howell answered the hotline to find Waylon Jennings on the other end of the line. They talked about Waylon's new album for a while, and John offered to play a cut. Waylon was thrilled, of course, noting on the air that he hasn't been too successful in getting airplay of late. That phoner was set up by morning co-host Trish Biondo. Then came the coup de gras - a phone call from Chicago and radio legend Larry Lujack who was at his new home, a ranch in New Mexico. This wasn't Howell's first meeting with ol' Lar. Howell was doing mornings in Grand Rapids in 1986 when Lujack retired from radio. Howell drove to Chicago and was outside the studios, bearing a gift - an Elvis hairbrush shaped like a guitar.

Lujack's morning producer Mick Kayler - who just happens to be the present WUSN morning show producer - came out, saw Howell's gift, and took him into the studio to meet the King of all Animal Stories. Howell says that Lujack told him the same thing Friday that he told him in '86 - "Get out of radio!" No telling what strings Biondo and Kayler had to pull to get those two on the air, but Howell told me, "It was the nicest thing anybody's done for me in all the time I've been in radio."



Blowing His Horn

Big John Howell and the Born to Boogie Band performs at the Arlington Country Music Festival at Arlington International Racecourse in Arlington Heights Sunday. Other acts included Restless Heart, Pam Tillis, Billy Ray Cyrus and Martina McBride.