

Collector brings Cash's bus to Grove City

By Marshall Hood
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

The discreet lettering on the the ominous black bus only hints at the ghosts inside: "J.C. Unit 1," reads one phrase.

"The House of Cash," proclaims another. "You know there was greatness in here," Dave Wright said, eyeing the interior of what was home on the road to Johnny and June Carter Cash.

The vintage-motorcoach collector and North Carolina horseman bought the 1979 MCI tour bus from a St. Louis car dealer in November and drove it to Grove City this week to be restored by Creative Mobile Interiors.

Wright spotted the Cash-mobile on eBay Motors last month and, being a fan, began bidding. About \$62,000 later, he owned the land cruiser that ferried the "man in black" from 1979 to 2003. The bus was also used for the landmark 1991 "Highwaymen Tour" — Cash, Waylon Jennings, Kris Kristofferson and Willie Nelson.

"You can't own something like this," Wright says **BUS** Page B2



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said. "It wouldn't be right for it to go to someone to use for tailgating. This is an orphan that needs a loving home."

Wright hopes home will be the Country Music Hall of Fame in Nashville, but officials there told him they might not have room for the 40-foot-long land yacht. He also is discussing a suitable venue with a Nashville car collector.

Until he finds one, "J.C. Unit 1" will undergo an eight-week spiffing-up at Creative Mobile.

Several employees of the Grove City company were familiar with the bus. They did some of the original customizing when they worked at Custom Coach, said marketing director Barbara Wayman.

"We're also trying to find more records (detailing the original condition) and trying to hook up with people who rode the bus," she said.

The Cashes' \$553,000, 500-horsepower rolling home



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Dave Wright in the tour bus used by Johnny Cash

features four rooms, including a center kitchen-galley-dinette and rear stateroom ("the Royal Box") with two sleeper sofas. All rooms have televisions, VCRs and two-way radios.

The interior is mostly black leather and blue velour. Wright

said he wanted to change the velour until he learned that it is called "June Carter blue."

The walnut in the stateroom came from the Cash farm in Tennessee.

Cash sold the bus three months before his death in 2003

to the American Heritage Music Foundation in Arkansas, which in turn sold it to the St. Louis auto dealer.

Although Wright owns four other vintage coaches, including one that belonged to Wendy's founder Dave Thomas, he couldn't resist buying "J.C. Unit 1."

"Years ago, I saw Johnny Cash's tour bus at a horse show. I never forgot it," he said. "This is a rolling monument to (Cash). He is a legendary and enduring musical figure."

Before it is put on display, however, Wright wants to give the bus a fitting send-off — or two.

He has offered to lend it to Cash's longtime band, the Tennessee Three, for its upcoming farewell tour.

And, Wright said, Joaquin Phoenix and Reese Witherspoon — who play the Cashes in the movie *Walk the Line* — are welcome to take it to the Academy Awards if they're nominated.

"Everybody else goes in a black Hummer," Wright said. "This would be, well, different."