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# HOME & AWAY

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CURTIS HILBUN - DOLLYWOOD

# Dolly Parton's Pigeon Forge

BY ANIETRA  
HAMPER

**D**olly Parton has a way of rolling out the red carpet for strangers with her girlish giggles and spirited tone. Whether she's doing a one-on-one interview or performing in front of thousands of fans, the legendary entertainer knows how to make people feel special.

"My, you're pretty. You look just like Jolene," Parton told me when we met for an interview in late March. Then, in a private serenade, she started singing, "Jolene, Jolene..." with the same passion she has onstage.

We were surrounded by nearly 60 years of treasures, dreams, memories and sequined costumes of her life and career at Chasing Rainbows, a museum in her Dollywood theme park in Pigeon Forge, Tenn. "I just glance around and it just brings back so many memories, and I think, 'Good Lord, how did I, when did I do all that?'" she said, laughing between words decorated with her soft Southern accent.

With talent and tenacity, Parton

has accomplished many of the big dreams she had as a girl growing up in rural Sevier County, Tenn. And though her music-and-movie career took her far away from her beloved Great Smoky Mountains and Sevierville-Pigeon Forge area, she continues to encourage visitors to discover for themselves the beauty and charm of this popular destination.

## Smoky Mountain Girl

"I'm so proud to be a Smoky Mountain girl and I've written so many songs about my home, and I never left home to get away from here," Parton said. "I just wanted to get out in the world to do things, then I could come back and do other things."

Things such as Dollywood, which celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. It was always Parton's dream to create something that would bring families together, allowing them to slow down and reconnect.

At Chasing Rainbows, visitors can view mementoes, handwritten song lyrics, and costumes from her roles in *9 to 5*, *Straight Talk*, *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* and *Steel Magnolias*, as well as photos from her many appearances on *Hee Haw* and the *Grand Ole Opry*, where she first performed at age 13 and never looked back.

"You never know when you're young, when you're starting out, if your dreams will come true," she said. "You don't know how you'll be remembered when you're older or how you'll feel about yourself when you're older. Now that I am, it's just a really wonderful feeling."

At 69, Parton shows no signs of slowing down. In addition to Dollywood, she has numerous entertainment venues and still maintains an active concert schedule. New projects keep her busy, too. Her 300-room DreamMore Resort is nearing completion and is set to open this summer next to Dollywood.

The singer, songwriter, actress and entrepreneur finds inspiration and joy in her Tennessee mountain home.





**Discounted admission tickets** to Dollywood and Dollywood's Splash Country are available at all AAA Ohio offices and at [AAA.com](http://AAA.com).

## "I will never get over being a Smoky Mountain girl, nor would I want to."

"I'm still a workin' girl. I've got to hustle to keep it going," she said. "You don't make these things happen without being on the job all day, all the time, night and day, 24/7/365 for years and years and years, but I love it. I love every bit of it."

### Pleasures of Pigeon Forge

Parton is not only the face of Pigeon Forge, she is the heart and soul.

"This area, and I'm not just saying it because I'm from here, whether you ever come to Dollywood or not, *please do*, there's just so many wonderful things to do that it truly is a wonderful place for families," she said.

While Parton will proudly tell people to visit her attractions, she is also an ambassador for the hundreds of other ways they can enjoy Pigeon Forge and its parkway, which many locals refer to as "five miles of fun."

The town offers a variety of attractions and activities, including miniature golf at Firehouse Golf, go-kart racing at The Track, science exhibits at WonderWorks, balloon rides over the Smokies at Wonders of Flight and a trip back in time at the Titanic Museum Attraction. The Island in Pigeon Forge is a popular retail-and-entertainment center where visitors can enjoy bird's-eye views of the town and Mount LeConte in the distance from the 200-foot-high Great Smoky Mountain Wheel.

It is nearly impossible for visitors to go hungry in Pigeon Forge, when independent and chain restaurants offer everything from pancakes and steak to ham-and-beans and chicken. One of the most popular is the Old Mill Restaurant, which serves family-style Southern food, including biscuits and grits. The restaurant is a modern extension of a gristmill built in 1830 that still operates commercially.

"The Old Mill was there all of our lives," said Parton, the fourth in a family of 12 children. "That was actually an active mill, and I'm sure that's where my dad used to get our corn ground up into commeal because we used to raise our own corn and shell it, and Daddy would take it to have it ground, and I'm just certain that's where he had it done."

The Old Mill has expanded into a

## Dollywood's DreamMore Resort

Inspired by Dolly Parton's family experiences growing up in the Great Smoky Mountains, the 100-acre DreamMore Resort is scheduled to open in August. It features more than 300 guestrooms and family suites. Parton envisions it as a place where families can create cherished memories.

"We have really gone all out to make that so family friendly with our front porch," she said. "We really made it a big deal to have chairs on the front porches all around the building, where people can sit out there and dream and talk, just like all my life I remember the porch and all the games we used to play out in the yard."

Resort guests receive discounts and special perks such as front-of-the-line attraction access and door-to-door transportation. To learn more, visit [www.dollywoodsdreammore.com](http://www.dollywoodsdreammore.com).



complex of stores and restaurants, including the Old Mill Pottery House Cafe and Grille (it serves a delicious fried green tomato BLT), Old Mill Pigeon River Pottery, Old Mill Candy Kitchen and Old Forge Distillery.

Live entertainment options are plentiful, too. There are numerous theaters in town, including the Comedy Barn, Country Tonite and the Smoky Mountain Opry, plus dinner theaters such as the Lumberjack Feud and Dolly Parton's Dixie Stampede.

## Mountain Majesty

The Smokies were a huge source of musical inspiration for Parton, and the mountains will always be home. She even bought her old Tennessee mountain home, which will someday be turned into a museum.

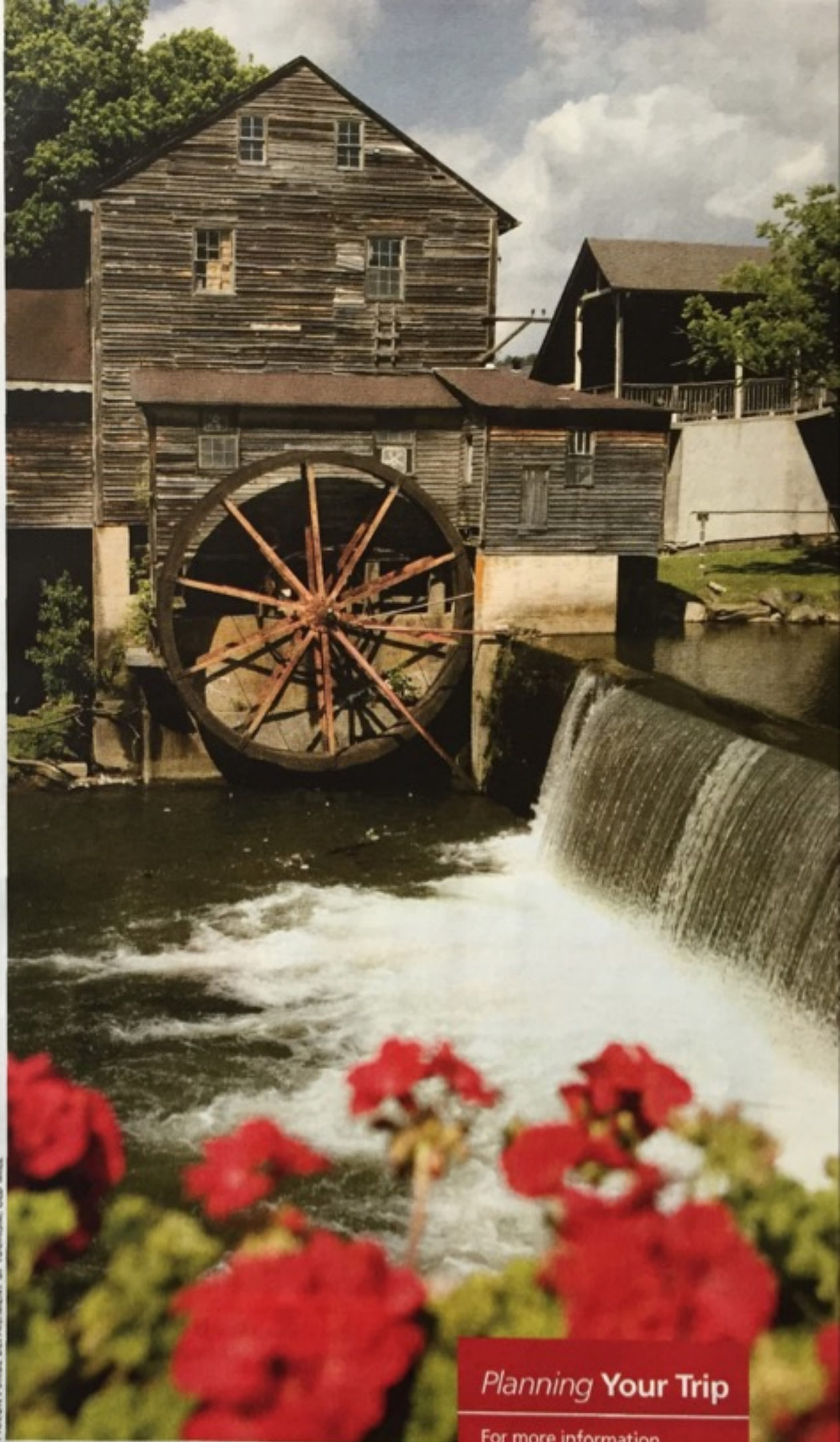
"When we were kids and when we had a chance to get up to the mountains, we would have family reunions because it was a place that you could go and it was free to walk around, and it was absolutely beautiful and it still is," she said.

Though Parton has been around the world many times, no place makes her feel more at peace than Pigeon Forge, and she is passionate about sharing her home with visitors. "I do have a feeling of peace when I come to this area," she said. "I will never get over being a Smoky Mountain girl, nor would I want to."

H&A

*Anietra Hamper is a freelance writer from Gahanna, Ohio.*

PIGEON FORGE DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM: OLD MILL



### Planning Your Trip

For more information, contact (800) 251-9100 or [www.mypigeonforge.com](http://www.mypigeonforge.com). For trip-planning assistance, contact your local AAA Travel agent or [AAA.com/travel](http://AAA.com/travel).