

Ace & TJ no longer will be on Hits 96.1 in Charlotte. Here's what's next for them.

[By Théoden Janes](#)

July 29, 2021 06:48 PM,

The Ace and T.J. Show announces they will no longer be on 96.1

There are some major changes coming to one of the most popular morning radio shows in Charlotte — “The Ace & TJ Show,” which has been on the terrestrial airwaves here for 23 years — and it’s virtually impossible to explain them all in a single breath.

It’s easier to lay them out one at a time:

First, perhaps the biggest piece of news is that David “Ace” Cannon and Ritchie “TJ” Beams are ending their business relationship with iHeartMedia Charlotte and will sign off from Hits 96.1, their home FM station for more than 9 1/2 years, for the last time on Tuesday, Aug. 31.

Second of all, after that date, the show no longer will be available on traditional radio in Charlotte. Instead, Ace & TJ will continue to create a daily morning show that will be available streaming on demand and through a variety of mobile and desktop apps. The format of that show will be much more like the *old* “Ace & TJ Show.” More on that in a minute.

Meanwhile, radio stations in other cities where the syndicated program airs will continue to carry on with the show as if nothing has happened. (We’ll explain that, too.)

And lastly, Ace & TJ have struck a deal with [95.7 The Ride](#) — one of the few remaining independently owned and operated stations in the Charlotte area — that will see the classic-hits station airing 60-second vignettes featuring Ace and TJ every hour of every day beginning in September.

It’s going to be a lot for fans to wrap their heads around, we know.

But let’s have Ace address up front what probably is the biggest of the burning questions people are going to be wondering: Why?

’The technology is now ready’

“We’re just taking full ownership and control of everything,” he said during an interview in Mooresville on Thursday. “It’s something we talked about doing for a long time ... and the opportunity has presented itself because the technology is now ready.”

In other words, the barrier to having full ownership and control of the show was being beholden to a radio station. They knew they could extricate themselves from that arrangements by taking

the show off the terrestrial airwaves in Charlotte and using other delivery methods to get the show to fans locally. These days, there is on-demand streaming at [AceTJ.com](https://www.aceandtj.com), as well as podcasting hosts like Apple and Spotify as well as a variety of apps.

But they didn't want to do that until broadband cellular networks were rock-solidly dependable in the area. 5G signals are now strong throughout the metropolitan area.

"If there ever was a time," Ace said, "this is it.

"It'll take time to get used to it," Ace continued. "People trying to find 'The Ace & TJ Show' won't know where to go to find it. But in reality, we feel like we're making it even easier to get it. Because everything is right here.

"You know, it's always on your phone, your phone's always on you, this is how everybody moves through the world. So no matter where you are, you just hit the button and there you are."

The new product has a name to match, too: They're calling it "Ace TJ 5G." The duo's manager, Adam Goodman, is even calling it "America's first radio show made for 5G."

It is not, however, going to be exclusive to 5G — at least, not in other markets where the show will continue to air. According to a Thursday news release from ATJ Inc., that same live full show will air in eight additional cities, while an edited-down version will be broadcast in five other cities.

Three of those 13 stations are iHeart Radio affiliates, and iHeart's app will continue to carry "The Ace & TJ Show."

In other words, there's no bad blood between Ace, TJ and iHeart.

"This is an amicable parting," said Chadwick "A.J." Hausknecht, Hits 96.1 program director, in an email to The Observer on Thursday. "Ace and TJ have been great partners of ours for 8-plus years and we appreciate all their contributions during their time at the station and wish them well."

Hausknecht, who is also iHeartMedia's senior vice president of programming for Charlotte and Raleigh, added that the station "will announce more details regarding our morning programming soon."

Getting back to their roots

Cannon and Beams have been Ace and TJ since 1993, when the Louisiana natives were paired up for the first time on a Top 40 station in Alexandria, near their hometowns of Pineville and Winnfield. They moved from nights to mornings, then on to Baton Rouge, then to stations in Huntsville and Birmingham in Alabama, before being hired to do KISS 95.1's morning show in Charlotte in 1998.

Back then, TJ recalled, he and Ace had much more time to just talk on the air.

“We played one song an hour, and if we got hot and it was funny, we could stretch it out. ... We would talk for 40 minutes (straight) and then run 17 minutes worth of commercials, that kind of stuff. Well, *this* is more like *that*,” TJ said of the type of show they have planned.

“When we do it this way, it just gives us more of an opportunity to talk to our radio family. It’s just us and them. There won’t be any music, there won’t be any traffic reports and weather reports and things like that. ... It’s gonna be a lot more work on our part, ’cause we can’t take five minutes off and sit there while two songs are playing ... but it’s not really work when all you’re doing is just hanging out with your friends and talking, you know?”

To fill the time, TJ said he and Ace will be adding a number of new segments, features and other “entertaining content.”

And they’ll be doing it, of course, from a new home.

For years, they’ve done the long commute from their homes in Mooresville to the station on Wood Ridge Center Drive in Charlotte, near where Interstate 77 meets Billy Graham Parkway. Soon, they’ll be broadcasting from a studio they’re constructing in a new building not far from the Brawley Road exit.

In that space, they’ll also record the aforementioned vignettes for David Lingafelt’s “95.7 The Ride,” as part of a deal they hope will help them reach a new audience while creating quick-hit content that adds some color and character to the music-focused station.

Said Goodman of the hourly vignettes: “We’re gonna do things like a music news report, a now-trending report, something funny, something that’s associated with our Grin Kids charity, you know, just little things in commercial breaks that are on ‘The Ride.’”

“Now that we’re finally talking about it publicly, though,” TJ said right as Thursday’s interview wrapped up, “I’m starting to think that this was a (mistake). We’re adding more work to it. We should be going the *other* way. God.”

“Yeah,” Ace added. “Most people taper off as they get older.”

“Adam, get iHeart back on the phone,” TJ said to Goodman. “Let’s talk about this.”

They all laughed.

Two final things worth noting.

One, this is not the first time Ace and TJ have gone digital-only.

In May 2011, after being unable to come to terms on a new contract with CBS Radio, the duo left KISS 95.1 — and due to a noncompete clause in their contract, they were restricted from

going on the air in Charlotte or negotiating with other local stations until that December. So they spent six months streaming “The Ace & TJ Show” to computers and mobile devices, broadcasting their syndicated program from a leased studio.

The other is that the news about the show’s upcoming changes broke on an otherwise very tough day for Ace.

Exactly one year ago, around midnight on July 29, his [daughter Payton Cannon died](#) after the rental car she was driving slammed into a tree on the side of a rainy stretch of road near Trump National Golf Club Charlotte on the edge of Lake Norman.

Payton Cannon was the oldest of the two children he shares with his ex-wife Shonnette Cannon of Mooresville. And she had just celebrated her 21st birthday less than four weeks earlier.

“This year of firsts has now kind of concluded,” Ace said when asked about the timing of the announcement. “My first Christmas without my daughter. My first Father’s Day. My first birthday. It kind of all comes full circle to today, which is the actual one year since her death.

“And then tomorrow we announce something fresh, new and exciting that is kind of reinvigorating.”

Friday, Ace and TJ will share the news about their partnership with 95.7 The Ride during a live-streamed town hall-style show for their audience at 9 a.m.

“So for me, yeah, it is ... get through today, and all that it entails. And then tomorrow, you’re looking ahead to the future — and hopefully a very prosperous future and exciting future, and something new for people to join in and be a part of.

“It didn’t intend to be that way, it just — it’s kind of the way everything fell. Which does give me — without overthinking it, it does give me a good feeling.”

Added TJ: “Over the last year, we’ve really come to the realization that if there’s something that we want to do, don’t let it pass you by. You don’t want to waste an opportunity. ’Cause you don’t know whether you (might) look up tomorrow and the opportunity’s not there anymore.”



David “Ace” Cannon, left, and Ritchie “TJ” Beams will be making some major changes to their morning show later this summer. Khadejeh Nikouyeh Knikouyeh@charlotteobserver.com

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