Fort Dodge Broadcasting: A History

Fort Dodge, Iowa, radio and television, from KFJY to Fort Dodge Radio

By Bill Grady

Fort Dodge Radio · fortdodgeradio.com/history/index.html

Fort Dodge on the air, 1939 to today

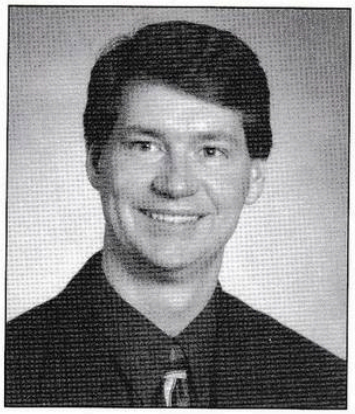
Fort Dodge had small radio stations in the 1920s, but its lasting station arrived on Christmas Eve 1939, when KVFD signed on from the Warden Building downtown. Over the next fifty years the city added a second AM, a television station, a string of commercial FM stations, one low-power educational station and one public NPR affiliate.

Most of the stations started local. KVFD and its TV sister were founded by Ed Breen, a Fort Dodge attorney and state senator. KTLB was started by a KVFD ad salesman, KRIT by a Clarion-area radio man back from Oklahoma, KTPR by an Iowa Central instructor, and Fort Dodge Radio by one person with connections to five Fort Dodge stations. Ownership later moved to regional groups and then to national ones. Today the six commercial stations share one owner, Connoisseur Media.

Fort Dodge and the Iowa Broadcasters Association. Fort Dodge broadcasters were part of the Iowa Broadcasters Association from its start in 1951. Its first president was William B. Quarton, head of WMT in Cedar Rapids; Ed Breen succeeded him in 1952, the year before both men put television stations on the air, WMT-TV in September 1953 and KQTV that November.

Quarton's ties to Fort Dodge ran deeper. Soon after KEOK signed on in 1956, he and partner Bill Dolph took it over and renamed it KWMT after his Cedar Rapids flagship, and in 1968, when he retired from WMT, he became chairman of KWMT Inc. Its president and general manager, James W. Maurer, led the IBA in 1969, and Bill Grady, general manager of KVFD and KUEL, was its president in 2001, making four IBA presidents with Fort Dodge ties in the association's first half century. Quarton even had an early link to Fort Dodge radio: he began his career in 1931 at KWCR in Cedar Rapids, the station that had shared the 1310 frequency with Carl Tunwall's KFJY.

GREETINGS FROM THE PRESIDENT



Bill Grady
President
2001/02

Welcome to West Des Moines for the IBA Summer Convention. I hope the "condensed version" of our annual summer meeting better fits your busy schedule and rewards you with many great ideas and new information.

As President of your Iowa Broadcasters Association this past year, I want to thank you for the support you have given this association. Because of your participation in the Non-Commercial Sustaining Announcement program (NCSA) and your annual membership dues, I am happy to report that the IBA is strong and continues to have the resources needed to serve you today and for many years to come.

As an association, our lobbying efforts are only as strong as the grassroots support that you have given by calling our representatives in Washington, DC. In February, you were well represented with personal, face-to-face visits to each of our Iowa Congressmen. During our visit to Washington, we were successful in telling the story of how pending legislation such as the anti-broadcaster Torricelli Amendment would adversely affect you and your bottomline.

"Greetings from the President": Bill Grady's welcome to the IBA Summer Convention in West Des Moines, written at the end of his 2001–02 term as president of the Iowa Broadcasters Association. Bill Grady collection.

Six stations, one roof. Over four decades, Fort Dodge's six commercial stations changed hands again and again, pairing off with sister stations until they all ended up under one owner and one roof:

- **1966:** KWMT and KKEZ become sister stations.
- **1988:** Dodge Communications pairs KVFD with 92.1, the station that became KUEL.
- **1992:** James Ingstad's group buys KRIT from Linder Broadcasting and renames it KIAQ.

- **1994:** Ingstad adds KTLB and runs both stations from KIAQ's offices at 10th and Central.
- **1997:** Three Eagles Communications buys KIAQ and KTLB from Ingstad.
- **2004:** Three Eagles adds KVFD and KUEL from Waitt/NRG.
- **2007:** Three Eagles buys KWMT and KKEZ from Clear Channel and brings all six stations together in the Dowd Building.
- **2014:** All six pass to Digity, then to Alpha Media.
- **2025:** Connoisseur Media buys the group.

Call letters here moved around constantly, so each history below follows one transmitter and frequency, whatever it was called at the time.

Signed on	Station	Frequency	Later calls	Today
Dec 24, 1939	KVFD	1400 AM (began on 1370)	—	KVFD, news/talk
Oct 1947	KFMY	102.7 FM	—	Off the air by the mid-1950s
Nov 23, 1953	KQTV	UHF channel 21, later 50	KVFD-TV (1966)	Off the air after the May 4, 1977 tornado
Apr 1956	KEOK	540 AM	KWMT	KWMT, country
Sept 1964	KRIT (Clarion)	96.9 FM	KIAQ (1992)	KIAQ, "K97" country
1966	KWMT-FM	94.5 FM	KKEZ	KKEZ, "Mix 94.5"
Sept 1971	KICB	88.1 FM	—	KICB, Iowa Central student radio
July 28, 1975	KTGA	92.1 FM	KSMX, KFTX-FM, KFDC, KUEL, KZLB	KUFX, "92 Rock"
Oct 5, 1975	KTLB (Twin Lakes)	105.5, now 105.9 FM	—	KTLB, "105.9 The Beach"
Sept 15, 1980	KTPR	91.1 FM	KNSH (2012), KNSK (2013)	KNSK, Iowa Public Radio

Signed on	Station	Frequency	Later calls	Today
Apr 1, 2019	Fort Dodge Radio	Online (Live365)	—	Fort Dodge Radio, classic rock

Before KVFD: Carl Tunwall and KFJY

Before KVFD there was Carl S. Tunwall, and by the records that survive he was Fort Dodge's first broadcaster. Born in Moline, Illinois, and orphaned at 10, he was raised by an uncle and aunt and then by the family of Judge Newton Roberts of Ottumwa. His formal schooling ended with the eighth grade, but he built his first wireless set in 1909, and in World War I he served in a radio platoon of the Army Signal Corps in France, where he also helped install radios in planes of Eddie Rickenbacker's squadron. His brother Roy, a supervisor at Fort Dodge Gas & Electric, encouraged him to settle in Fort Dodge after the war. He worked at the hydroelectric dam before opening a radio store, and in 1922 he married Gertrude Mueller. According to local historian Roger Natte, Tunwall's 1920 demonstration of broadcasting at the Hawkeye Fair "created a sensation," and his transmitting set was used again in a John's Dry Goods Co. demonstration advertised for March 4, 1922.

That spring the Standard Radio Equipment Co., which sold Atwater Kent radio sets and parts, put WEAB on the air from rooms 619–23 of the Carver Building and sold time on the air. Licensed May 25, 1922, on 360 meters, the wavelength nearly all early stations shared, it was one of only five broadcasting stations in Iowa that June, along with stations in Ames, Centerville, Davenport and Des Moines. Tunwall was the company's treasurer and its announcer, and Bill Davis was its engineer. WEAB's license was deleted October 30, 1923, and the company failed the next year, according to Ronald Tennant, whose older brother, Carleton, ran its stockroom.

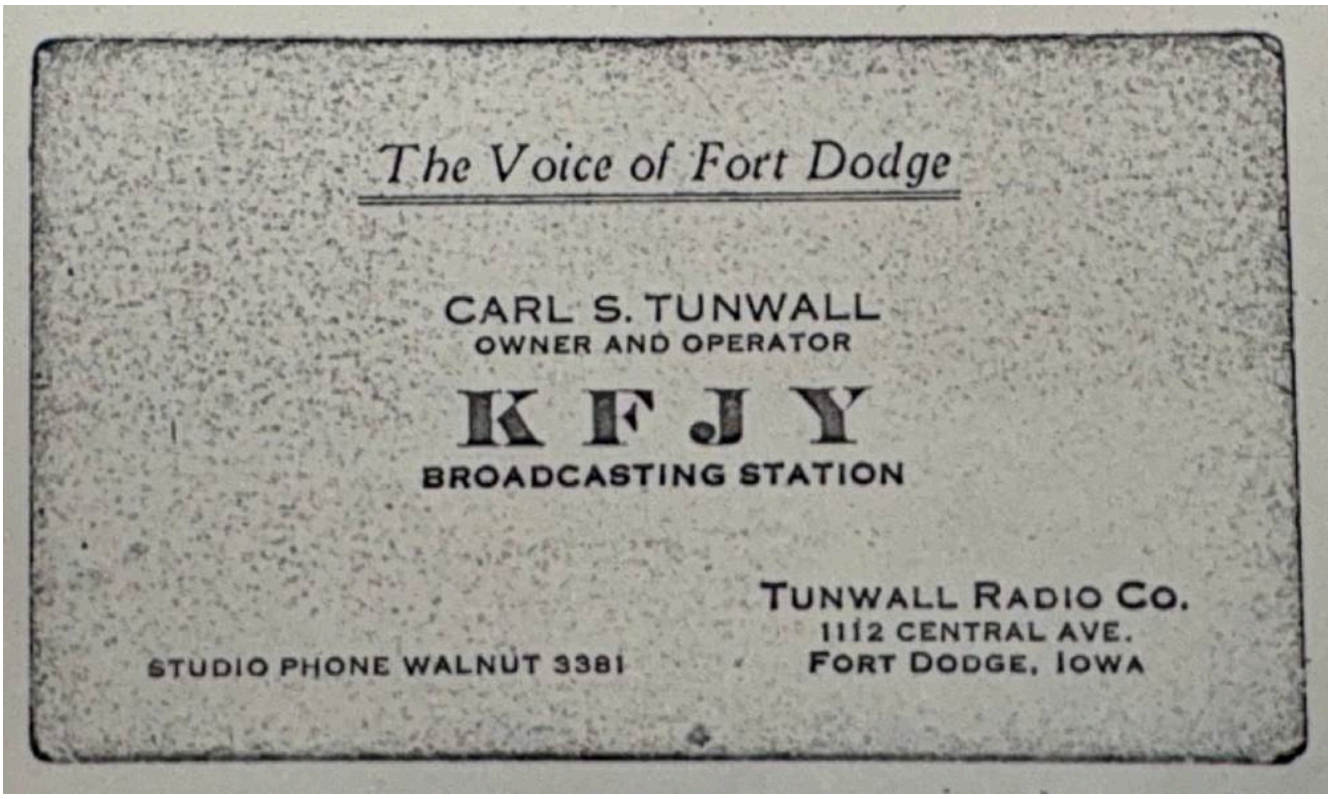


Carl Tunwall outside the Tunwall Radio Co., with radio service and radio supplies in the windows. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

By then Tunwall had his own Tunwall Radio Co., first at 13 North 10th Street, and on September 23, 1923, he put KFJY on the air. The Commerce Department's *Radio Service Bulletin* of October 1, 1923, announced it as a new station: Tunwall Radio Co., Fort Dodge, 50 watts on 246 meters, or 1220 kilocycles. In September 1924 *The Messenger* described its schedule: market reports, farm news and weather every evening at 6, orchestra music from the Princess Theater on Wednesday nights, and church services alternating between First Baptist and Bethlehem Lutheran. By 1927 Tunwall and Carl Anderson were its announcers, with music from 10 to 11 a.m., weather, markets and current events from 5:45 to 6:15 p.m., and a special musical program every Tuesday night; organist Frank Voelker of the Strand Theater was a favorite. *The Messenger* teamed with KFJY and the Fort Dodge Telephone Co. to broadcast primary election returns on June 8, 1926.

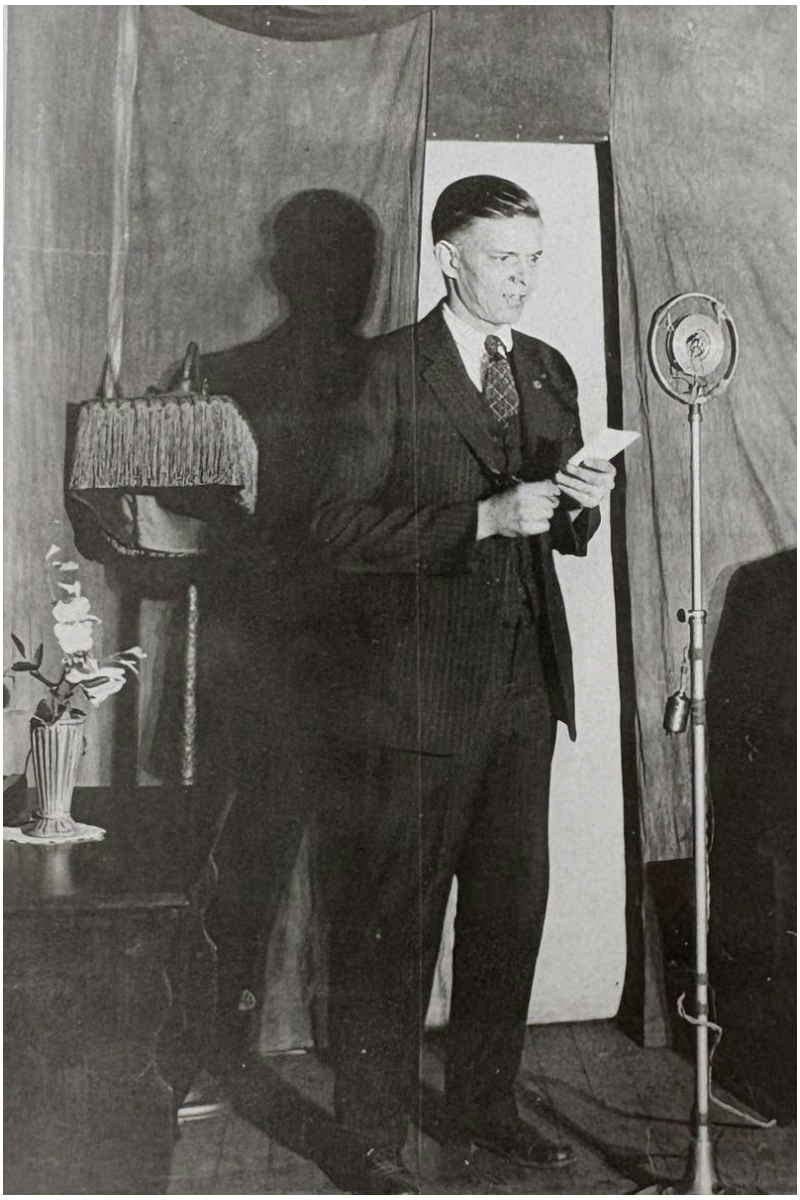
For a small station it carried a long way. A postcard from Belfast, Ireland, verified a KFJY market report, and by early 1927 listeners in 41 states and Canada had written in, averaging 75 letters a day and twice that during prize contests. "We have built up a good reputation throughout the state for the clear quality with which our station is received," Tunwall told *The Messenger* in February

1927. Like most small stations of the day, KFJY was moved around the dial: it was on 1250 kilocycles at 100 watts by 1927 and on 1290 by April 1928, and in the Federal Radio Commission's nationwide reallocation of November 11, 1928, the station, licensed to C.S. Tunwall, moved to 1310 kilocycles, still at 100 watts, sharing time with KWCR in Cedar Rapids.



"The Voice of Fort Dodge": Carl S. Tunwall's business card as owner and operator of KFJY, Tunwall Radio Co., 1112 Central Ave. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

City directories place the studio at 1004 Central Avenue in 1927 and 1928 and at 1112 Central in 1929, the address on Tunwall's business card, which billed KFJY as "The Voice of Fort Dodge." By 1930 the station had moved to Riverdale. Tennant remembered playing in the high school band when it broadcast from Tunwall's Central Avenue studio in 1930. KFJY was not the only voice in town: in September 1924 *The Messenger* counted two stations, both on North 10th Street just off Central Avenue. The other was KFER, a 10-watt station on 1300 kilocycles run by H.E. Giltner of the Auto Electric Service Co., which broadcast Sunday services from the First Methodist Episcopal Church and organ recitals from the Majestic Theater. KFER appears in station lists from late 1924 into early 1925 but is gone from them by September 1925.



Carl Tunwall at the microphone. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

KFJY was still listed in 1931, on 1310 kilocycles from Riverdale, but no Fort Dodge station appears in the 1932 lists or in the first *Broadcasting Yearbook* in 1935. Natte wondered whether it was a victim of the Depression; Tunwall had left the radio retail business in 1929. He had hoped to join the KVFD staff when it opened in 1939, his children later said, "but that didn't happen." Instead he ran a radio repair shop from his home at 1520 Fourth Avenue South from 1934 to 1946, and in 1944 the FCC registered his amateur transmitter there. He was an associate member of the Institute of Radio Engineers. His son Carl Jr. worked with him in the radio business for a time, and Carl Jr. and his brother John both became ham operators. Carl Jr.'s son, Steve

Tunwall, followed his grandfather into radio and later founded Tunwall Radio LLC, which made transmitter control systems for broadcasters.



Amateur station 9UL, with its horn speaker and license certificates on the wall, 1920s. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

KVFD 1400 AM: "The Voice of Northwest Iowa"

KVFD signed on Sunday, December 24, 1939, and it has been on the air ever since, making it one of Iowa's oldest continuously licensed AM stations.

Founding. Northwest Broadcasting Company won a construction permit in 1937 for a 100-watt station on 1370 kHz, sharing time with KFGQ in Boone. Its backers were Fort Dodge attorney Edward Breen, who had been an announcer and program director at WHO in Des Moines and was then a state senator; O.M. Oleson; and Allen R. Loomis II. Local challenges held up construction until the FCC re-granted the permit on July 13, 1939. KVFD went on the air that Christmas Eve, with studios in the Warden Building and a 310-foot tower south of town on Highways 169 and 20. Breen was president and general manager.



The KVFD transmitter building and tower south of town during the station's first years on 1370, 1939–1941; the sign reads "KVFD 1370 On Your Radio." Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

Finding its place on the dial. When the NARBA treaty reshuffled North American stations on March 29, 1941, KVFD moved to 1400. Northwest Broadcasting then bought KFGQ a new tower in exchange for full use of the frequency, and on October 1, 1941 KVFD went to unlimited hours and joined the Mutual network. The new schedule ran from 6 a.m. to midnight, with farm news and markets five times a day, Mutual commentators such as Raymond Gram Swing and Fulton Lewis Jr., Buck the Lonesome Cowboy every morning at 6:30, and Breen himself calling Fort Dodge Dodgers football; Bob Carson was program director. By 1954 KVFD served a nine-county region of about 21,490 families. Day power rose to 1,000 watts, licensed August 30, 1961; the station joined the Iowa Radio Network in 1965, and in 1971 it moved its transmitter and tower half a mile south of the Highways 169 and 20 intersection.



The Webster County
FARMER'S NEWS

Rural Route
Box Holder

Sec. 562 P. L.&R.
U. S. POSTAGE
Fort Dodge, Iowa
PERMIT NO. 101

OL. 1, NO. 10 — OCTOBER, 1941, — Published by Joselyn Press

Station KVFD Joins Mutual Network

With its chief aim the best in e way of entertainment and ed- ational programs for Northwest wa, Radio Station KVFD faces e future with better prospects of fulfilling this aim than ever be- re in its history. On October 1, VFD joined the Mutual Broad- ting system and shortly there- er authorization for full time eration from 6:00 a. m. until 12 dnight was received. Now VFD greets Northwest Iowa th a full day of programs.

Let's take a quick look around e clock with your dial set at 0. Just to start the day off ht the Sunrise Serenade from 0 a. m. until 6:30 a. m. brings u the type of music to help you rt the day. As many of you e recognized, good music and ariety of it is one of the key- ms of KVFD's musical pro- ams. Following the clock ough the day you'll find pro- ams of interest to farmers, emakers, shoppers, both lovers classical music and the inevit- e jitterbug, educational pro- ms of almost every type, va- y shows featuring some of the ion's leading comics and songs America's leading vocalists.

—KVFD—

rough its affiliation with the tual Broadcasting system FD brings you President sevelt in the near future. On sday, November 11, the Presi- t will participate in the im- sive American Legion Armi- e Day ceremonies from Arling- National cemetery and the b of the Unknown Soldier. s program comes to you at 0 a. m., November 11.

—KVFD—

ery Saturday evening KVFD gs you over the Mutual net- k, "the Chicago Theatre of the ." This program features such tanding names in American dre as Thomas Thomas and ton Clure and presents all of e favorite operettas. Be sure to p, among others, for your fa- te Victor Herbert and Rudolph ll opperettas each Saturday ing from 8:45 until 10:00 p. m.

—KVFD—

e early bird catches the worm s to be an under statement e face of KVFD's new sched- ule. For now the early bird also catches Buck, the Lonesome Cow- boy in a program from 6:30 until 6:50 a. m. daily Monday through Saturday. By mail request Buck sings your favorite cowboy tunes.

—KVFD—

One of the stars of tomorrow who styles songs of today is Ra- chel Saxton, KVFD's young fea- tured vocalist. Songs by Saxton come of you daily 12:35 until 12:45.

—KVFD—

When it comes to football and forecasting, KVFD leads the field. Keep abreast of this pace setting sport with KVFD every Wednes- day and Friday evening 6:45 until 7:00 p. m. Ed Breen, your football commentator, brings you the Dick Dunkel football forecast, giving ratings on games played through- out the country each week. Satur- day afternoons features the na- tions leading football games brought to you by the country's leading play by play football com- mentators, and every Friday eve- ning throughout the football sea- son, Ed Breen, KVFD's football commentator, brings you a com- plete play by play description of the Fort Dodge "Dodgers" games. Keep tuned to 1400 and keep sport entertainment at the top of your "must" list.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR
This is Bob Carson, program director for Radio Station KVFD.

Milk Flow Increased By Using Water Bowls

In keeping with the new farm program's request for greater production of milk and other dairy products, water bowls for dairy cows is a timely recommendation.

A study made by the Agricul- tural Experiment Station of Iowa State college showed that dairy cows watered inside by means of water bowls drank about 18 per cent more water and yielded 3.5 per cent more milk and 10.7 per cent more butterfat than cows that were watered twice a day at an outside tank.

Cows watered inside drank an average of 10 times per day while cows watered at the outside tank would frequently drink only once a day.

COWBOY ARTIST

Buck, KVFD's lonesome cowboy entertainer, is on the air several times daily, is in wide demand for northwest Iowa theatre, farm bu- reau and P.T.A. programs.

KVFD Offers Farm News and Markets Five Times Daily

In keeping with its boast of be- ing a farmers' station, Radio Sta- tion KVFD is now offering farm news and markets five times daily, since the station has been authorized by the federal commu- nications commission to operate full time.

Farm news is broadcast at 6:50 a. m. and again at 12:30 p. m. A complete newscast of United Press news is given at 7:15 a. m.

The farm market reports are at 8:55 and 10:00 a. m., and at 12:00 noon.

Farmers as well as the general public will be interested in hearing the nationally known news com- mentators now being heard over this station through the facilities of the Mutual network. These commentators are Raymond Gram Swing, Fulton Lewis, Jr., Wash- ing commnetator, and Cedric Fos- ter.

Heny Peterson Wins Husking Title

Henry Peterson of Callender, former Iowa husking king, will represent Webster county at the district meet in Dallas county Oc- tober 28. Peterson, who also won the county championship last year, was top with 2,310 pounds of corn, in the contest held on the Alfred Bitsad farm near Calehder October 24.

Second place went to Carl Heist of Humboldt, who came in with a net of 2,156 pounds, and third to Dennis Freed of Fort Dodge, who was barely nosed out by Heist. Freed's net was 2,146.

cPrhaps a thousand people wit- nessed the contest, which was staged under ideal yeather condi- tions, with 10 men entered.

The district contest will be held on the George Briatte farm near Dayton, Iowa.

"Station KVFD Joins Mutual Network": the front page of The Webster County Farmer's News, *October 1941. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.*

The full-service years. For decades KVFD was Fort Dodge's hometown station: local news, live local sports, farm programming, middle-of-the-road music, Mutual News, and St. Louis Cardinals baseball. By the late 1950s KVFD was broadcasting every Fort Dodge high school game, and many college games, from the press box at the high school stadium. Breen delivered his own commentary, *It Seems to Me*.



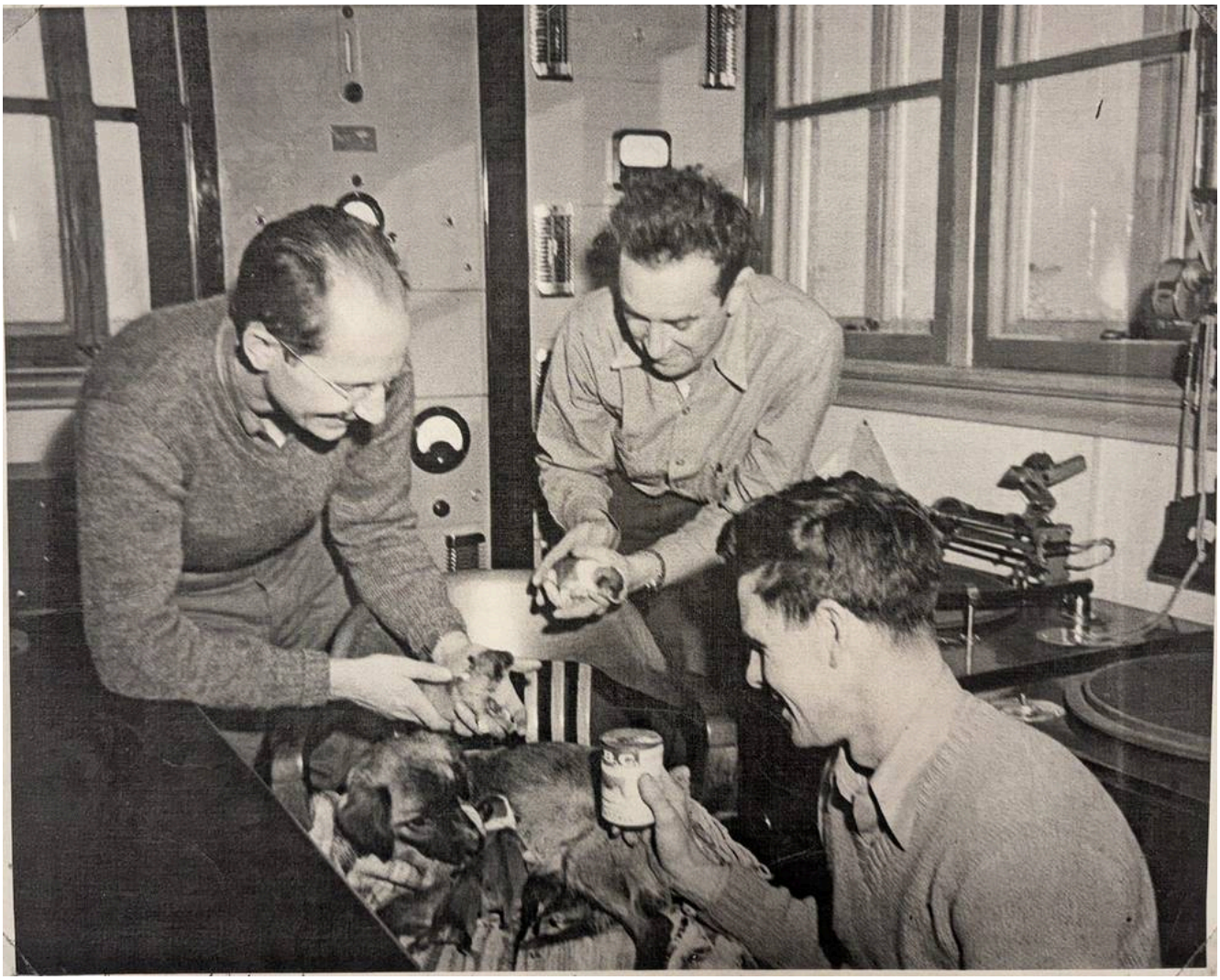
Live music at the KVFD microphones: Mary Varguson at the piano, with Wally Engelhardt and an announcer in the studio. Varguson, who also played at many area clubs and restaurants, was featured on one of the station's most popular local programs, playing listener requests live on the studio's baby grand; if the musicians couldn't sing or play a song, the caller won a prize. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

Drexel Peterson, who joined KVFD in October 1943 and hosted the station's wartime "Your Letter From Home" broadcasts, became its program director and held the job for some thirty years; he also programmed KQTV when it signed on in 1953.



Randolph Churchill (left) being interviewed by Drexel Peterson in the KVFD studios, 1949. From Fort Dodge Today, *November 1994.*

Several programs ran for decades: the Cooking School, first held in 1955; the *Swap Shop*, a half hour at 1 p.m. for listeners buying, selling, trading or giving things away (Landes remembered "when a wife called in and wanted to give away her husband"); and the Rev. Lloyd Meyer's *Old-Fashioned Church of the Air*, broadcast live for an hour every Sunday evening for 24 years from a booth in his Eagle Grove church.



Dave Sinclair, Glenn Harold Sorenson and John Hepburn with the transmitter dog and her pups at the KVFD transmitter house south of town, 1949. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

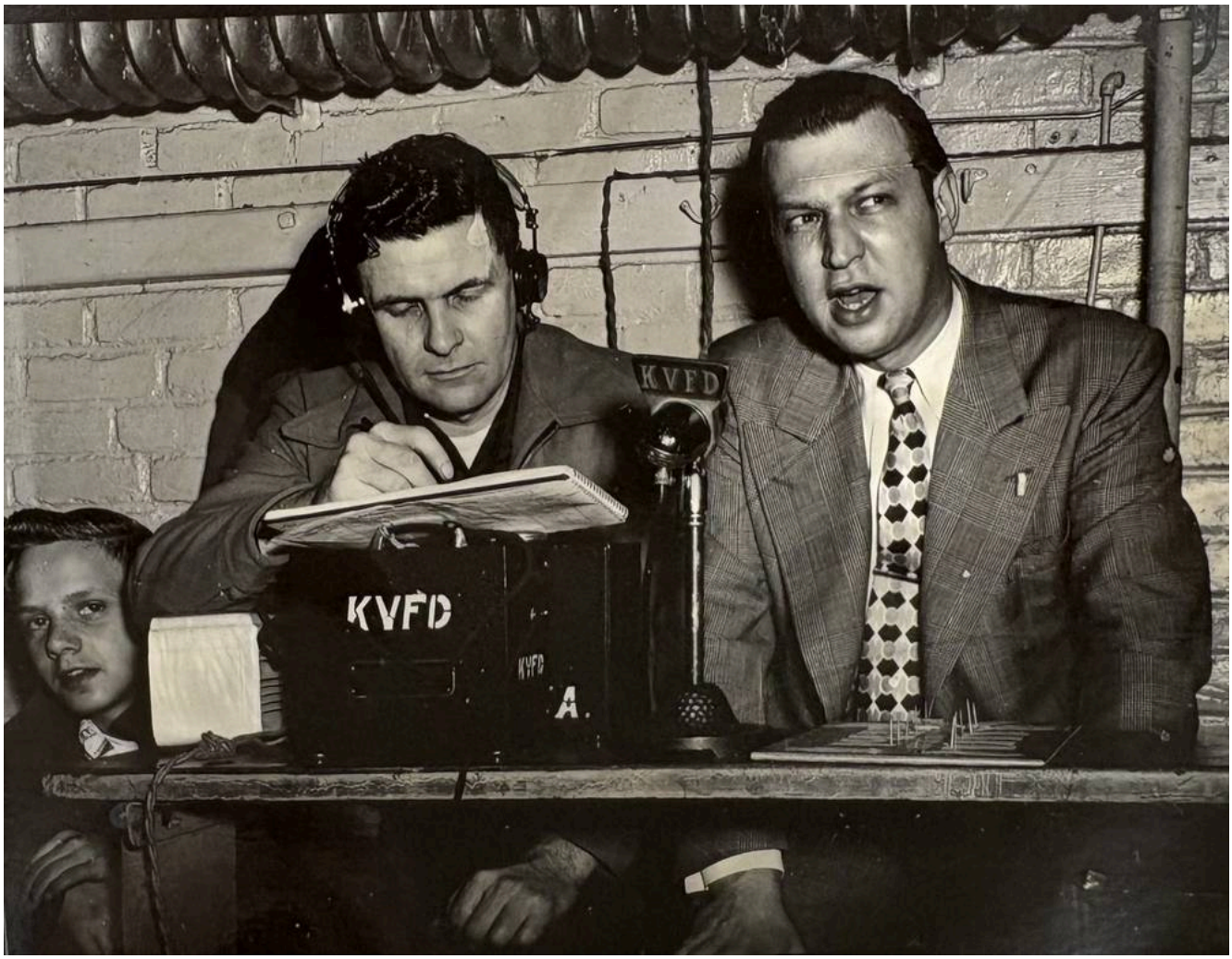
One of KVFD's first hires became its most famous alumnus: Gene Elston joined in 1940 at age 20, worked the press box when the Cubs and White Sox played an exhibition at Fort Dodge's Dodger Stadium on April 9, 1942, returned to KVFD in 1944 after serving in the Navy, began calling minor league baseball in Waterloo two years later, and went on to become the first voice of the Houston Astros and winner of baseball's 2006 Ford C. Frick Award. He died in 2015 at 93.

Sports on KVFD. Local sports were part of KVFD from its first years, when Ed Breen himself called Fort Dodge High School Dodgers football and Gene Elston worked the press box. In the 1950s the station had its own sports director: the *Broadcasting Yearbook* lists Wally Engelhardt, Johnny Green, Bob Roderick and, by 1956, Bob Brown.

Brown had started his journalism career at KQTV in 1953 before moving to KVFD radio, and in 1956 he became sports editor of *The Messenger*, where he stayed until he retired in 1993; the Iowa High School Athletic Association gave him its Sports Media Award in 1976.

Bill Higgins came to KVFD in 1955 as a sports director and broadcaster. He had started in radio at KICD in Spencer and spent 1951 to 1953 in the Army in Tokyo as a news broadcaster for the Far East Network during the Korean War. Like many of Breen's radio staff he worked both sides of the house: in the late 1950s he was also news editor at KQTV, and in the 1960s KVFD's promotion manager. At KVFD he called Fort Dodge Senior High Dodgers games for years and received the same IHSAA award in 1980. Known for his deep, rich voice, Higgins later hosted KVFD's morning show until he retired in 1996; he died on December 31, 2007, two days after Max Landes.

In the 1990s Joe Peterson was sports director of both KVFD and KUEL while doubling as news director, and the Iowa Sportscaster Association named him its 1996 Play-by-Play Announcer of the Year.



Gene Elston (right) at a KVFD broadcast shortly after World War II, with a young fan looking on. Sports were Elston's main interest, and he went on to become the voice of the Houston Astros. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

"Your Letter From Home." During World War II, KVFD mailed a printed weekly letter about life back home to Fort Dodge-area men and women in the service. It began in the last week of October 1943. Ed Breen wrote nearly every opening letter and filled the rest with excerpts from service members' own letters. On Tuesday nights volunteers from the Wa Tan Ye Club, Fort Dodge's women's service club, filled the station's offices to address the envelopes by typewriter and by hand, as many as 5,500 a week, and local sponsors paid for the printing. On the air, Drexel Peterson, who joined KVFD the same week, hosted a companion program at 12:45 each weekday afternoon that grew into interviews with service members home on leave.



Ed Breen, Drexel Peterson and Bob Williams, in uniform, on stage at the Rialto Theater. From Fort Dodge Today, *November 1994.*

The letters ran until 1946. Service members wrote back that the letter reached them faster than any other mail, and about 5,000 of their letters came back to the station. The project's records survive in an archival collection, most of it from 1943–1946: KVFD's letters, the replies, broadcast scripts, photographs and sketches, along with 1974 oral histories in which local historian Roger Natte interviewed Ed Breen and Drexel Peterson. The Webster County Historical Society's Roger Natte Archives Room holds a mix of original letters and digital copies, along with a transcript of the Peterson interview.



Ed Breen (left) shows a letter to K.C. Kirkberg, John Mitchell and an unidentified guest at KVFD, April 16, 1952. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

Drexel Peterson. For more than three decades the voice many listeners connected with KVFD belonged to Drexel Peterson. Polio struck him at six on his parents' farm near Madrid, and he walked on crutches all his adult life. During his treatment in Minneapolis a teacher encouraged his singing and speaking voice, and by the late 1930s he was singing on WOI in Ames. In 1943 he wrote to Ed Breen from Boone asking for an announcing job. Breen later recalled seeing the crutches at their first meeting, hearing an excellent audition, and inviting Peterson's family up the next Saturday to put their doubts to rest.



The historian Will Durant (left) being interviewed by Drexel Peterson in the KVFD studios. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

Peterson stayed 34 years, as announcer and program director. With his wife, Ruth, whom he married in 1945, he hosted *Ruth and Drex* every weekday from 9 to 9:30 a.m.; Ruth gave away a recipe at the end of each show, delivered by taxi to a winner drawn from the phone book. He interviewed Richard Nixon twice, once aboard a campaign train from Waterloo to Fort Dodge, as well as Carl Sandburg, his favorite, Burl Ives, Hedda Hopper, Randolph Churchill and the historian Will Durant, his longest interview, and for years he was the KVFD Santa Claus who read children's letters on the air. When post-polio syndrome forced him to retire, Mayor Herbert Conlon proclaimed April 14, 1977, "Drexel Peterson Day." Ruth died May 10, 1994, and he died September 10, 1999, at 80.



Drexel Peterson Day, April 14, 1977, when he retired from KVFD. Standing, from left: Bill Higgins, Max Landes, Bob Dean, Ruth McTigue and Gordon DeKoster; seated: Drexel and Ruth Peterson. From Fort Dodge Today, *November 1994. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.*

Local owners (1971–1988). Northwest sold KVFD on August 1, 1971, for $450,000, to Fort Dodge Broadcasting Inc., a group of local investors led by longtime Commercial Manager Max Landes, who became President and General Manager. In the 1970s KVFD played middle-of-the-road music by day and, from 1973, Top 40 at night, and announcer "Buckskin Bill" Smith played country tunes and commercial jingles on his guitar during a two-hour program. Landes entered the Iowa Broadcasters Association Hall of Fame in 1995.

The KVFD Radio Club. In the spring of 1979 Bud Young, a teacher at Fort Dodge Senior High, started a radio club that gave students their own program on KVFD. Every Saturday afternoon the

members wrote the show from scratch and recorded it; each student was assigned a segment or could pitch an idea to the group, and the finished program aired Sunday nights at 7 on KVFD. The first show aired Sunday, March 4, 1979, without a name. Hosts Dave Ambroson and Chris Jensen asked listeners to mail in suggestions, and the winning entry, from Todd Macek, made it *Dodger Teen Beat*; the prize was his choice of either a KVFD spy camera or a 16-inch Paul Revere's Pizza. The show mixed school news, commentary, record reviews, comedy sketches and a weekly Billboard top-five countdown. Bill Grady was a member of the first club, and Mike Fellers got his start in it in 1981, at 16; both went on to long careers in radio.

AUDIO

Two early Radio Club shows (14:28). The first, March 4, 1979, has Dave Ambroson and Chris Jensen launching the name contest, Twirp Week news from Maria Powell and Grady's weekly feature, "Off the Wall and Down the Hall," on the lunch line. The second, March 18, 1979, hosted by Mike Morrissey and Dawn McGuire, announces the winning name, *Dodger Teen Beat*, and includes Tracy Vaubel's album feature on the Village People's *Cruisin'*, a detective-serial spoof by Dave Ambroson and Bill Grady called "Get Serious", and Dan and Mike's "Take Five" countdown. Vaubel went on to work at KKEZ for a while. Bill Grady collection.

Max Landes. No one worked in Fort Dodge broadcasting longer: he spent 60 years at KVFD. Born in Marshalltown in 1921, he played baseball at the University of Iowa in the Nile Kinnick era, and he graduated with a communications degree. He entered the Army in 1943 and was wounded in action in Europe in the fall of 1944, earning the Silver Star, the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart. After he recovered, he taught military science at the University of Illinois, coached its rifle team, and left the service as a captain.

He came to Fort Dodge in 1946 and joined KVFD in sales, rising to sales manager and then station manager. Landes later said that during the television years KVFD radio covered KVFD-TV's cash shortfalls to keep channel 21 on the air. He ran the station until the 1988 sale, then stayed on in sales through the award years and into the Three Eagles era, retiring in January 2005 with a celebration at the Laramar Ballroom. Away from the station he served on the Fort Dodge school board from 1968 to 1974, helped organize the YMCA Little League and served for years as its commissioner and a coach, and was named Fort Dodge's Outstanding Young Man in 1953. He died in Fort Dodge on December 29, 2007, at 86.



Bill Grady (right) inducts Max Landes into the Iowa Broadcasters Association Hall of Fame in June 1995, as Landes reads his plaque. Bill Grady collection.

Dean Naven. KVFD's most decorated newsman came to Fort Dodge late in a 45-year career. A Drake University broadcasting graduate, he had flown 35 missions over Europe as a ball-turret gunner in World War II and later served as an Air Force public relations officer during the Berlin airlift. He worked at KRNT in Des Moines and at KOIL and KMTV in Omaha, was news and program director at KMA in Shenandoah, and ran newsrooms in Sioux City before becoming news director at KWMT and then KVFD. In 1991 the Iowa Broadcast News Association gave him its highest honor, the Jack Shelley Award. He had been at KWMT from 1969 to 1974 and at KVFD since 1980. In December 1990, as KVFD rearranged its programming ahead of the switch to adult standards, the station let him go, then rehired him shortly after; he stayed until he retired in December 1991. Naven died of cancer at his home in Fort Dodge on May 28, 1995, at 70.

VIDEO

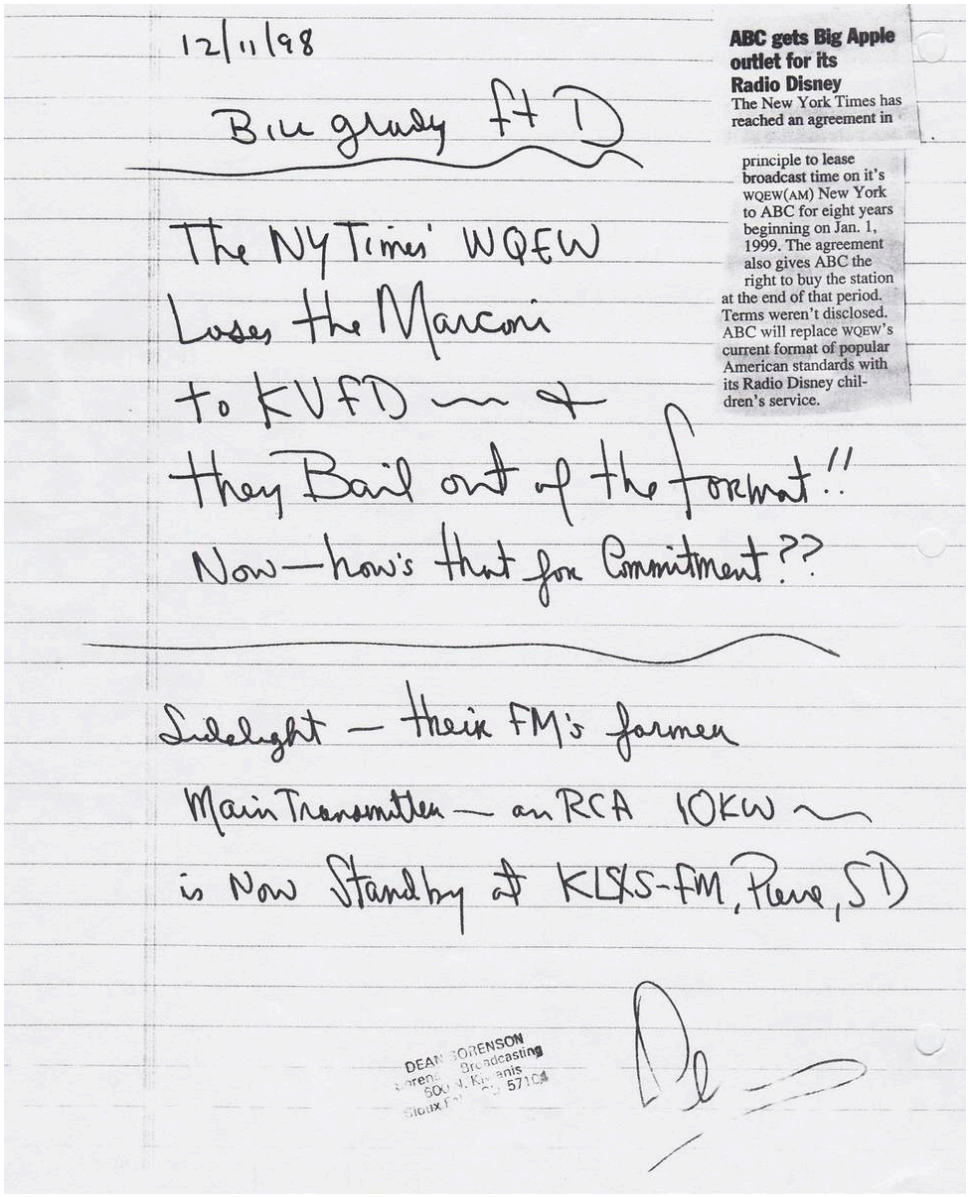
"KVFD Radio, Fort Dodge, Iowa Tribute," by Callie Bierman (YouTube)

Sorenson and the award years (1988–2002). In 1988 Dodge Communications, owned by Dean Sorenson and Ray Lamb, bought KVFD for $475,000, along with the 92.1 FM. On December 17, 1990, KVFD changed from middle-of-the-road full service to adult standards, keeping its local news; the same day, its FM sister became KUEL. Sorenson took full ownership in 1991, and Bill Grady became general manager that December. In 1996 the stations moved to the Dowd Building at 200 North 10th Street.

VIDEO

KVFD receives the 1998 NAB Marconi Award for Adult Standards Station of the Year in Seattle, Washington, in October 1998; General Manager Bill Grady accepts on behalf of the staff (YouTube)

Under Sorenson Broadcasting, KVFD became one of the most honored small-market stations in the country: an NAB Crystal Award and NAB Marconi Award for Adult Standards Station of the Year in 1998, and both awards again in 2000. KVFD's sister station, KUEL-FM, also won Crystal and Marconi honors in 1999. The stations had been Crystal Award finalists in 1996 and 1997, before the three straight wins. Read more about the award streak in Young Guns, Big Wins: The KVFD/KUEL Broadcast Legacy.


12/11/98

Bill grady ft D

The NY Times' WQEW
Loses the Marconi
to KVFD — &
they Bail out of the format!!
Now—how's that for Commitment??

Sidelight — their FM's former
Main Transmitter — an RCA 10KW —
is Now Standby at KLXS-FM, Pierre, SD

ABC gets Big Apple outlet for its Radio Disney

The New York Times has reached an agreement in principle to lease broadcast time on it's WQEW(AM) New York to ABC for eight years beginning on Jan. 1, 1999. The agreement also gives ABC the right to buy the station at the end of that period. Terms weren't disclosed. ABC will replace WQEW's current format of popular American standards with its Radio Disney children's service.

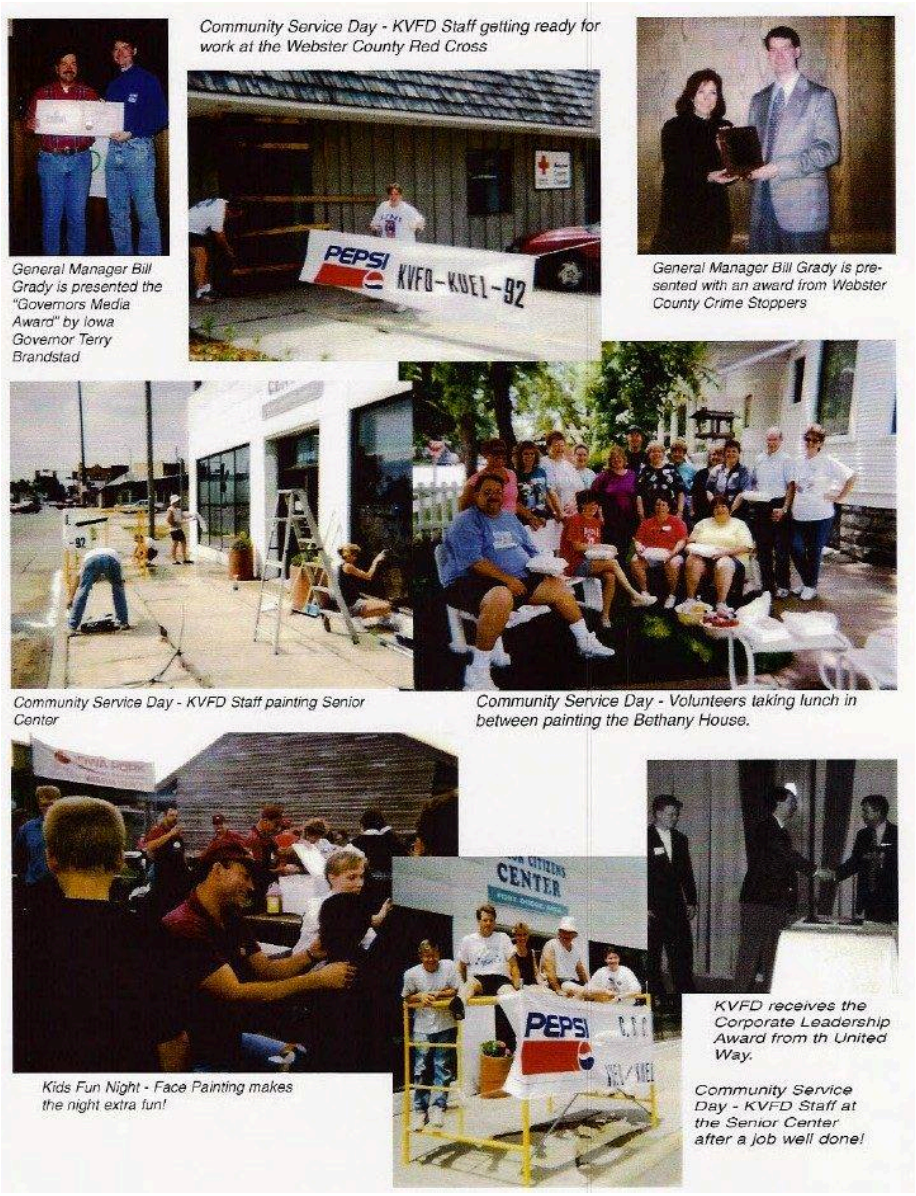
DEAN SORENSON
Sorenson Broadcasting
500 W. Kiwanis
Sioux Falls, SD 57104

"Now — how's that for commitment??" A December 11, 1998, note to Bill Grady from Dean Sorenson of Sorenson Broadcasting, KVFD's owner, with a clipping reporting that The New York Times *would lease its WQEW in New York to ABC for Radio Disney, ending the station's standards format. WQEW, Sorenson wrote, had lost the Marconi to KVFD, "& they bail out of the format!!" Bill Grady collection.*

The award-era staff. The awards went to the stations, but a small staff did the work, most of them in their 20s and 30s and many new to radio. KVFD's 1998 Crystal Award entry, covering 1997, counts 15 employees involved in more than 70 community activities, from 11 seats on boards of directors to 28 volunteer roles and one youth coach.

On June 11, 1997, the station's first Community Service Day sent 70 volunteers from 12 businesses out to clean, fix up and paint for nonprofits including the Red Cross, the Senior

Center, Bethany House, the Domestic/Sexual Assault Outreach Center, the Blanden Memorial Art Museum and the Webster County Historical Society, with an hour of live radio from each work site. "Students in the Arts" put 18 young artists a month on the air and gave eight graduating seniors $500 scholarships to Iowa Central. Kids Fun Night at the Fort Museum invited 2,000 students from 11 elementary schools to raise money for their schools, and every Friday in April the morning show went out live from a moving school bus while students voted for their favorite driver. That year KVFD helped the United Way raise $295,000 and received the agency's first Corporate Leadership Award, along with the Governor's Media Award.



A page from KVFD's winning 1998 NAB Crystal Radio Award entry, showing the station's 1997 community work: Community Service Day at the Webster County Red Cross, the Senior Center and Bethany House; face painting at Kids Fun Night; and the Governor's Media Award, a Webster County Crime Stoppers award and the United Way's first Corporate Leadership Award . Bill Grady collection.

The entry names the people behind it: Operations Manager Jeremy Borash; News Director Joe Peterson; announcers Ed Miska and Brian Peters; Sales Manager Kim Ewing; Traffic Coordinator Deb Telfer; telephone sales representative Chandra Hendrickson; and sales representatives Suzanne Elsbecker, Ann Halbur, Pat McGinty, Linda Trager, Kim Wetzel and Max Landes, whose Kiwanis Club had just given him its Legion of Honor for 50 years of service. Halbur chaired the

Webster County Red Cross board and the March of Dimes WalkAmerica recruitment team, mentored at three schools, and was a 1999 finalist for Radio Wayne Streetfighter of the Year.

Throughout the award years many were a part of the team too, including Bill Higgins, Craig Voorde, Mary Sorenson, Chris Walterman, Phil O'Reilly, Mike Temaat, Rusty McNeil, Mike Fellers, Max Christensen, Jay Alexander and Tony Thomas.

"I know of no other company in Fort Dodge that does so many different things in the interest of improving the community for all," Linda A. Smith, executive director of Webster Health Care, Inc., wrote to the station.



Political season, fall 2000: from left, Laurie Hagey, John Hale, Bill Grady, Gov. Tom Vilsack and Jim Reed on a live remote at the Community Orchard in Fort Dodge. Bill Grady collection.



The Kool 92 and 1400 KVFD building at 3566 Fifth Avenue South, the stations' home before the 1996 move to the Dowd Building. Bill Grady collection.



Ribbon cutting at the KVFD/KUEL Broadcast Center, the former Dowd Building at 200 North 10th Street, at the open house in May 1996. Jim Zabel of WHO-TV and WHO Radio (center, in the black suit) came over from Des Moines to help with the ceremony; Bill Grady stands to his right, and Jeremy Borash is on the right end in the dark blue blazer. Bill Grady collection.

After the award years (2002–today). In July 2002 Grady left after more than ten years as general manager of KVFD and KUEL to start his own company, Star Communications of Iowa, and with him went the award era. The stations went through several managers before they were sold again in 2004, and KVFD dropped adult standards for news/talk; by 2005 it had switched again, to sports, news and oldies.

Today the two-time NAB Marconi Adult Standards Station of the Year is a news/talk station. Waitt Radio had operated Sorenson's stations under an agreement since 2000. In a sale announced in April 2004 and completed in June, KVFD and KUEL went to Three Eagles Communications as part of a $9.45 million deal for nine former Sorenson stations, which also included KWAT and two FMs in Watertown, South Dakota. In both markets Three Eagles was buying out its competition. Three Eagles' Fort Dodge stations passed to Digity in 2014, then to Alpha Media, and in 2025 to Connoisseur Media.

One person saw the stations through all of it. Barb Dennis, whom Grady hired as office manager in April 1992, ran the office through the financial turnaround, the award years and every change of

ownership that followed. On the air, she was Kool 92's first Pumpkin Lady. She retired in April 2021, 29 years to the month after she started, and died March 15, 2022.

Devine Intervention. From November 2008, Mike Devine hosted KVFD's weekday morning show, *Devine Intervention*, 6 to 9 a.m., a mix of local news and talk with city and county officials, candidates and community leaders as guests. He streamed it as video online, an early move for a small-market AM station, and from 2013 he also did afternoons on K97, KIAQ. The show ran until 2023.



Inside the KVFD studio on Devine Intervention*, March 2019: from left, Fort Dodge Mayor Matt Bemrich, Congressman Steve King and host Mike Devine. Courtesy of Mike Devine.*

KFMY 102.7. KVFD's owners added an FM sister in October 1947: KFMY on 102.7, a 10,000-watt signal from an antenna mounted on the KVFD tower. It was among Iowa's early FM stations, but like many early FMs it doesn't seem to have lasted. It appears in the *Broadcasting Yearbook* through the 1954 edition and then drops out of the Fort Dodge listings, and by December 1958

the KFMY call letters belonged to a new station in Eugene, Oregon. The Fort Dodge FM most likely left the air in the mid-1950s. An ashtray bearing the KVFD and KFMY call letters, one on each side, is a rare keepsake from the station; Steve and Cary Estlund of Kirkberg Jewelers gave it to Bill Grady, and it remains in his collection.

KQTV / KVFD-TV: Fort Dodge television, 1953–1977

Fort Dodge had its own television station for 24 years. KQTV signed on November 23, 1953 on UHF channel 21, owned by Ed Breen's Northwest Television Company, and it was the city's only commercial TV station. It started small: in its first year it was on the air from 4:15 to 10:30 each evening, from one 40-by-40-foot studio with a single camera, and a 650-foot tower.



In the KQTV studio: Jim Duncan, with TV Magazine, *in front of a KQTV camera. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.*

The FCC had granted its construction permit on January 29, 1953; KQTV signed on at 18,000 watts and was up to 170,000 by 1955. Breen called the early years "a horrible struggle." "We're over the hump now and making money," he said in 1966, "but what a battle it was. One major problem was that we were pioneers in the UHF field."



The KVFD-TV studio entrance, early 1970s. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.



The KVFD-TV building and tower in winter, early 1970s. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

News and network sharing with WHO-TV. KQTV was an NBC affiliate that also carried ABC, CBS and DuMont programs in its early years. It picked up NBC's feed off the air from WHO-TV in Des Moines, whose own signal was too weak in Fort Dodge to compete, and its network schedule included *Huntley-Brinkley* and *Wednesday Night at the Movies*. It ran local news at 6 and 10 p.m., anchored by Breen, who also delivered his commentary *It Seems to Me*; Bob Brown called Breen the area's first TV news anchorman.



Bob Dean at the KQTV news desk. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

Breen staffed the TV station largely with his radio people. Bob Dean came to KVFD in 1956 after radio jobs in Huntsville and Decatur, Alabama, and stayed 30 years, until poor health forced his retirement in 1986. He was the radio station's news director for nearly all of that time and ran the TV newsroom as well through the 1960s and into the early '70s. Program Director Drexel Peterson, Dick Johnson, Bob Brown and Bill Higgins also worked on both radio and TV. In 1973 Bob Tarbox took over as TV news director and held the job until the station went dark in 1977, while Dean stayed with radio. Roy Chase left KWMT in 1972 to become KVFD-TV's weatherman and sportscaster, and stayed until the tornado took the station off the air.



Bob Brown (left) and Bob Roderick of Northwest Television. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

Behind the scenes, David G. Sinclair kept both stations on the air: he came to KVFD in 1941, was its chief engineer from 1942 to 1972 and vice president of engineering for KQTV and KVFD from 1952 to 1977, and also handled radio communications for the Fort Dodge police and fire departments and the Webster County sheriff. Breen also hosted *Conference Table*, an interview show with local and state newsmakers, and *Calling Ed Breen*, a weekly half-hour call-in show on Tuesdays at 10:30 p.m.



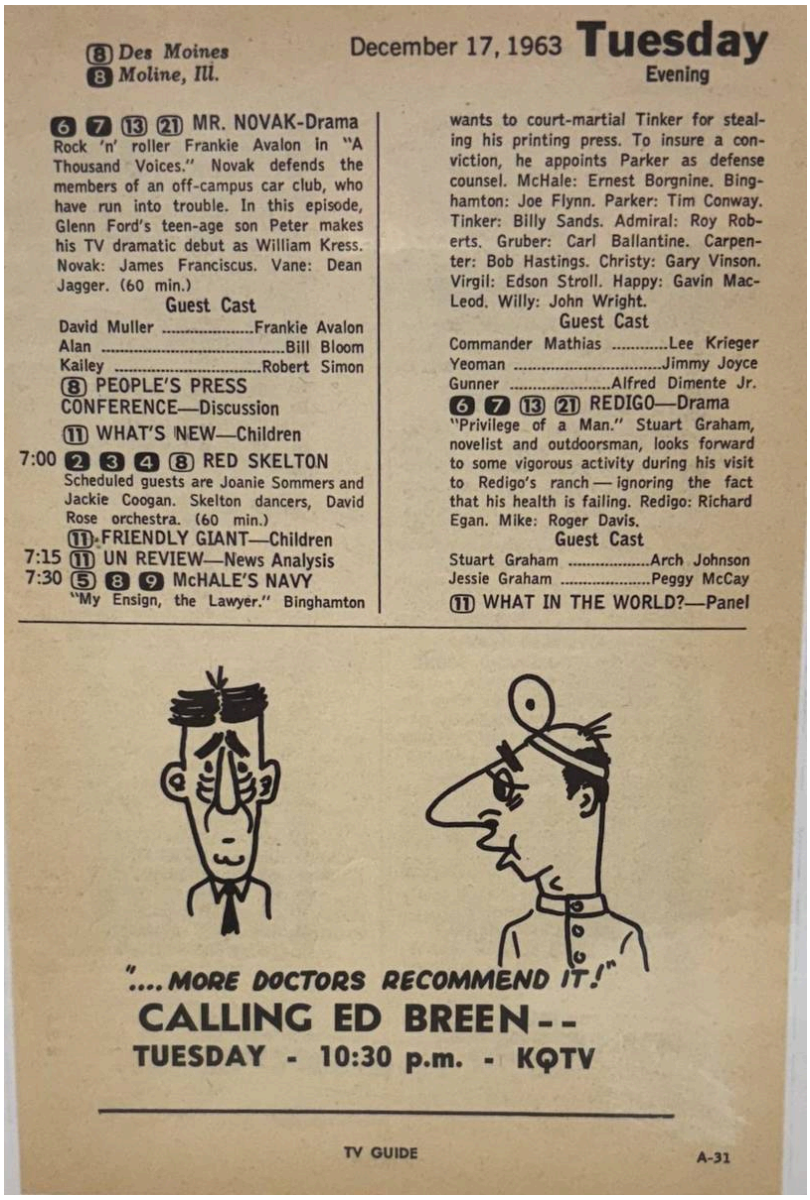
Dave Sinclair in front of the KQTV Channel 21 sign on November 23, 1954, the station's first anniversary. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.



Behind the console during the Barn Dance: *from left, Earl Kopp, Fred Porter (cowboy hat) and Dave Sinclair in the control room, with an unidentified boy. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.*



Ed Breen's chair at the anchor desk, early 1970s. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.



(8) Des Moines
(8) Moline, Ill.

December 17, 1963 **Tuesday**
Evening

(6) (7) (13) (21) MR. NOVAK-Drama
Rock 'n' roller Frankie Avalon in "A Thousand Voices." Novak defends the members of an off-campus car club, who have run into trouble. In this episode, Glenn Ford's teen-age son Peter makes his TV dramatic debut as William Kress. Novak: James Franciscus. Vane: Dean Jagger. (60 min.)

Guest Cast

David Muller .....Frankie Avalon
Alan .....Bill Bloom
Kailey .....Robert Simon

(8) PEOPLE'S PRESS CONFERENCE—Discussion

(11) WHAT'S NEW—Children

7:00 (2) (3) (4) (8) RED SKELTON
Scheduled guests are Joanie Sommers and Jackie Coogan. Skelton dancers, David Rose orchestra. (60 min.)

(11) FRIENDLY GIANT—Children

7:15 (11) UN REVIEW—News Analysis

7:30 (5) (8) (9) McHALE'S NAVY
"My Ensign, the Lawyer." Binghamton wants to court-martial Tinker for stealing his printing press. To insure a conviction, he appoints Parker as defense counsel. McHale: Ernest Borgnine. Binghamton: Joe Flynn. Parker: Tim Conway. Tinker: Billy Sands. Admiral: Roy Roberts. Gruber: Carl Ballantine. Carpenter: Bob Hastings. Christy: Gary Vinson. Virgil: Edson Stroll. Happy: Gavin MacLeod. Willy: John Wright.

Guest Cast

Commander Mathias .....Lee Krieger
Yeoman .....Jimmy Joyce
Gunner .....Alfred Dimente Jr.

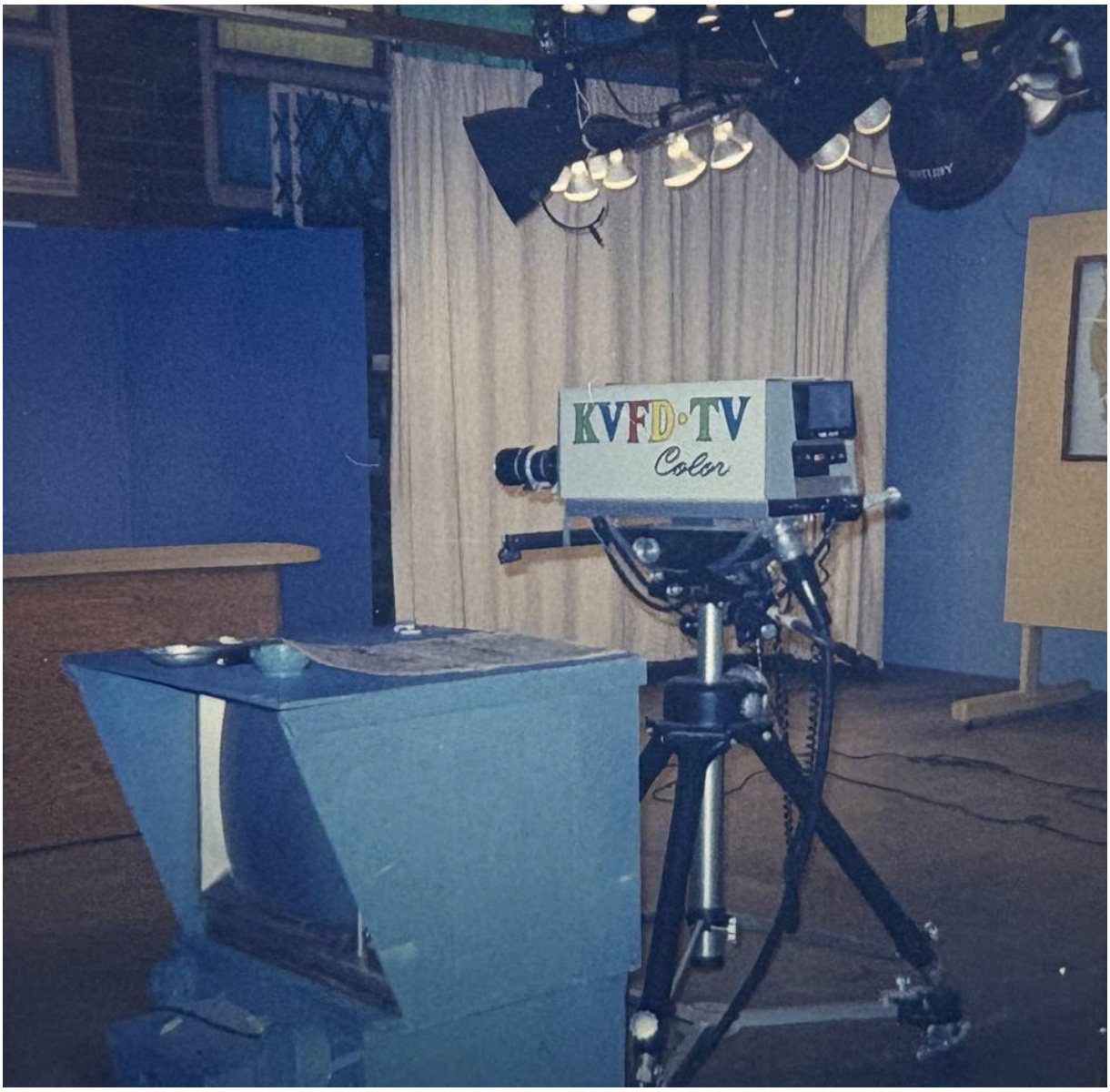
(6) (7) (13) (21) REDIGO—Drama
"Privilege of a Man." Stuart Graham, novelist and outdoorsman, looks forward to some vigorous activity during his visit to Redigo's ranch — ignoring the fact that his health is failing. Redigo: Richard Egan. Mike: Roger Davis.

Guest Cast

Stuart Graham .....Arch Johnson
Jessie Graham .....Peggy McCay

(11) WHAT IN THE WORLD?—Panel

"More doctors recommend it!": Calling Ed Breen, *Tuesdays at 10:30 p.m. on KQTV, in a* TV Guide *ad, December 17, 1963. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.*



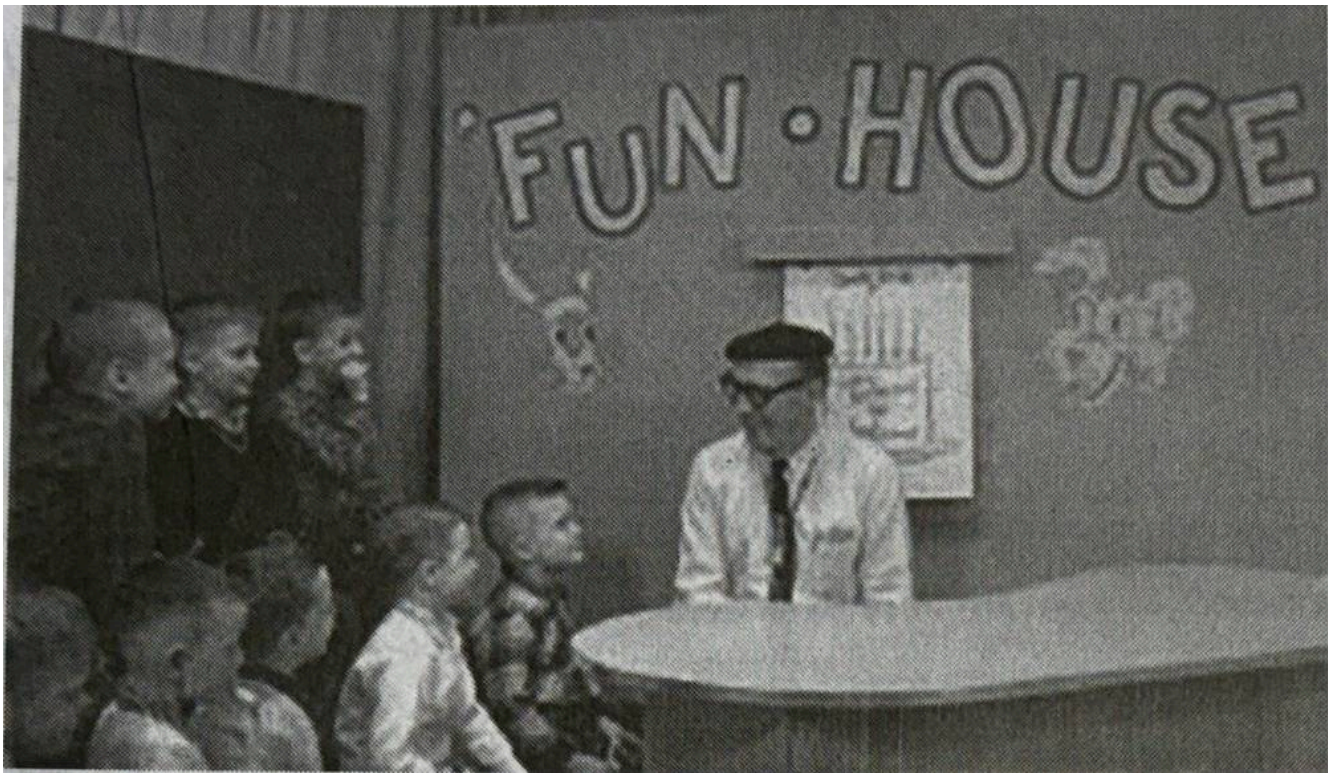
A "KVFD-TV Color" camera on the studio floor, early 1970s. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

Popular local shows and personalities. Local shows included *Saturday Night Barn Dance*, *Uncle Dick's Fun House* with Dick Johnson, and a weekday-morning *Romper Room*. The *Barn Dance*, hosted by Dee Coleman and Bobby Awe, ran until April 15, 1972.



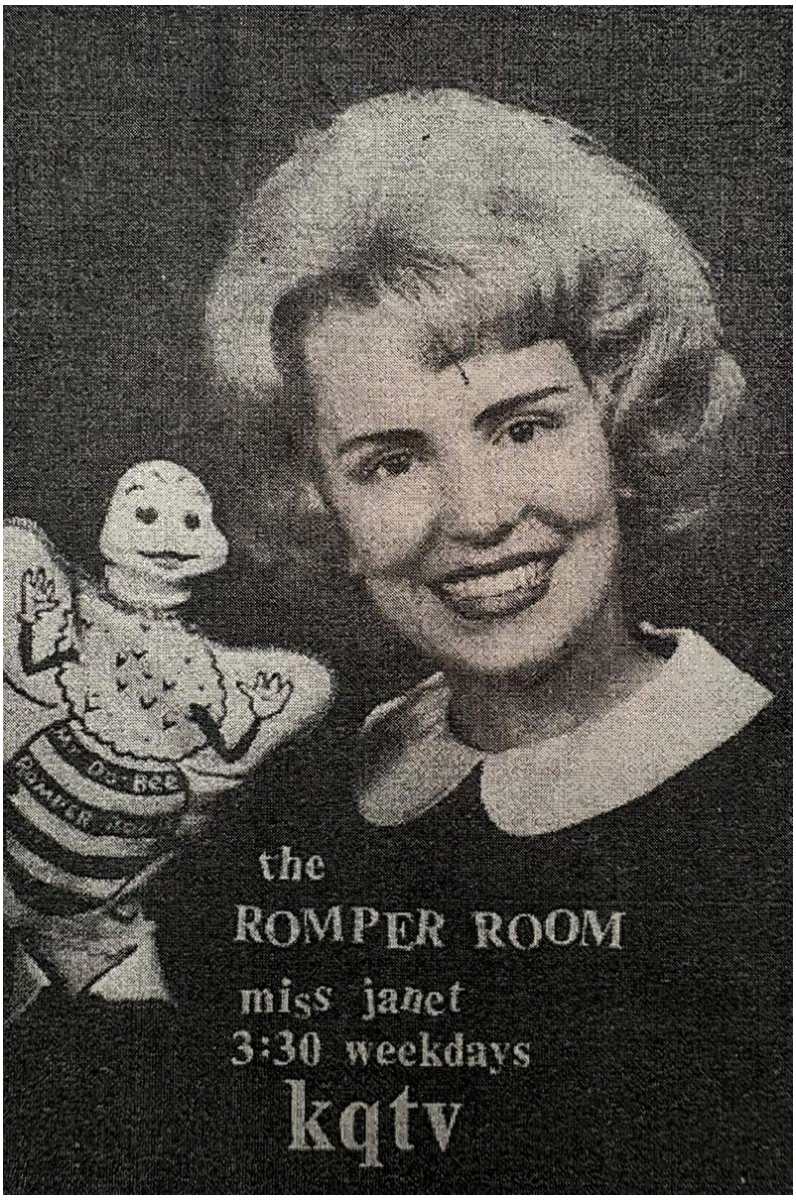
Fred Porter and the Cowboys performing on channel 21's Barn Dance. *Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.*

Fun House aired at 5 p.m. until 1968, when it was cut to a 15-minute *Birthday Party*, and it ended in 1970; Johnson, who had joined KVFD radio in 1953, also did weather and news. The show was Breen's idea. Johnson remembered being called into his office and told, "Starting next Monday, you'll have the 5 to 5:30 slot after Eve." With no videotape, Johnson filled the time between commercials and film by drawing pictures for the kids, and nearly every day brought a birthday party. He later did television news in Great Falls, Montana, and died there in 2024 at 95.



Dick Johnson and a studio full of young guests on Uncle Dick's Fun House, *weekdays from 5 to 5:30 on KQTV. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.*

Romper Room was a national franchise in which each station supplied its own teacher. It had started on WHO-TV in 1954 before coming to KQTV, where Fort Dodge's teacher was Janet Wiewel, "Miss Janet"; except for most of 1964, the show ran until February 1970.



A KQTV ad for Romper Room *with Miss Janet, then airing at 3:30 weekdays. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.*

Eve Rubenstein hosted *Eve's Kitchen* for the station's entire run, and in 1972 she was recognized for logging more on-camera hours than any other woman in the country.



Eve Rubenstein on Eve's Kitchen, *pictured on a 1957 KQTV postcard. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.*

In the late fall of 1958 Breen and cameraman Don Zahrobsky, who worked at the station until 1977, filmed *This Is Fort Dodge*, a tour of the city's landmarks, schools and industries narrated by Breen. Along the way he points out the Warden Building, home to "the studios and offices of KVFD and KQTV," and the film shows the start of a series of historical markers KQTV placed at points of interest around Fort Dodge. In 1966 the call letters changed to KVFD-TV, matching its radio sister.

VIDEO

This Is Fort Dodge (filmed fall 1958), narrated by Ed Breen (YouTube)

Eve Rubenstein. Her career at the station was a story of its own. When her husband, Charlie, died in 1953, Breen, a close family friend, hired her as a continuity writer; when television arrived a year later, at his direction she launched *Eve's Kitchen*, which grew from a cooking show into a program on everything from fashion to gardens to 4-H.

She spent nine years as sales manager, and at the start of 1972 she became general manager of KVFD-TV, with Breen as president. Her commercials for the station won her a trip to Paris and London from the National Footwear Institute, and she served as resolutions chairman of American Women in Radio and Television. Asked by the *Des Moines Register*'s Gordon Gammack whether men resented taking orders from a woman, she said, "Yes. But I don't know why."



Eve Rubenstein on her cooking show in the KQTV studio kitchen, 1950s. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

More local programming. Channel 21 filled its schedule with local shows. *High School Bowl*, a quiz modeled on NBC's *College Bowl*, with format and questions from John Cleary, longtime producer and director of the network show, was hosted by news editor Bob Tarbox, who joined KVFD-TV in 1969; by the early 1970s 27 schools from as far as 87 miles away played tournament-style for prizes and books for their libraries.



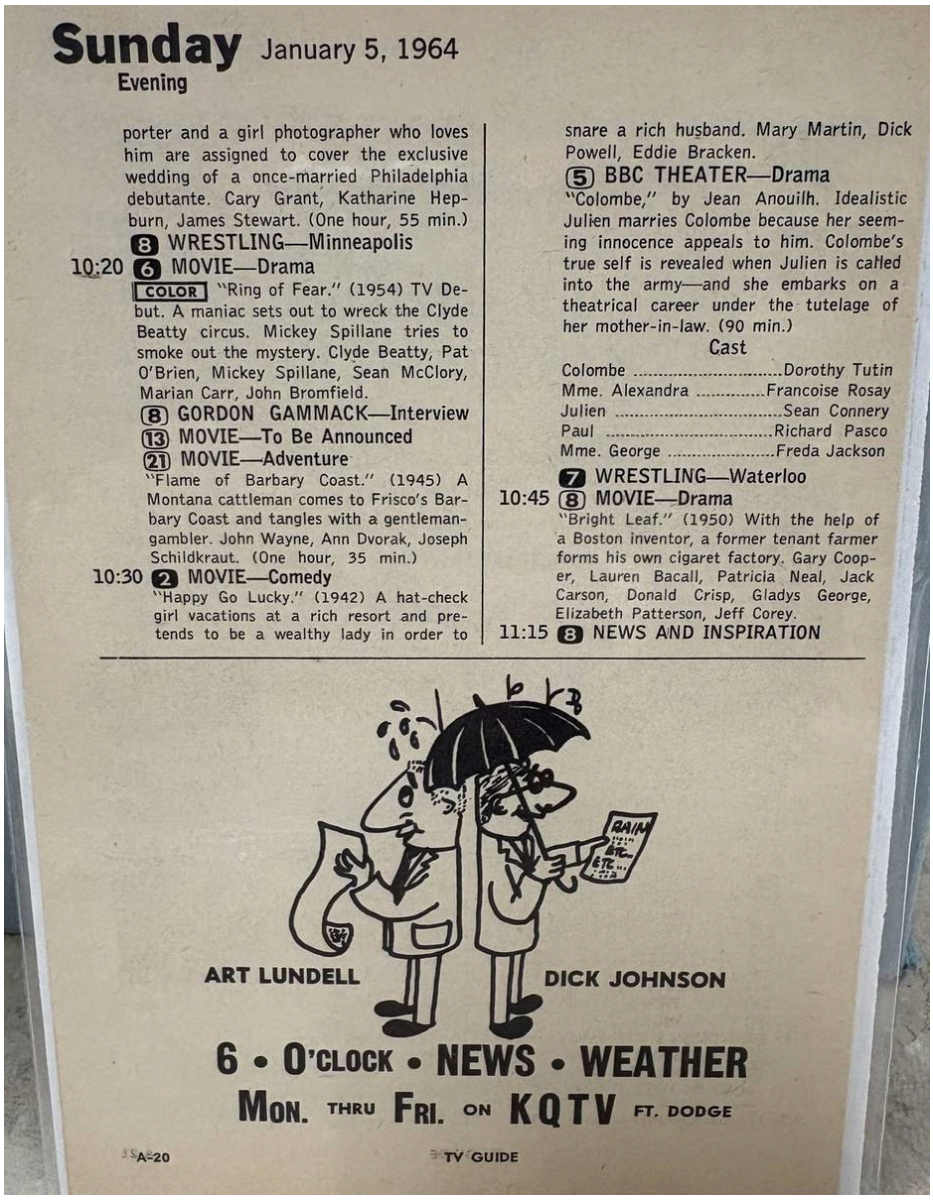
"Quiet please while on the air": an on-air auction on the set, with a "Mystery Package" among the items. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

The Garden Club of the Air, set up by Mrs. Hugh Moore and Mrs. Alfred Hansen of Goldfield with the 6th District Garden Clubs, began on May 2, 1960, as a 13-week series and was still running in the 1970s, winning national and regional garden club awards.



The "KVFD Treasure Chest" set in the color era, early 1970s. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

Encounter, which began around 1971 at the suggestion of Pastor Stanley Ecklund of Grace Lutheran, put a panel of local ministers in front of viewers' questions every Friday. Churches also had *Sermons and Songs* with the Rev. D.D. Underwood of First Assembly of God, and the Rev. Lloyd Meyer's *Little Country Church of Iowa*, which featured rural congregations for nearly a decade.



Sunday January 5, 1964
Evening

porter and a girl photographer who loves him are assigned to cover the exclusive wedding of a once-married Philadelphia debutante. Cary Grant, Katharine Hepburn, James Stewart. (One hour, 55 min.)

8 WRESTLING—Minneapolis

10:20 6 MOVIE—Drama
COLOR "Ring of Fear." (1954) TV Debut. A maniac sets out to wreck the Clyde Beatty circus. Mickey Spillane tries to smoke out the mystery. Clyde Beatty, Pat O'Brien, Mickey Spillane, Sean McClory, Marian Carr, John Bromfield.

8 GORDON GAMMACK—Interview

13 MOVIE—To Be Announced

21 MOVIE—Adventure
"Flame of Barbary Coast." (1945) A Montana cattleman comes to Frisco's Barbary Coast and tangles with a gentleman-gambler. John Wayne, Ann Dvorak, Joseph Schildkraut. (One hour, 35 min.)

10:30 2 MOVIE—Comedy
"Happy Go Lucky." (1942) A hat-check girl vacations at a rich resort and pretends to be a wealthy lady in order to snare a rich husband. Mary Martin, Dick Powell, Eddie Bracken.

5 BBC THEATER—Drama
"Colombe," by Jean Anouilh. Idealistic Julien marries Colombe because her seeming innocence appeals to him. Colombe's true self is revealed when Julien is called into the army—and she embarks on a theatrical career under the tutelage of her mother-in-law. (90 min.)

Cast

Colombe .....Dorothy Tutin
Mme. Alexandra .....Francoise Rosay
Julien .....Sean Connery
Paul .....Richard Pasco
Mme. George .....Freda Jackson

7 WRESTLING—Waterloo

10:45 8 MOVIE—Drama
"Bright Leaf." (1950) With the help of a Boston inventor, a former tenant farmer forms his own cigaret factory. Gary Cooper, Lauren Bacall, Patricia Neal, Jack Carson, Donald Crisp, Gladys George, Elizabeth Patterson, Jeff Corey.

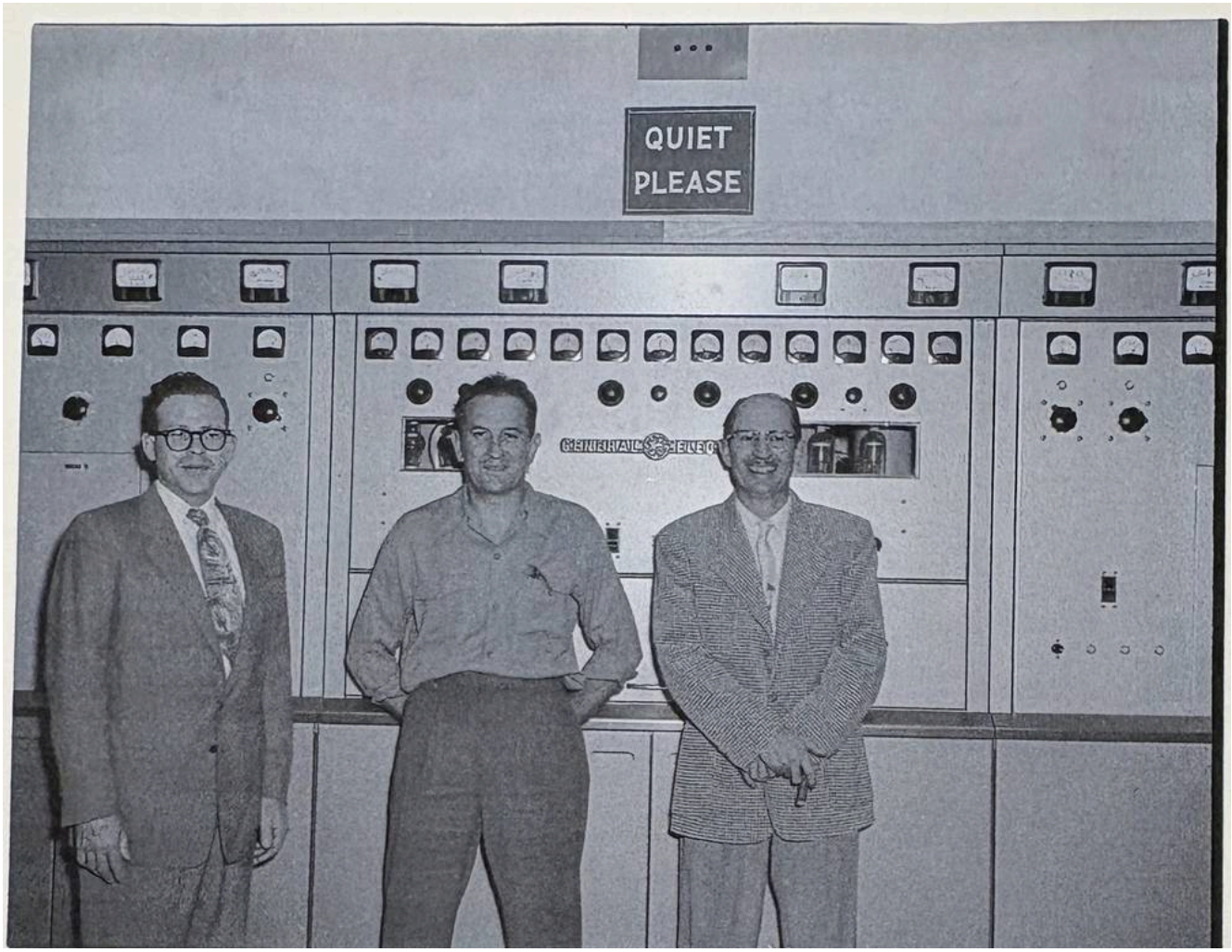
11:15 8 NEWS AND INSPIRATION

Art Lundell and Dick Johnson on KQTV's 6 O'Clock News and Weather, weeknights, in a TV Guide *ad, January 5, 1964. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.*

Art Lundell, who went to work for Breen in 1956, hosted the Saturday *Teen Hop* while also reading the 6 p.m. news on KQTV and working afternoons on KVFD radio; in 1963 *TV Radio Mirror* called him "the busiest man in Fort Dodge."



Art Lundell at the podium as teens dance on his Saturday-afternoon Teen Hop, *4:30 to 5:30 on KQTV. From* TV Radio Mirror, *June 1963. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.*



Under the "Quiet Please" sign at the KQTV control panels: an unidentified man, Glenn Harold Sorenson and, at the far right with the cigar, Dave Sinclair. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

Channel 50. KQTV's studios and original 650-foot tower stood on the edge of Fort Dodge, beside what became the Iowa Central campus; in 1970 the station moved its transmitter to a new 1,200-foot tower at Bradgate, about 25 miles northwest, and raised its power to 414,000 watts. The bigger coverage area never brought in enough advertising, and the station lost money every year after the move.



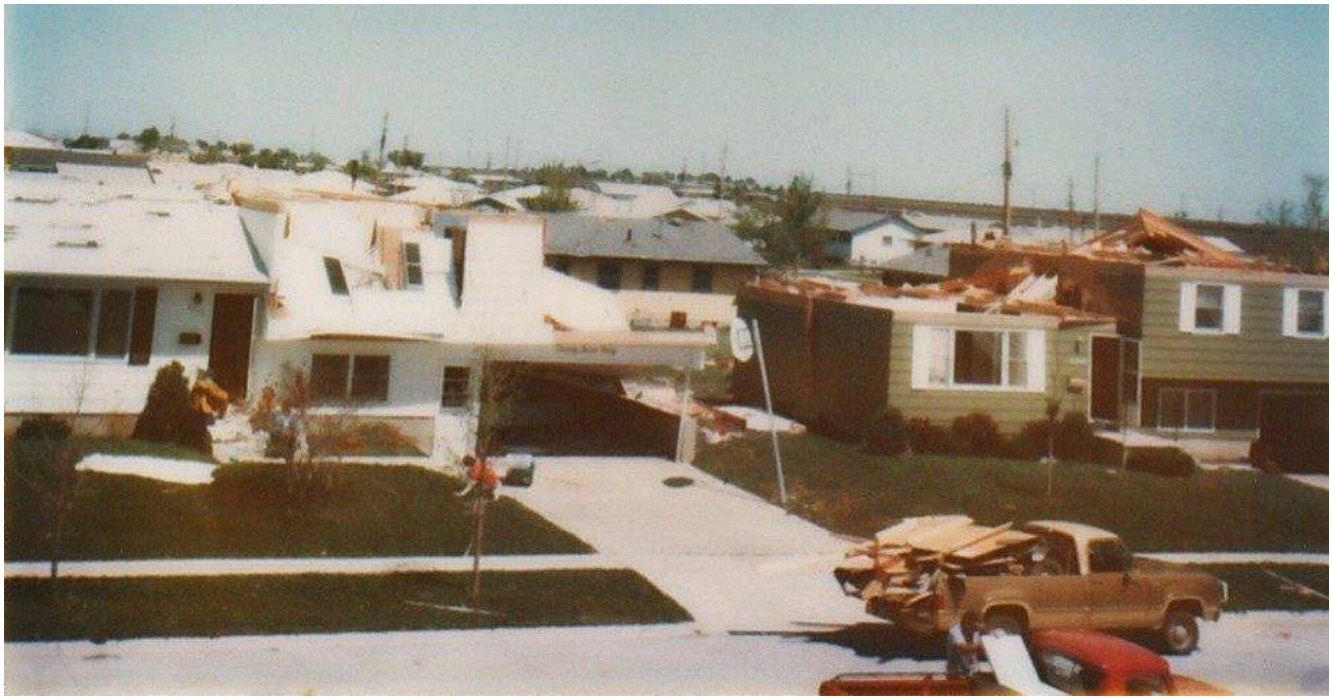
The KQTV-TV Channel 21 test pattern, 1950s. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

In July 1975 Breen agreed to sell the Bradgate tower and channel 21 transmitter to Iowa's public television network, which held a permit for channel 46 in Fort Dodge; the FCC moved that permit to channel 21. KVFD-TV went back to its original Fort Dodge tower on channel 50 with a used transmitter.

The FCC approved the swap in May 1976, and channel 50 went on the air in March 1977. KTIN signed on from Bradgate on channel 21 on April 8, 1977, less than a month before the tornado.

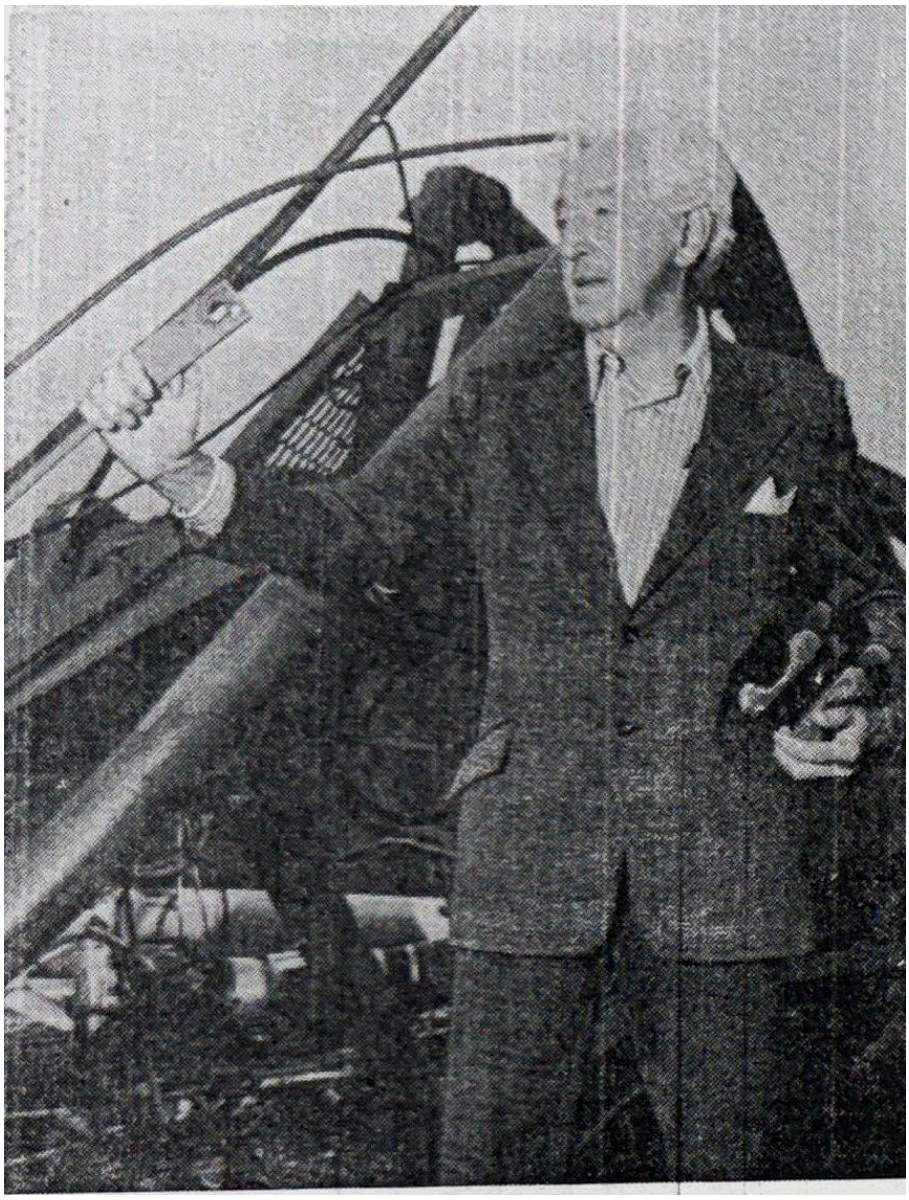
May 4, 1977. That evening an F4 tornado cut a six-block-wide path through northeast Fort Dodge, damaging or unroofing hundreds of homes. The evening newscast was over, and channel 50 had gone to NBC's prime-time schedule, starting at 7 with *The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams*. The only person in the building was engineer Don Lewis, who was keeping an eye on the weather. At 7:15 a Webster County sheriff's deputy spotted a tornado several miles south of town,

the city's sirens sounded, and Lewis put tornado warnings on the air several times. At 7:30 he had just enough time to dive under a steel table before the station took a direct hit. No one at the station was killed. The 650-foot tower was left standing but so badly damaged that it had to come down; ten days later crews from Stainless Tower, the company that had put it up nearly 25 years earlier, returned to dismantle it.



The day after the tornado: looking north at 27th Street and 19th Avenue North on May 5, 1977. Bill Grady collection.

On Saturday, May 14, with Breen and other station veterans watching, the crew cut the guy wires. The plan was to drop the tower to the northwest, but it broke at the tornado-weakened point 250 feet up, and the 400-foot section above flipped back and fell east onto the station building. "Well, let's go see what it hit," Breen said, and strode across the field to look. "He's at his best in a crisis," said Sinclair, the engineer who had put the tower up in 1953. Jim King, the only man to climb the tower after the tornado, directed the job.



Ed Breen, KVFD-TV's 78-year-old president and founder, amid the rubble after the damaged 650-foot tower was lowered to earth on Saturday, May 14, 1977. From The Messenger, *May 16, 1977. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.*

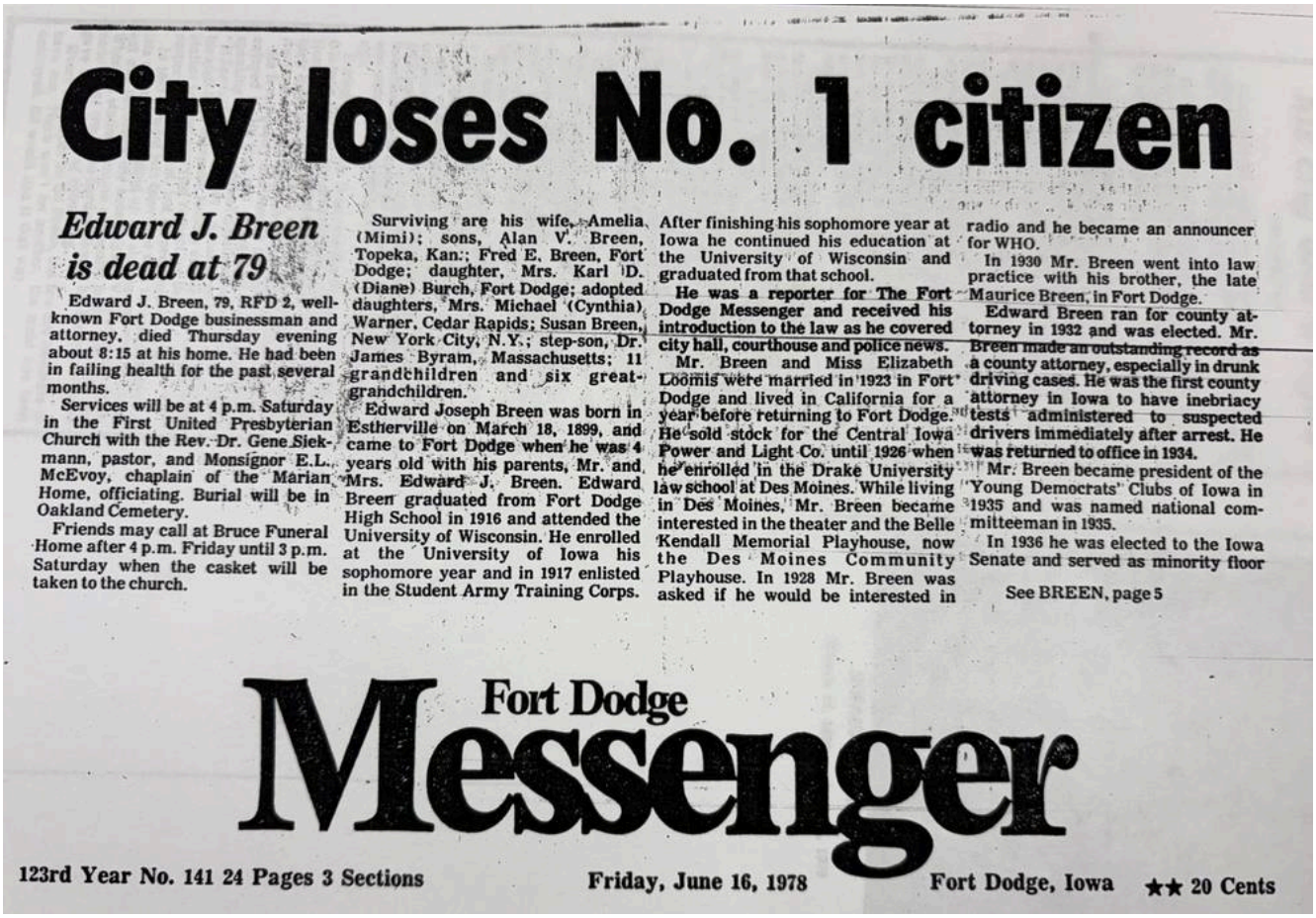
KVFD-TV never returned to the air. Breen, 78, had already put the station up for sale, saying no one in his family was ready to take it over, and insurance covered only about half of a loss of more than $500,000. Even so, he planned to rebuild. He told *The Messenger* it would take $300,000 to $400,000 for a new 650-foot tower and transmitter building and a new studio on the Iowa Central campus, using $615,000 worth of cameras, transmitter and other equipment that had come through the tornado and was stored at Bradgate, and he set a target of May or June 1978 for returning to the air. Two or three buyers had made offers, and Breen said a sale could

come even before construction, but he was moving ahead on the plan to put the station back on the air under its present ownership.

He took an option on a new tower site 2½ miles south of town but died before using it, and the FCC deleted the call sign in 1981. The tower and studio building were removed, and the land became Iowa Central's football practice field for most of the 1980s.

Ed Breen (1899–1978). Born March 18, 1899, in Estherville, Breen graduated from high school in Fort Dodge in 1916 and from the University of Wisconsin in 1921, then came home to work for *The Messenger*. He was Webster County attorney (1932–36) and a state senator (1937–41), part of that time minority leader. He was the second president of the Iowa Broadcasters Association (1952) and entered its Hall of Fame in 1974. As county attorney he was the first in Iowa to test drivers for intoxication right after arrest.

When Fort Dodge turned 100 on August 23, 1950, Breen put on the birthday party himself, with Adm. Chester Nimitz as parade marshal and more than 40,000 people lining Central Avenue. "Everybody's here but the Cardiff Giant," he said. He died at home on June 15, 1978, at 79, and *The Messenger*'s front page called him the city's "No. 1 citizen." In an editorial, Bob Brown wrote that apart from his family, Breen loved two things, "the city of Fort Dodge and a good, scrapping fight," and closed: "Every city needs an Ed Breen, but few are fortunate to have one."



City loses No. 1 citizen

Edward J. Breen is dead at 79

Edward J. Breen, 79, RFD 2, well-known Fort Dodge businessman and attorney, died Thursday evening about 8:15 at his home. He had been in failing health for the past several months.

Services will be at 4 p.m. Saturday in the First United Presbyterian Church with the Rev. Dr. Gene Siekmann, pastor, and Monsignor E.L. McEvoy, chaplain of the Marian Home, officiating. Burial will be in Oakland Cemetery.

Friends may call at Bruce Funeral Home after 4 p.m. Friday until 3 p.m. Saturday when the casket will be taken to the church.

Surviving are his wife, Amelia (Mimi); sons, Alan V. Breen, Topeka, Kan.; Fred E. Breen, Fort Dodge; daughter, Mrs. Karl D. (Diane) Burch, Fort Dodge; adopted daughters, Mrs. Michael (Cynthia) Warner, Cedar Rapids; Susan Breen, New York City, N.Y.; step-son, Dr. James Byram, Massachusetts; 11 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

Edward Joseph Breen was born in Estherville on March 18, 1899, and came to Fort Dodge when he was 4 years old with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Edward J. Breen. Edward Breen graduated from Fort Dodge High School in 1916 and attended the University of Wisconsin. He enrolled at the University of Iowa his sophomore year and in 1917 enlisted in the Student Army Training Corps.

After finishing his sophomore year at Iowa he continued his education at the University of Wisconsin and graduated from that school.

He was a reporter for The Fort Dodge Messenger and received his introduction to the law as he covered city hall, courthouse and police news.

Mr. Breen and Miss Elizabeth Loomis were married in 1923 in Fort Dodge and lived in California for a year before returning to Fort Dodge. He sold stock for the Central Iowa Power and Light Co. until 1926 when he enrolled in the Drake University law school at Des Moines. While living in Des Moines, Mr. Breen became interested in the theater and the Belle Kendall Memorial Playhouse, now the Des Moines Community Playhouse. In 1928 Mr. Breen was asked if he would be interested in radio and he became an announcer for WHO.

In 1930 Mr. Breen went into law practice with his brother, the late Maurice Breen, in Fort Dodge.

Edward Breen ran for county attorney in 1932 and was elected. Mr. Breen made an outstanding record as a county attorney, especially in drunk driving cases. He was the first county attorney in Iowa to have inebriacy tests administered to suspected drivers immediately after arrest. He was returned to office in 1934.

Mr. Breen became president of the Young Democrats' Clubs of Iowa in 1935 and was named national committeeman in 1935.

In 1936 he was elected to the Iowa Senate and served as minority floor

See BREEN, page 5

Fort Dodge Messenger

123rd Year No. 141 24 Pages 3 Sections Friday, June 16, 1978 Fort Dodge, Iowa ★★ 20 Cents

"City loses No. 1 citizen": the front page of The Messenger, *Friday, June 16, 1978, the day after Ed Breen died. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.*

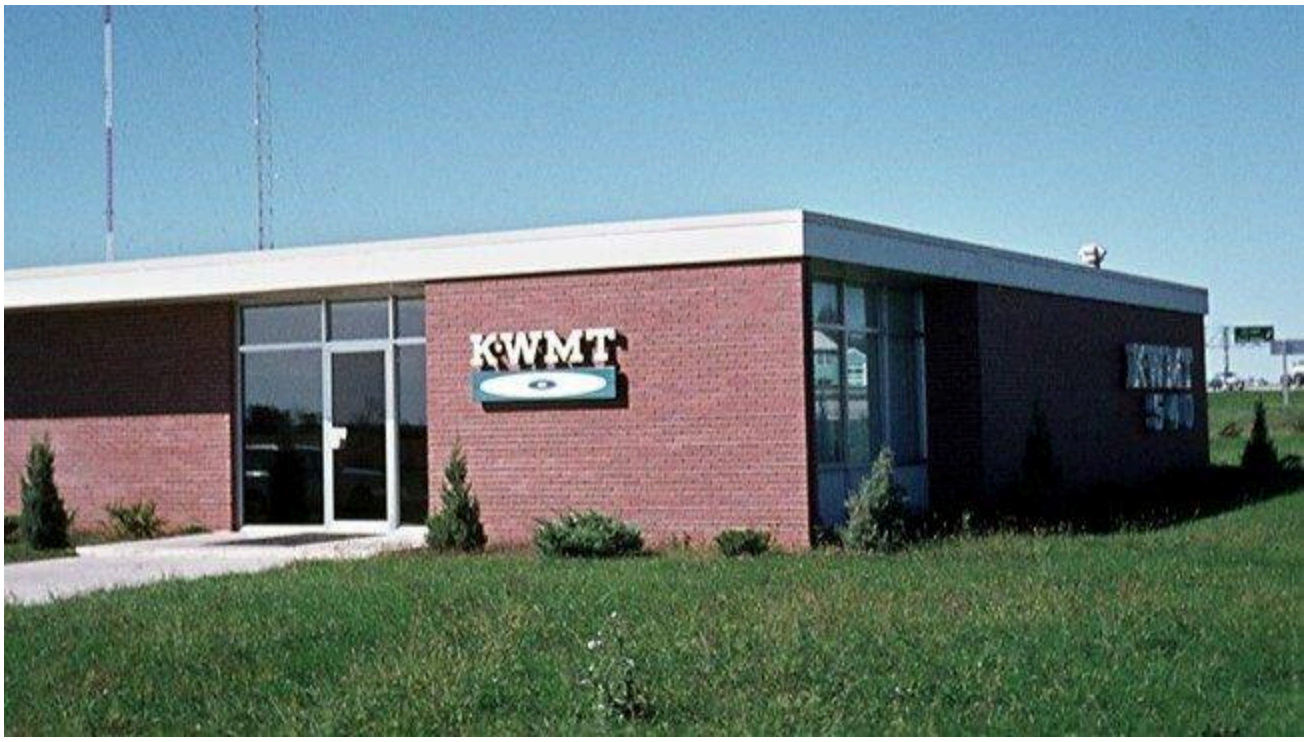
KWMT 540 AM and KKEZ 94.5 FM

KWMT, Fort Dodge's second AM station, signed on in April 1956 as KEOK. Soon after, the owners of WMT in Cedar Rapids bought it and renamed it after their flagship. Its spot at 540, the bottom of the dial, carries a long way: 5,000 watts by day, with power cut back at night to protect clear-channel stations in Canada and Mexico.



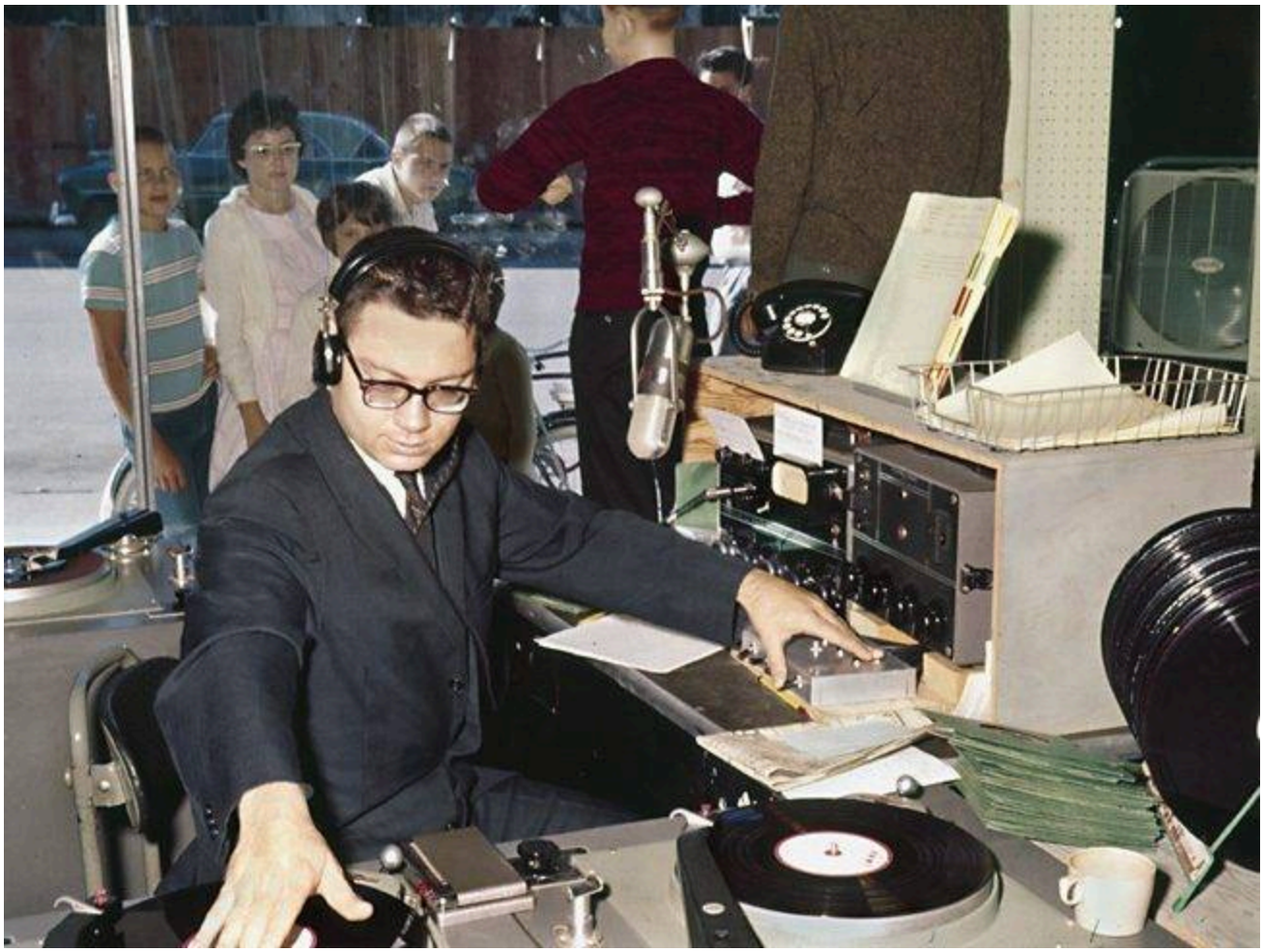
Where KWMT began: the KEOK 540 building, 1956. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

The early years. Under manager Burns Nugent, KWMT built a new $75,000 studio building beside its transmitter at 540 A Street, and in 1956 Nugent hired Don Rose as program director; Rose brought in the Top 40 format while the station was still running 1,000 watts. Later, under General Manager James W. Maurer, KWMT billed itself as "Iowa's largest daytime coverage" and opened what it called the newest and most advanced studios in the Midwest, completed about 1961, to the public with an open house.



The KWMT building at 540 A Street, 1961. Courtesy of Deane Johnson.

Its 1961 air staff was Paul Brown in the morning, who coined the line "54, that's easy to remember," Phil Robbins from 9 to noon, Roy Chase afternoons and evenings, and Peter McLane, with Tom Danaher as news director. Danaher, who lived in Fort Dodge from 1958 to 1967, was remembered by *The Messenger* as "an enterprising and able competitor" who "had his share of scoops"; off the air, he made the first contacts that led to the gift of land for Rogers Park, and he left radio for public relations work with the Iowa Department of Public Safety.



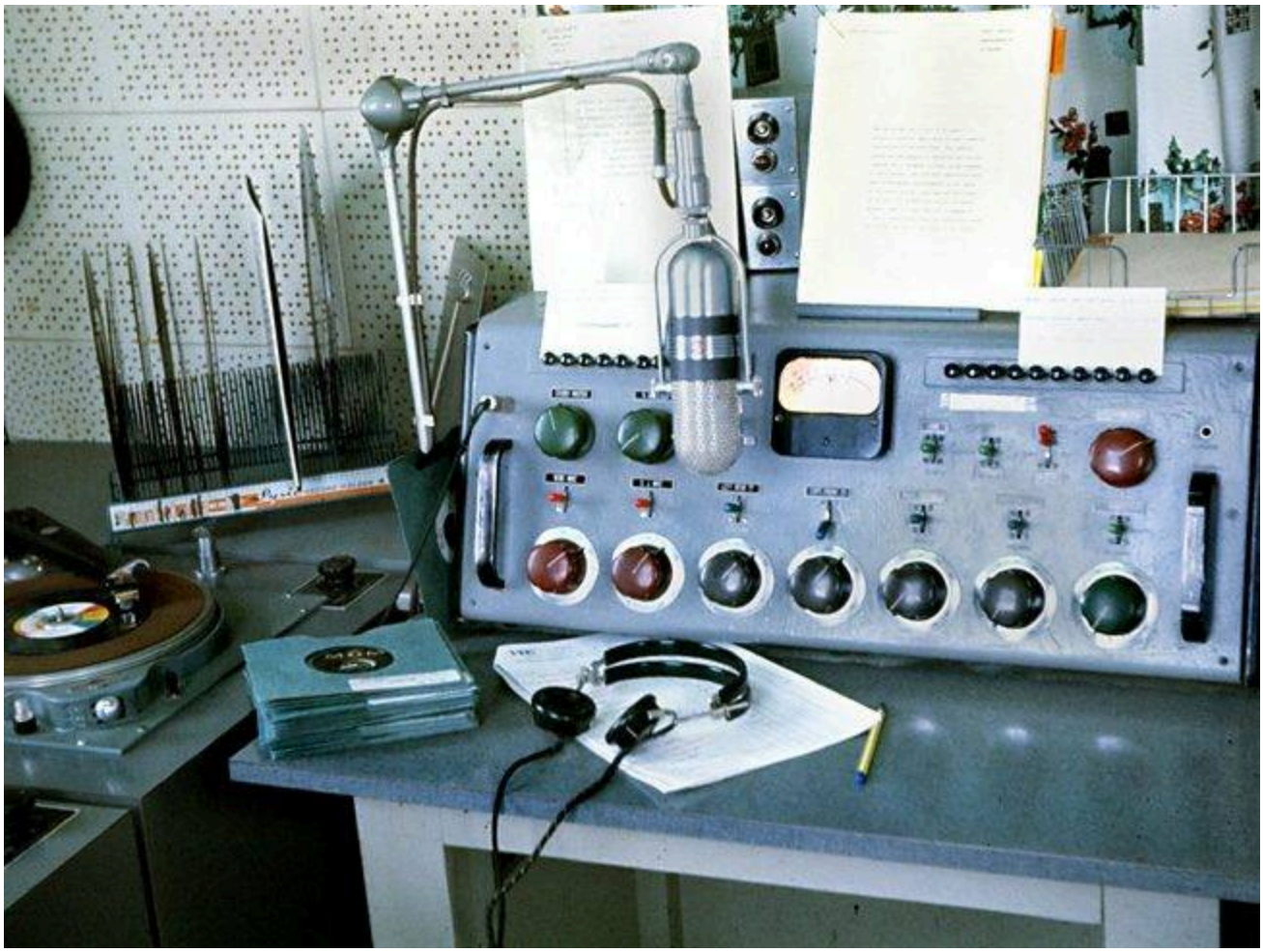
"Dr." Don Rose broadcasting live for KWMT from the Sears store in downtown Fort Dodge, 1960, as shoppers watch through the window. Courtesy of Deane Johnson.

Farm Director Bob Nance led a two-hour daily *Farm Hour* with Bill Alford and Jerry Brady, and Roy Chase called lucky listeners five times a day as the Gus Glaser Money Man. Chase, a Brown Institute graduate, had joined the station in 1957 as a disc jockey and chief engineer; he later hosted mornings as "The Chase Is On" and spent weekends spinning records at teen sock hops. His wife, Ann, also worked at KWMT in those years.



Roy Chase on a KWMT remote at the Fort Dodge Sears store, with young fans crowded behind him. Courtesy of Deane Johnson.

The Winter Dance Party. KWMT's disc jockeys hosted sock hops across Iowa and as far away as Wisconsin, and on January 30, 1959, the station sponsored the Winter Dance Party at Fort Dodge's Laramar Ballroom, with Buddy Holly, three nights before his last show at the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake. In 2001 the Iowa Rock 'n Roll Music Association inducted KWMT into its Hall of Fame as one of the first Iowa stations to make the move to rock and roll.



The original KWMT on-air studio, 1960: the control board, microphone, turntable and a rack of 45s. Courtesy of Deane Johnson.

A Top 40 training ground. In the late 1950s and the 1960s KWMT played Top 40, and several of its disc jockeys went on to national careers. "Dr." Don Rose auditioned in 1956. He left to program KTUL in Tulsa, came back to KWMT's air staff when that didn't work out, and then programmed sister station WEBC in Duluth before going on to WQXI Atlanta, WFIL Philadelphia and KFRC San Francisco; he was *Billboard*'s Disc Jockey of the Year for 1973 and entered the Bay Area Radio Hall of Fame in 2006. Deane Johnson, who succeeded Rose as program director, left KWMT in 1962 for Storz Broadcasting as program director of KOMA in Oklahoma City and later of WTIX in New Orleans.



Peter McLane on the air in KWMT's new studios, 1962. Courtesy of Deane Johnson.

Peter "Rabbit" McLane programmed KWMT before moving to KIOA in Des Moines in 1963. As program director there he led the "Good Guys" era, the longest run of success in KIOA's history, through 1977, and he entered the Iowa Broadcasters Association Hall of Fame in 2000.



The K-WMT Christmas bus party, the day after Thanksgiving, November 1966. The group rode a Fort Dodge Transportation Co. charter to the Ice Follies in Des Moines, with steaks in Boone along the way. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

Country and farm (from 1970). KWMT, a rock-and-roll station since 1957, switched to country in 1970, a move Roy Chase and Jerry Sheeder pushed for, and became one of the region's most respected farm stations; Duane Murley, hired in 1985 as a high school senior, got his start when Farm Director Doug Cooper asked him to fill in on the market reports; Murley later became farm director himself and, more than three decades later, left for WHO-AM in Des Moines. Dale Eichor, DJ and music director from 1972, was the Country Music Association's small-market DJ of the Year in 1974 and *Billboard*'s small-market Program Director of the Year in 1989, and was inducted into the Country Music DJ Hall of Fame in 2001.



"Join Us in K-WMT Country": KWMT's March 1970 ad for its new country format, with the "K-WMT Countrymen" and the station's news, farm, weather and sports staff. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

KWMT's March 1970 "K-WMT Country" lineup featured Ken Churchill, Jerry Sheeder, Dick Hake, Michelle Brooks and Roy Chase, with Dean Naven as news director, Dave Miller as farm director, Curt Lutz on weather, and Rob Williams and Bob Brown on sports. Hake, a Brown Institute graduate, spent his weekends spinning records at Teen Hops around the Midwest and later served as Humboldt's city clerk from 1971 to 1991. The station later hired Mike Hoyer from WHO in Des Moines, where he had presented *Country Music U.S.A.* for six years and had just been named *Billboard*'s top country DJ of the year.



"Frontier Friends": KWMT's annual Frontier Days shows in 1980, which that year also marked the station's 10th year of country music and its 25th on the air. Standing, from left: afternoon personality Carol Ratcliff; recording artists Eddy Raven, David Frizzell and Shelly West; Operations Director Dale Eichor; and morning man P.J. Winn. Kneeling: evening disc jockey Chris Walterman and summer reliever Tommy Edwards. Courtesy of Chris Walterman.

The news voice. For more than three decades, news on KWMT and KKEZ meant Jerry Sheeder. A native of Guthrie Center, he first came to KWMT in 1967 as an afternoon disc jockey and became its program director and then its news director. He later left Iowa to be the afternoon news anchor at WTAE in Pittsburgh in the mid-1970s, on the air as Jerry Shane, and hosted the Steelers' halftime and postgame shows during their 1974 and 1975 Super Bowl seasons. In 1976 he moved to WRC in Washington. He married, came home to Iowa and returned to KWMT in 1979 as news director, delivering his newscasts live, with no edits. He died at his home in Fort Dodge on September 6, 2013, at 67.

Early in the KKEZ years the newsroom also had Sue Shyzis, whom Libbie remembers as "amazing," and Patty Pershing who later moved back to Des Moines.

Big Red. Carl Lemon, on the air as "Big Red," was, in Libbie's words, "one of a kind." "He cared little for rules but such a hit on the radio," Libbie says. He thinks he fired Lemon "maybe twice," but listeners loved him and he was perfect for KWMT, so the station hired him back each time. After KWMT, listeners recall, he worked briefly at a Fort Dodge car dealership before going home to Ohio.

VIDEO

"Big Red," KWMT's half of a pair of 1985 television commercials, one for each station, promoting "America's music on Country 54" (YouTube)

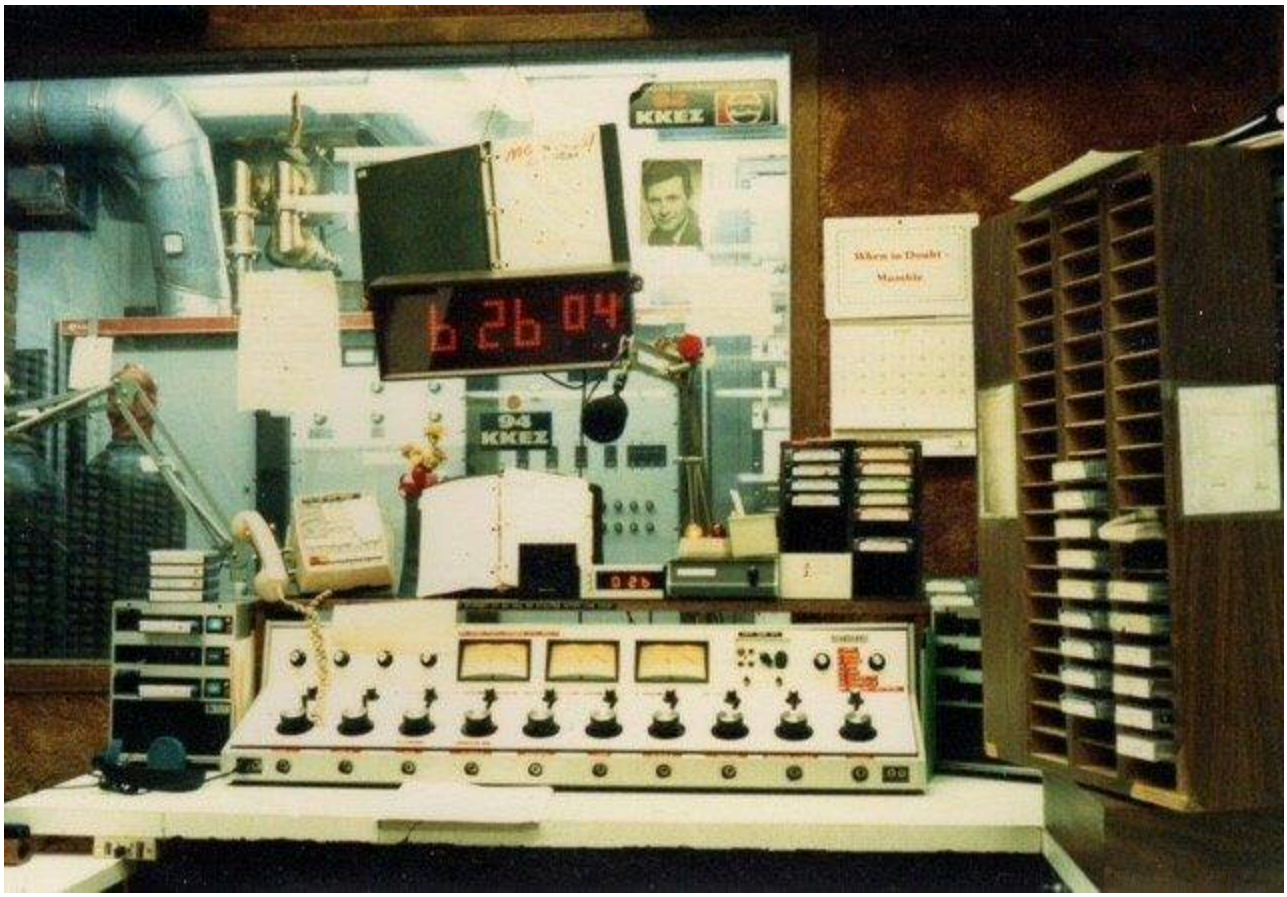
Owners. In July 1968 KWMT was bought by KWMT Inc., with WMT's longtime head William B. Quarton as chairman and James W. Maurer as president and general manager; Maurer was IBA president in 1969. In 1993 Maurer sold to the Jenkins family's KWMT Radio Inc., with John P. Jenkins as CEO and Jon W. Jenkins running the stations. The Jenkinses sold to Clear Channel in 1999. Three Eagles Communications bought KWMT and KKEZ in 2007, as part of a $25 million purchase of 13 Clear Channel stations in Iowa and Minnesota. Three Eagles moved them out of their longtime home at 540 A Street, which was left empty, and into the Dowd Building, where all of the group's Fort Dodge stations broadcast today. The stations passed to Digity in 2014, then to Alpha Media, and in 2025 to Connoisseur Media.

KKEZ 94.5. The FM signed on in 1966 as KWMT-FM, simulcasting the AM. Around 1970 it became KKEZ, an automated easy-listening station running on four-deck reel-to-reel machines. In 1979 it flipped to Top 40, becoming "Fort Dodge's Favorite FM 94.5," and went up against KTGA, with KWMT's resources behind it. It became "Z94" on September 1, 1986.



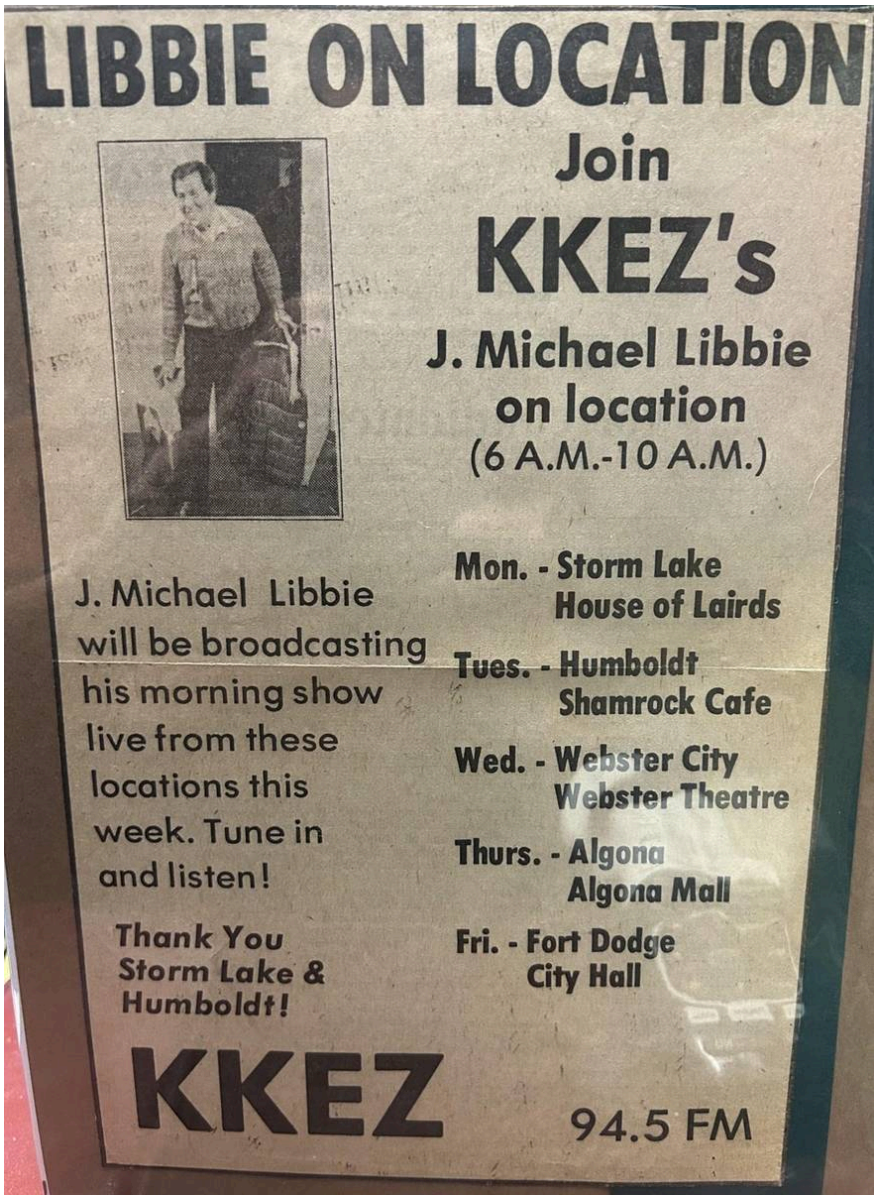
A 1979 newspaper ad for KKEZ FM 94.5, "Great Family Radio," promoting J. Michael Libbie's weekday morning show, 6 to 10 a.m., as KKEZ went up against KTGA. Bill Grady collection.

On the air. KKEZ went live as a Top 40 station in the spring of 1979. News Director Jerry Sheeder hired J. Michael Libbie, who had programmed WKSI in southern Illinois, as program director and morning host, weekdays 6 to 10 a.m. Libbie, who arrived in April, believes the change was a financial one: the automated "Great Family Radio" service from Utah was hard to sell to local Fort Dodge advertisers.



The KKEZ control room at 540 A Street in the 1980s. Courtesy of Chris Walterman.

The studio had no turntable, so engineer Barry Walsh took one from the production room, and on launch day the station ran on that single turntable and Libbie's own records. The first air staff included Grant Williams, who came over from KOEL in Oelwein, Dory Rose from KTGA, Don Roberts and Don Stevenson. Charlie Chase came over from KRIT in 1980, and Jane E. Morgan, Cal Bierman and Dave Haldin joined later. Morgan had been hired at KWMT for the office; once Libbie heard her talk, he asked to put her on the air, and she stayed on 94.5 for four decades before moving to KWMT, where she voice-tracks middays.

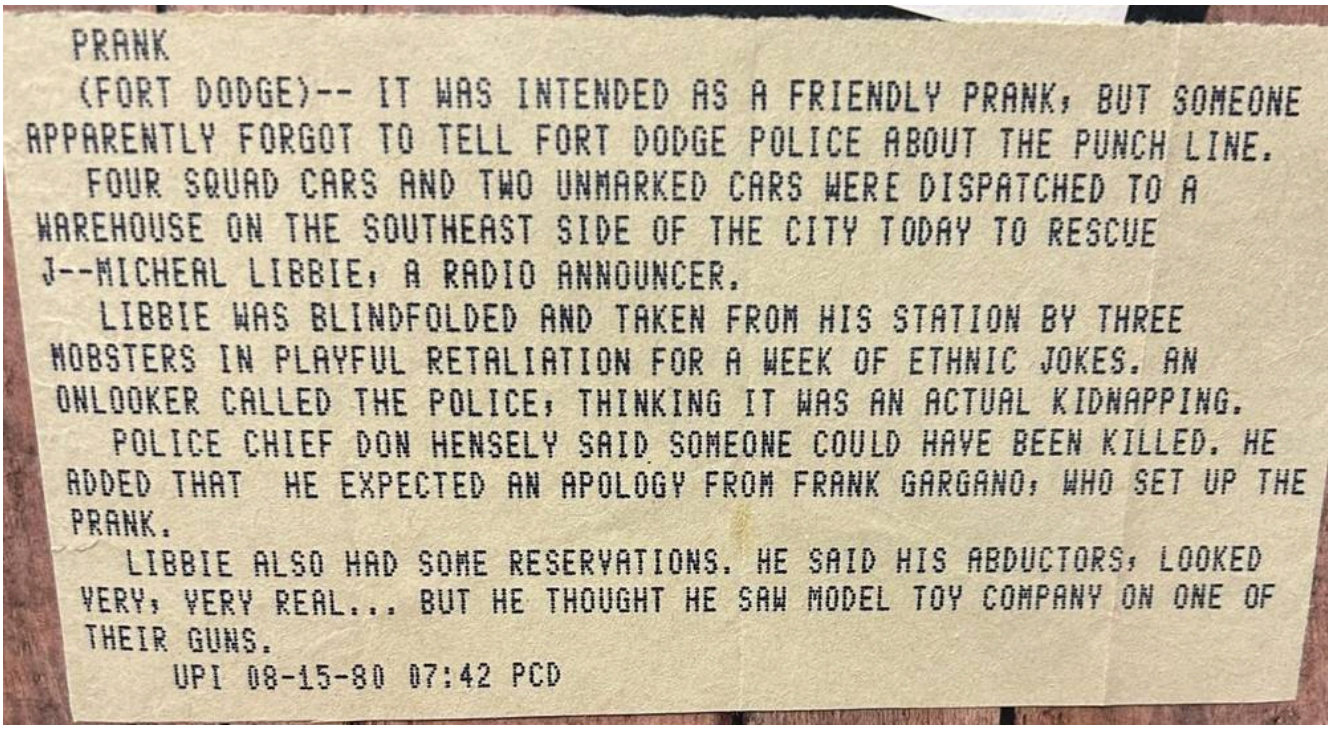


"Libbie on Location": a KKEZ ad for J. Michael Libbie's morning show, 6 to 10 a.m., broadcast live that week from the House of Lairds in Storm Lake, the Shamrock Cafe in Humboldt, the Webster Theatre in Webster City, the Algona Mall and Fort Dodge City Hall, spring 1980. Courtesy of Michael Libbie.

"We paid better than anybody else," Libbie says, "so going after great people was pretty easy." By that summer "Great Family Radio" had given way to "Fort Dodge's Favorite FM 94.5" and "100,000 Watts of Energy for the 80's!"

The kidnapping. That August the new KKEZ made the UPI wire. On August 15, 1980, UPI reported that Libbie had been blindfolded and taken from the station by three "mobsters" in playful retaliation for a week of ethnic jokes, in a prank set up by Frank Gargano. An onlooker took it for a

real kidnapping and called police, and four squad cars and two unmarked cars were sent to a warehouse on the southeast side of the city to rescue him.



PRANK

(FORT DODGE)-- IT WAS INTENDED AS A FRIENDLY PRANK, BUT SOMEONE APPARENTLY FORGOT TO TELL FORT DODGE POLICE ABOUT THE PUNCH LINE.

FOUR SQUAD CARS AND TWO UNMARKED CARS WERE DISPATCHED TO A WAREHOUSE ON THE SOUTHEAST SIDE OF THE CITY TODAY TO RESCUE J--MICHEAL LIBBIE, A RADIO ANNOUNCER.

LIBBIE WAS BLINDFOLDED AND TAKEN FROM HIS STATION BY THREE MOBSTERS IN PLAYFUL RETALIATION FOR A WEEK OF ETHNIC JOKES. AN ONLOOKER CALLED THE POLICE, THINKING IT WAS AN ACTUAL KIDNAPPING.

POLICE CHIEF DON HENSELY SAID SOMEONE COULD HAVE BEEN KILLED. HE ADDED THAT HE EXPECTED AN APOLOGY FROM FRANK GARGANO, WHO SET UP THE PRANK.

LIBBIE ALSO HAD SOME RESERVATIONS. HE SAID HIS ABDUCTORS, LOOKED VERY, VERY REAL... BUT HE THOUGHT HE SAW MODEL TOY COMPANY ON ONE OF THEIR GUNS.

UPI 08-15-80 07:42 PCD

"It was intended as a friendly prank": a UPI wire story of August 15, 1980, on the staged kidnapping of KKEZ's J. Michael Libbie, blindfolded and taken from the station by three "mobsters" in playful retaliation for a week of ethnic jokes. An onlooker thought it was real and called police, who sent four squad cars and two unmarked cars to a warehouse on the city's southeast side. Courtesy of Michael Libbie.

Police Chief Don Hensley told UPI that someone could have been killed and that he expected an apology from Gargano. Libbie had his own reservations: his abductors, he told UPI, looked "very, very real," though he thought he saw "Model Toy Company" on one of their guns.



KWMT and KKEZ Chief Engineer Barry Walsh (left) with J. Michael Libbie, who holds a hand-lettered KKEZ sign, 2006.

Promotions. Each week Libbie asked the sales staff what they needed from programming. "I think that was the secret sauce," he says. Sales lined up sponsors in towns around central Iowa and the morning show went out live from each one, the staff volleyball team played its way across the region, and weekly "Top Thirty" surveys were handed out all over Fort Dodge. One night the staff blew up 99 red balloons and tied them around town for a "99 Red Balloons" giveaway.



KWMT and KKEZ staff, about 1986. Back row, from left: Charlie Chase, John France, Mike Devine, Jerry Sheeder, Michael Libbie, Steve Myrick, and Denny Lind; front: Carl Lemon ("Big Red") and Dale Eichor. Courtesy of Chris Walterman.

KKEZ interviewed Dan Aykroyd in Webster City and Clayton Moore, TV's Lone Ranger, live by phone, and Libbie broadcast Midnight Mass from Sacred Heart. By his account, the station billed about $200,000 the year before the change and nearly $1 million in its first 13 months as a Top 40 station.



KKEZ for the March of Dimes, April 1983. From left: Cal Bierman, Charlie Chase, Dave Haldin and J. Michael Libbie.

Jim Maurer later had Libbie oversee KWMT as well. Libbie stayed until the fall of 1986, when he left radio for Friendship Haven in Fort Dodge and later became its president and CEO. That same year KKEZ brought in Jim Davis from Des Moines as program director, a KIOA alumnus who had also worked at KOIL in Omaha. It was a big-market hire for a Fort Dodge station. Davis produced the imaging for the "Z94" relaunch before leaving in March 1987 for WLLR-FM in the Quad Cities.

VIDEO

"94 KKEZ, Good Time Radio": KKEZ's half of the pair of 1985 television commercials made for the two sister stations. "Anybody can play the hits, but when you join your friends at 94 KKEZ you know you're going to have fun" (YouTube)

The Z94 launch. Drew Durigan, then working at a station in Colorado, remembers Davis starting in early August 1986 and calling him the second week of that month to offer him the 6-to-midnight shift; Durigan started Monday, August 18.

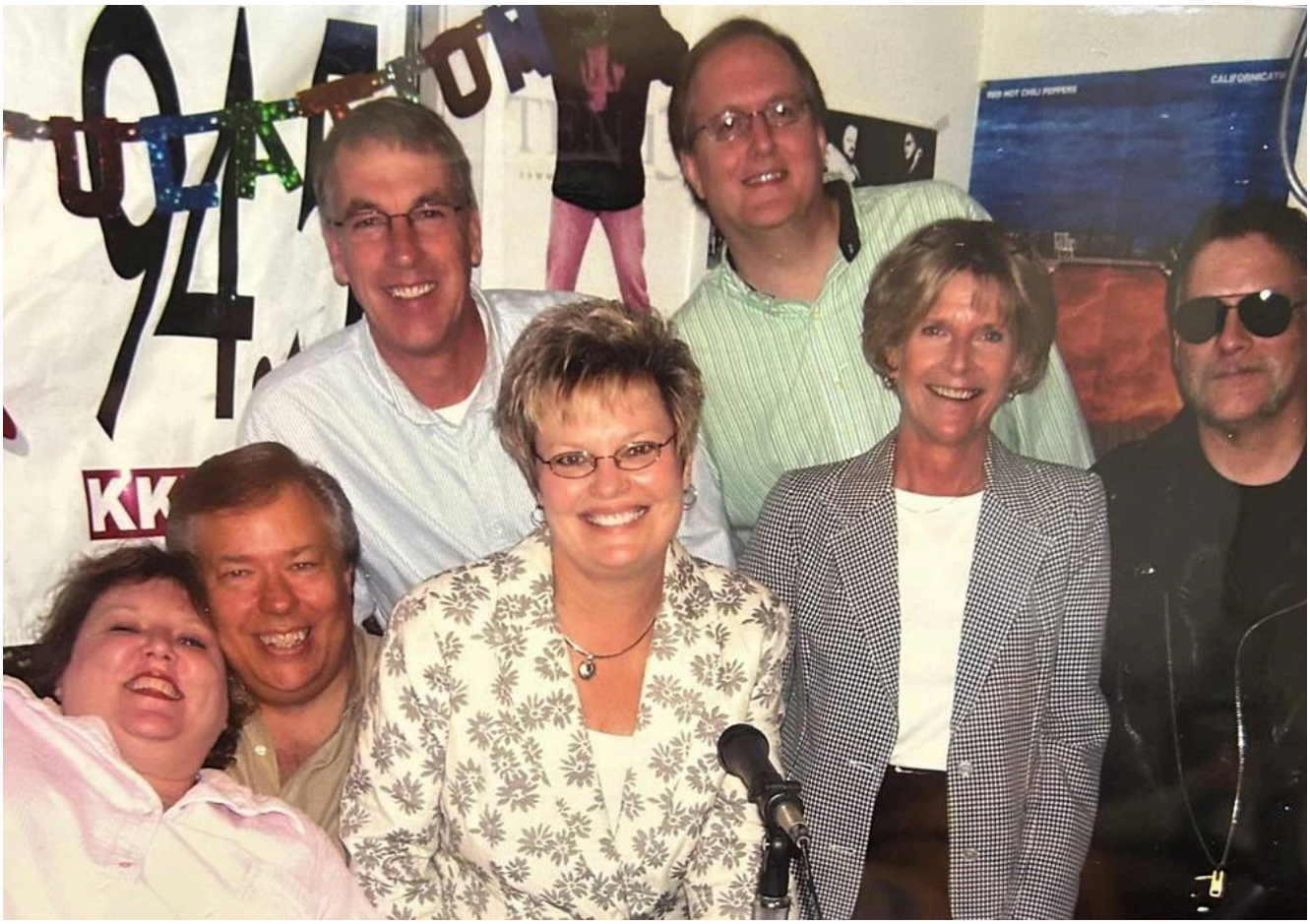
Davis's arrival also shook up the staff. By Durigan's account, Cal Bierman left for KEZT in Ames, Mike Devine left, Dave Haldin went to FM 108 in Waterloo, and Charlie Chase moved from the air to sales.

AUDIO

The legal ID that relaunched KKEZ as "Z94" on September 1, 1986, produced by Jim Davis (0:37). It opens, "Fort Dodge was one of the birthplaces of rock and roll in Iowa. Our roots go back to 1957," and closes, "Now we're Z-94, all the radio you'll ever need. Z-94 is KKEZ Fort Dodge." The 1957 date reaches back to the station's AM sister, KWMT. Courtesy of Drew Durigan.

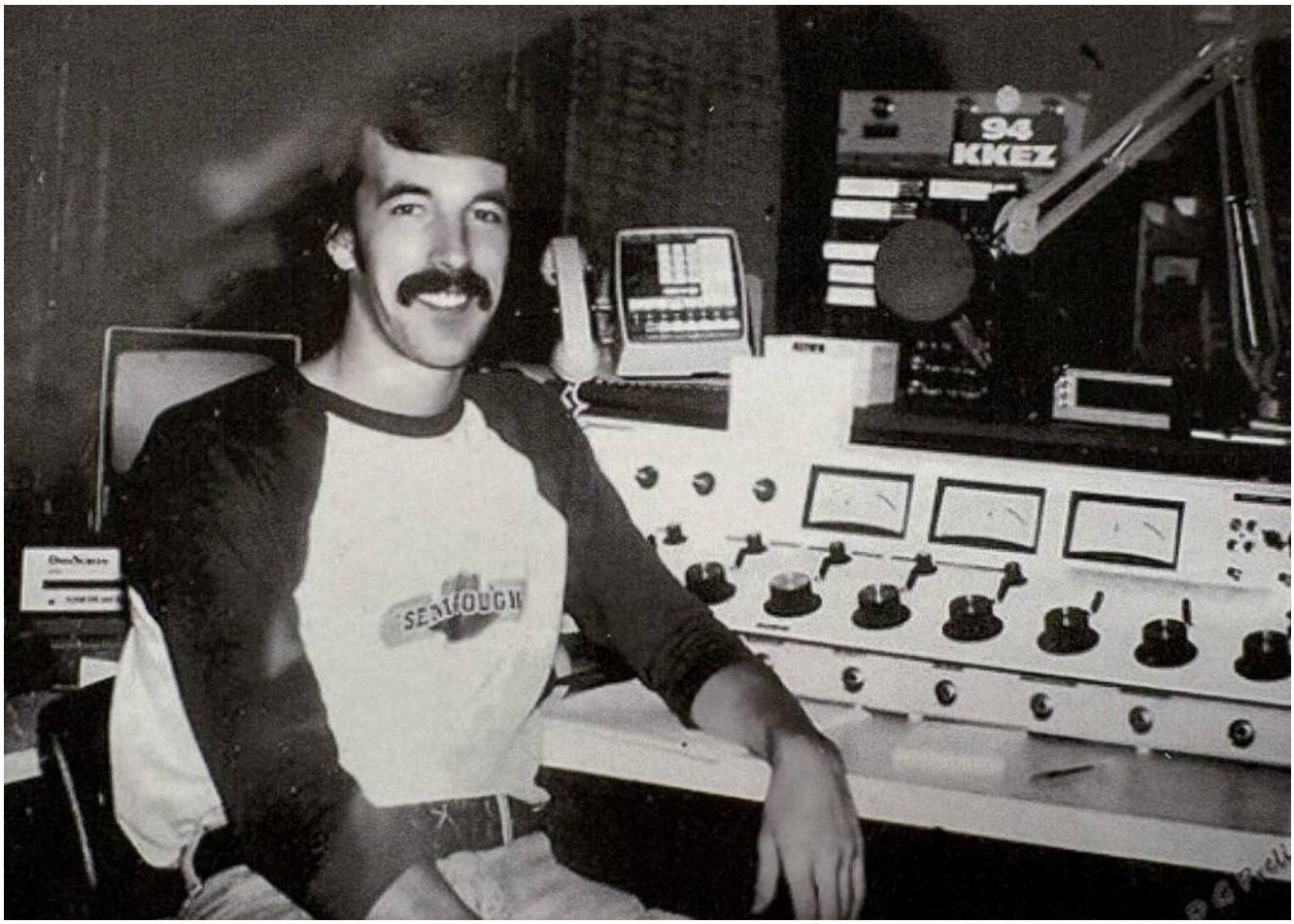
KKEZ flipped to "Z94" on Monday, September 1, Labor Day, the same day Kelly Burnham, on the air as Kelly O'Shea, started. Durigan lists the launch air staff as Davis from 6 to 10 a.m., Jane E. Morgan from 10 to 2, O'Shea from 2 to 6, himself from 6 to midnight and Denny Lind overnight, with Duane Murley, Phil Jaye and Mike Fellers, then on the air as Stu Stevens.

When Davis left in March 1987, Doug McKinnon replaced him as program director. McKinnon wanted fewer phone calls and less talk on the air, Durigan says, and let him go. That May Durigan joined Super 97 as it went on the air from Fort Dodge, and the radio war between the two stations was on.



A KKEZ reunion, 2006: Jane E. Morgan, J. Michael Libbie, Charlie Chase, Cal Bierman, Paulette Shelby, Becky O'Brien, and guest.

Charlie Chase. Tim Bohlke started working overnights on KKEZ as Charlie Chase, a name he came up with himself. "The name Charlie Chase was all Tim," Libbie says. "He created it." Libbie, then president of the Iowa Junior Chamber and traveling much of the time, was often late for his 6 a.m. start, so he left Chase a couple of carts with his own voice and a song to play at 6; it became a running joke at the station.



Charlie Chase at the KKEZ board, early 1980s. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

Libbie remembers Chase's memory for music: "I never really paid attention to the song or the artist but Charlie knew them all," along with details about each song. Chase also had a huge record collection: thousands of records, his wife, Lynn Bohlke, says, "all in alphabetical order and cataloged." His signature sign-off came from "The Boy in the Box": "Be good, buy bonds, and bye bye"; Libbie says the name was a nod to old radios, many of which were shaped like a box. "He had fun on the air," Libbie says, "always engaging the listeners and was always up for doing promotions."

Chase and Chris Robbins (Chris Walterman) had been at the Brown Institute at the same time, in different classes; Robbins first noticed him because of the green military jacket he usually wore, and the two would say hi in the hallway. Chase's first job was at KRIT in Clarion and Robbins's at KWMT. About three months after Robbins started, he walked past Libbie's office, saw Chase inside, just hired at KKEZ, and "we both looked at each other like…hey I know you!" They became lifelong friends.



From left: Charlie Chase and Chris Walterman at Mineral City Mill & Grill in Fort Dodge, July 2018, where the two "talked for hours" before this picture was taken. "This is my favorite picture of us," Walterman says. Courtesy of Chris Walterman.

KKEZ since 1987. After the Z94 years, KKEZ went to classic rock in the early 1990s, and in January 2000 it became "Mix 94.5," an adult contemporary station at 100,000 watts. It briefly went soft AC in 2009 before returning to adult contemporary that summer, and today it is still Mix 94.5, playing hot AC. In the summer of 1991 Jon Jenkins brought Dave Haldin back to KKEZ to do mornings, but Haldin left radio that November. Through the ownership changes, two voices carried over: Jerry Sheeder's news, and Jane E. Morgan, who stayed on 94.5 for four decades before moving to KWMT.

92.1 FM: from KTGA to "92 Rock"

No Fort Dodge frequency has worn more names than 92.1. Its license dates to July 28, 1975, and in the five decades since it has been KTGA, KSMX, KFTX-FM, KFDC, KUEL, KZLB and KUFX, all one station.

KTGA: "Keep The Gospel Alive." The FCC granted the construction permit on December 2, 1974, and KTGA signed on Monday, July 28, 1975, with studios on the mezzanine of the Warden Plaza, where the building's public business offices were, and a tower west of Otho, just off Highway 169. Its first owner was Gospel Radio Inc., owned by the Rev. N.S. Beminio, a train conductor, and Jack Becker, a farm equipment designer. Beminio ran the station himself, and the call letters stood for "Keep The Gospel Alive."

In 1977 Beminio left broadcasting for health reasons, and on June 1 that year KTGA was bought for $110,000, including $20,000 for an agreement not to compete, by Rainbow Broadcasting Company, owned by James E. "Jim" Boardman, a freelance writer and photographer with no other stations. For a while it mixed middle-of-the-road music with religious programming, plus farm and classical shows. By 1978 it had turned to Top 40, the first rock station on Fort Dodge FM, just as FM was winning over AM's younger listeners, with Boardman as owner, general manager and his own chief engineer.



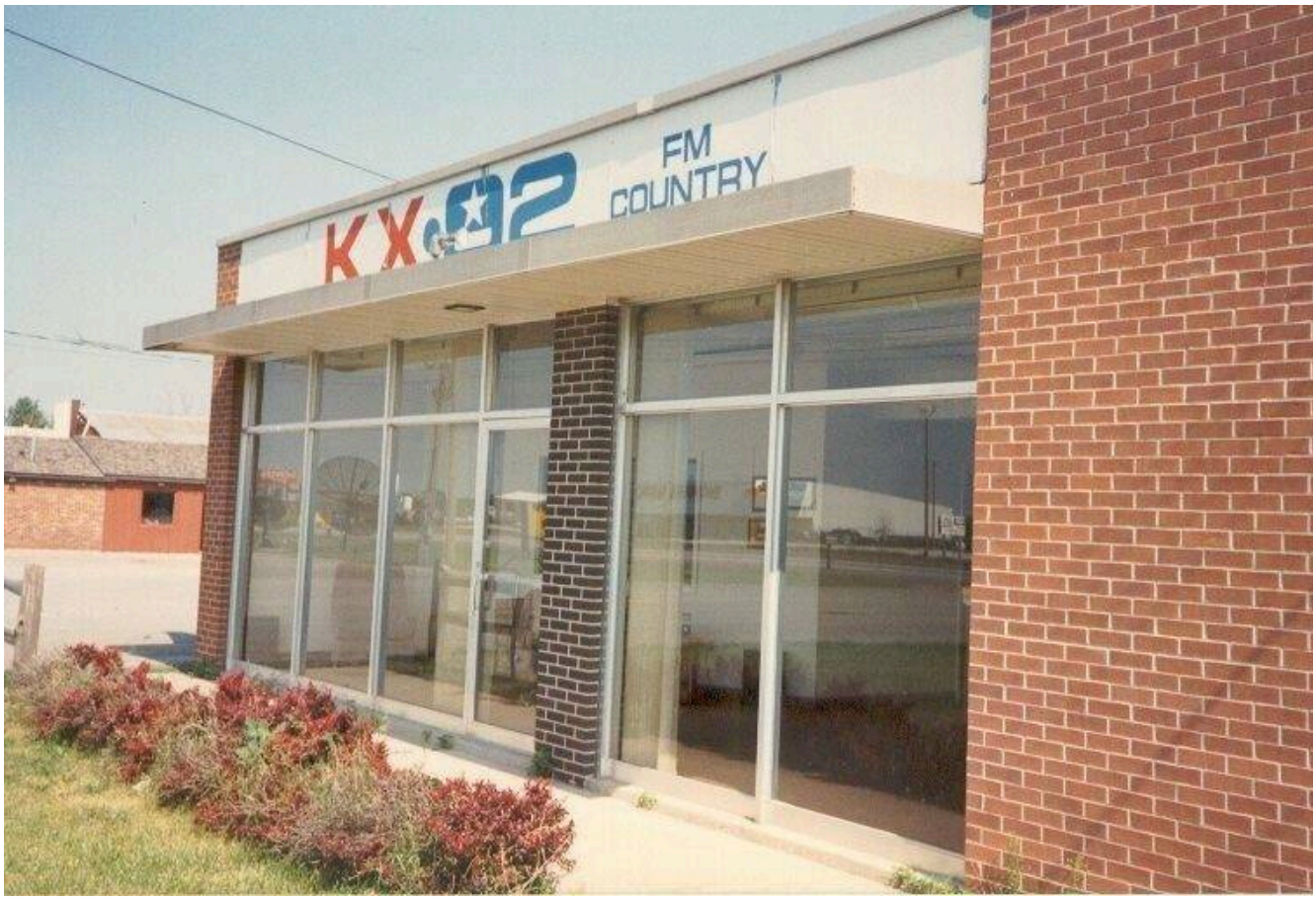
A KTGA "K92" bumper sticker from 1978, when the station had turned to Top 40. Bill Grady collection.

KTGA carried Casey Kasem's countdown on Saturday afternoons and Wolfman Jack's show on Sunday evenings. As an affiliate, KTGA arranged for Wolfman Jack to come to Fort Dodge for the Frontier Days parade on June 9, 1979. He was featured in the parade and appeared at the Runway that evening; the disco's manager, Rick Fuhr, later wrote that the appearance cost the club $4,500.

Earlier that year KKEZ had gone Top 40 too, with KWMT's money behind it. KTGA didn't have the resources to match KKEZ's on-air sound or its sales staff, and most of KTGA's announcers left for better pay. The station struggled.

KSMX. In April 1980 Smithway Communications Corporation, owned by Harold Smith of Smithway Motor Xpress with partners Russell Hilkin and Shannon Reed, bought the station from Boardman's Rainbow Broadcasting for $50,000 plus its debts; the FCC had approved the sale on March 18. Smith became president, and Shannon Reed, the largest shareholder at 33.4 percent, became general manager. Reed was a well-known name in Fort Dodge radio: he had spent three years at KWMT and three more at KTGA itself before buying in. Under him the call letters changed to KSMX, and the station kept its rock-leaning Top 40 sound for a while, but it was hard to find talent and the station sounded thin next to KKEZ.

Within a year Reed had left for stations in Ames. Thomas Carmody, who also ran the sales department, became general manager in 1981 and stayed on through the 1983 sale. KSMX went adult contemporary in 1981, and a switch to country never caught on. In 1983 Smithway sold KSMX for $75,000 to KSMX Radio Limited, owned by Harold O. Bastian, who ran the station for a year.



The "KX 92 FM Country" building at 3566 Fifth Avenue South, later home to KVFD and KUEL. Courtesy of Chris Walterman.

Webster Broadcasters: KX 92. On October 5, 1984 the station changed hands again, for $150,000. The new owner was Webster Broadcasters Inc. of Cedar Falls, owned by the Hamilton family, owners of KCFI in Cedar Falls; Ken Hamilton was president, John Hurley vice president and Paul Coates general manager. Webster changed the call letters from KSMX to KFTX-FM and branded it "KX 92, FM Country."

Around 1986 it moved out of Warden Plaza into a new building at 3566 Fifth Avenue South, which later became home to KVFD and KUEL. The transmitter sat west of Otho on a dog breeder's property, where, former staff recall, the heat from the transmitter building kept the puppies warm in winter. On the air it called itself "Kicks 92." Its late-1984 lineup had Chris Robbins (Chris Walterman) in the morning, Tracy Joel (Hoodjer) at midday and Greg Richards in the afternoon.



KFTX-FM Radio is on the move with a modern country sound

FORT DODGE KX-92

FORT DODGE KX-92

"KFTX-FM Radio is on the move with a more modern country sound": KX 92's staff in The Messenger, *April 29, 1985. Courtesy of Chris Walterman.*

Its biggest promotion put Robbins, KWMT's Big Red and car dealer Bob Campbell of Bob Campbell Motors 48 feet in the air in a camper held up by a crane, for 48 hours, trying to sell 48 cars, with the stunt broadcast on both KWMT and KX 92. Listeners came from all over to see them and buy cars.

Every now and then the crane's hydraulics would settle with a noise, Robbins remembers, and each time Big Red would say, "Campbell, I don't care how many damn cars you want to sell let's get down!" They came down only once: around 3 a.m. one night a thunderstorm set the camper

swaying, and Campbell had the crane operator lower it until the storm passed. "Then we went back up and none of the listeners knew," Robbins says.

A package deal (1988). In June 1988 Webster sold KFTX to Dodge Communications, owned equally by Ray Lamb and Dean Sorenson, and in the same transaction Max Landes's group sold Dodge Communications KVFD. The price was $875,000 in all: $400,000 for the FM and $475,000 for KVFD.

The new owners moved the FM antenna from its original site west of Otho to the KVFD tower on Highway 169, south of Highway 20; the application was filed in May 1988, while the sale was pending, and the new license was applied for that December. The station stayed on the air through the change, kept much of its staff, and became KFDC, for "Fort Dodge Country," with Mel Moyer as general manager.

On December 17, 1990, KFDC became KUEL, "Kool 92," playing oldies from the 1960s and early '70s. In October 1991 Sorenson bought out Lamb's half to take full ownership, and that December Bill Grady became general manager of KUEL and KVFD.



"Good Times, Great Oldies! On the All New KOOL-92!" An ad in Fort Dodge Today, *February 1991. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.*

Jeremy Borash. Kool 92's best-known alumnus was hired on his 19th birthday in 1994, fresh from the Brown Institute broadcasting school in Minneapolis, to be program director and morning host, and he later became operations manager for both stations. *Borash in the Morning* had him hypnotizing local politicians on the air, skydiving from 13,000 feet over Fort Dodge, handing out free breakfasts to listeners at a drive-through and broadcasting from a school bus as kids headed to class.

The Twist & Shout Interview

Jeremy Borash Tells All

- by Dave Haldin -

Radio personalities tend to be vagabonds, on the move all the time. Jeremy Borash, popular morning show host on KUEL 92, has made his mark in Fort Dodge, but his previous job history is fascinating. We thought you would like to know a bit more about your wacky morning guy.

T&S: Where is home for Jeremy Borash?

JB: I'm from Chanhassen, Minnesota. In fact, my family's home is right next door to Prince's house, and just a few miles away from his Paisley Park Studios.

T&S: How did you get into radio?

JB: By way of television. After doing a local twin cities TV show for a couple of years, I got a call from the program director at KKCM and he offered me a night shift.

T&S: Tell us more about this TV show.

JB: It was a live late night call-in show geared toward youth. It was called "Jeremy Borash Live" and was on Channel 6 which is a *Fox* affiliate. We did some outrageous stuff. We had some great guests on the show like Hulk Hogan, Ray Bradbury and Dawn Wells.

T&S: Did you have a lot of viewers?

JB: We did OK. At one point they projected us to be in up to 2 million households.

T&S: Back to radio...

JB: I eventually got on at KDWB where I did swing shifts and research work. I actually worked at 3 radio stations at one time. I would literally



work 36 hours straight, because I produced the morning show at KSTP-AM, did afternoons at KKCM and overnights at KDWB.

T&S: Any truth to the rumor that you worked with Jay Leno?

JB: Yes. I did research for Jay. Things like making sure he had funny headlines to read on Monday nights. I got into that through my position at KDWB. I was really just a "look out" for jokes and material for him in this area.

T&S: And you're a published author, too?

JB: Yeah; I wrote a little book called *Breaking Into Radio and Television*. Amazingly, it is still used as a resource tool at Brown Institute in Minneapolis. Of course, I made no money from it, but it was a lot of fun.

T&S: So, why are you in Fort Dodge?

JB: I started getting death threats from people who watched my TV show. We weren't very controversial, but I think it turned some viewers off to have a smart-alec kid on TV doing whatever he wanted.

T&S: Did you ever get beat up?

JB: No. But I was to the point where I was ready to take advantage of some opportunities, and this one happened to come along.

T&S: What is your ultimate career goal?

JB: I'd like to wind up in Chicago doing both radio and television again. Kind of like what Jonathan Brandmeier had there for awhile with *Johnny B On the Loose*.

T&S: How is your KUEL 92 morning show doing in the ratings?

JB: *Arbitron* numbers are a funny thing. I don't know if we're number one or not, but I do know that listeners have more fun listening to our show. There's no doubt that we are the most active morning show in town. Meaning that we are very involved in the community.

T&S: What other Fort Dodge disc-jockeys do you respect?

JB: I have tremendous respect for Bill Higgins and Max Landes. These guys have been doing it for twice as long as I've been alive. Bill Grady is the best general manager I've ever had. I like Chad Michaels, too.

T&S: What do you think of Fort Dodge now that you've been here for well over a year?

JB: I've really grown to love the people in this town. In fact, it's gotten to the point where most of them use all five fingers when the wave at me now. Since I've moved here, we've made national news with nude skydivers and a strip bar burning down. I've met the politicians ranging from the president to Bob Dole. I'd never have had the opportunity to be involved with this kind of stuff back home.

T&S: Seen any good movies lately?

JB: Yes. Being in the comedy business, I loved the new Jim Carrey movie, *Ace Ventura, When Nature Calls*. I embarrassed the people I was with because I was laughing so hard.

T&S: Where are you politically speaking, and who do your support for president in '96?

JB: I'm a moderate Republican, and I really like Alan Keyes even though he doesn't stand a chance of winning. As a realistic candidate I support Bob Dole.

T&S: As a radio programmer, have you ever been offered a bribe or payola?

JB: No, but I'm more than open to any ideas someone might have. (Jeremy was laughing when he said this!)

T&S: Is it true what they say about radio being a good way to meet girls?

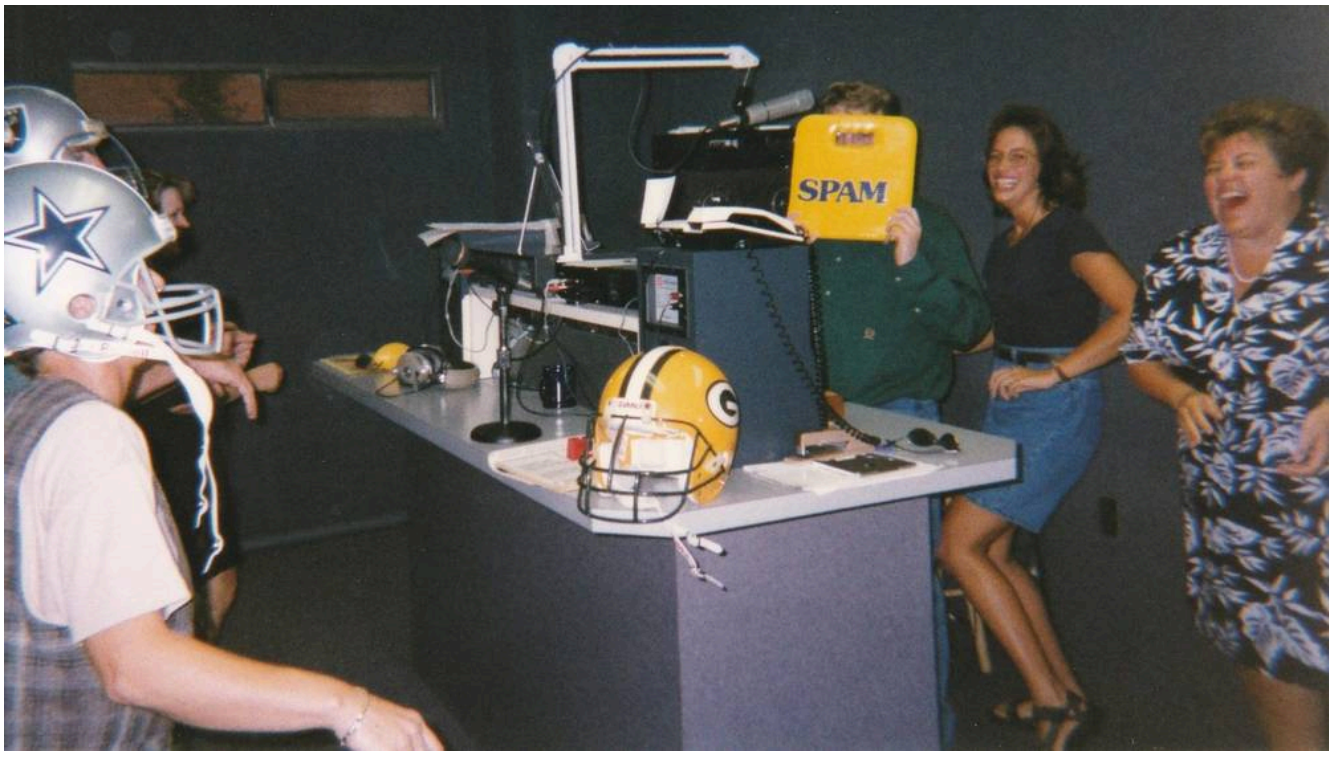
JB: Surprisingly, yes. Of course, due to the format differences, I'm sure that Chad Michaels has a lot more of them coming his way than I do. **T&S**

Jeremy Borash Tells All": Dave Haldin interviews the Kool 92 morning host for Twist & Shout, *about 1996. Bill Grady collection.*

"I think I learned more in those four years than I could have ever learned anywhere else," he said in 2006. "It was more about being involved in the community and finding out how important that is." He became the youngest nominee ever for the NAB Marconi Award for small-market personality.

He left Fort Dodge in 1997 and went on to a national career in wrestling television: writer and announcer at WCW, ring announcer and play-by-play voice at TNA/Impact Wrestling for 16 years, and later vice president of content and development at WWE. He never lost touch with Fort

Dodge, returning to its airwaves in 2001 to host the All-America City broadcast for KVFD and KUEL. (Wikipedia)



Fun in the studio with the Girl Scouts of Lakota Council on Borash in the Morning, *July 1997; Jeremy Borash is hiding behind the Spam cushion. Bill Grady collection.*

The Wheel of Meat. From 1994 to 1997, *Borash in the Morning* gave listeners a spin of the Wheel of Meat, sponsored by Randall Foods. Listeners called in, Borash picked a caller at random, and the wheel decided the prize: prime rib, a roast, spam, ground chuck, hot dogs or the joke slot, "what we killed at the transmitter site." Grady had brought the promotion with him from WYUR in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

Out of the studio. During the 1990s, Kool 92 was the live remote king of the Fort Dodge market, and Grady did the vast majority of those broadcasts himself, more than 700 over about a decade by his count. "When I arrived they needed a host for 'Come Alive,' so I did that when it was in the basement of the Laramar. After that I was always somewhere. The longest day was Black Friday, a string of remotes beginning at 5:30 a.m. I'd get up at 3:30 a.m. to be live on the air in front of Target, and after an hour I would go to the next one, and that continued for 12 hours straight. I enjoyed most of what we did, just not that."

The Come Alive at 5 Reunion. The Laramar version, called simply "Come Alive," was short-lived. By the time Grady took it over it was, he says, "a shell of what it was," and he hosted it

through the spring of 1992. Later Mike Parry and Chris Robbins brought him the idea for a one-time "Come Alive at 5 Reunion" on KUEL at the Laramar, in May 1996. Parry introduced Charlie Chase, as he had at the Rock 'N Roll Reunion, and the night ended in a big conga line. "It was the first time I ever experienced the fun those guys had, and the response from the people who remembered those days was also memorable," Grady says. "Charlie was a fantastic host."

Being live and out in the community was a big part of the stations' NAB Crystal Radio Awards for community service, and some remotes raised money directly: in October 1998 Grady and the Fort Dodge Fire Department raised money for the United Way by sending him up in a fire truck's bucket over the Norwest Bank parking lot on Central Avenue.



"Up, in the bucket!" Bill Grady broadcasting live for KUEL-92 from a Fort Dodge Fire Department bucket over the Norwest Bank parking lot on Central Avenue to raise money for the United Way, with the goal thermometer below, October 1998. Bill Grady collection.

Format Change to Adult Contemporary. On April 1, 1996, the same week the stations moved into the Dowd Building, KUEL switched from oldies to adult contemporary. It kept the Kool 92 name, which was already established and fit the hip, cool AC hits of the '90s.

The timing turned out to matter. Grady later got a call from Chris Knight, the new general manager of K97 and KTLB, who had succeeded Mike Parry. KTLB had been ready to drop country for adult contemporary, he said, and had negotiated contracts for the music and imaging. The agreements were on his desk that Friday, but he decided to wait until Monday to sign them. Driving to work that Monday, April 1, he tuned in Kool 92 and heard the new format. The first thing

he did when he walked into his office, he told Grady, was tear up the contract. Later in 1996 KTLB went to oldies instead, the format Kool 92 had just left behind.

In 1999 the frequency that had struggled for two decades won an NAB Crystal Radio Award for community service and within 3 years of changing format, won the NAB Marconi Award for AC Station of the Year, arguably the station's finest hour.

VIDEO

KUEL-FM receives the 1999 NAB Marconi Award for AC Station of the Year in Orlando, Florida, in October 1999; General Manager Bill Grady accepts on behalf of the staff (YouTube)

Wolfman Jack and Lou Lamb Smith. When Wolfman Jack flew into the Fort Dodge airport the night before the parade in June 1979, Bill Grady and his friend Dave Ambroson drove out on the spur of the moment to try for an autograph. All Ambroson had to write on was a cardboard pair of novelty "balloon feet" he found under the seat of his car, but they made it through a big crowd at the airport, and Wolfman Jack signed the back.

Twenty years later, in April 1999 in Las Vegas, Wolfman Jack, whose real name was Robert Weston Smith, was inducted posthumously into the NAB Broadcasting Hall of Fame at the same convention where KUEL, the 92.1 station that had brought him to Fort Dodge, received its NAB Crystal Radio Award. At a reception before the ceremony Grady showed the balloon feet to Smith's widow, Lou Lamb Smith, who said her husband had come home raving about how wild the weekend was and how much fun Fort Dodge had been. She signed next to his autograph: "20 years later we meet Bill Grady. What a small world. God Bless. Lou Lamb Smith, the Wolf Woman."



The balloon feet, signed by Wolfman Jack at the Fort Dodge airport in June 1979 and by his widow, Lou Lamb Smith, in Las Vegas in April 1999. Bill Grady collection.

All-America City (2001). The stations' remote work paid off in June 2001, when Fort Dodge competed for the National Civic League's All-America City Award in Atlanta. KVFD and KUEL reported daily from Atlanta, where Jeremy Borash and Jay Alexander covered the city's 52-member delegation and its Friday-morning presentation to the jury.

Back home, Grady and Tony Thomas broadcast live from the new Fort Dodge Public Library on both stations, and a closed-circuit video link let the jury in Atlanta see the crowd gathered there. Organizers had hoped for 250 people; more than 1,200 came, in a city of about 26,000. The stations carried the awards ceremony live that Saturday, when the announcer read, "This city is Fort Dodge, Iowa!" Fort Dodge was one of 10 cities named All-America Cities that year.

AUDIO

All-America City Awards broadcast, KVFD and KUEL, June 22–23, 2001 (42:11; Fort Dodge Radio)

KZLB and KUFX. The station became KZLB in 2009 and has since been "The Blaze" (active rock), "The Eagle" (classic rock) and, since October 3, 2019, "92 Rock." On October 12, 2026, Connoisseur Media moved the KUFX call letters, used in San Jose, California, since 1998, to 92.1, keeping the San Jose calls registered to the company after that station took back its old KBAY letters.

KRIT Clarion to KIAQ Fort Dodge, 96.9 FM

KRIT went on the air in September 1964 as Wright County's own radio station, licensed to Clarion on 96.9. The call letters said "K-Rite," for the Wright County Radio Company.

Founding. KRIT was founded by Marv "Shorty" Hull, who was working at a radio station in Oklahoma when an equipment salesman told him about an area that badly needed a station: the Clarion area, his hometown. He came back, lined up old friends and classmates as stockholders, and filed with the FCC in the fall of 1962. The FCC soon froze new FM applications while it worked out coverage rules, but Hull held out for the largest class, 100,000 watts, enough to cover the whole county and beyond, and when the license came through in late 1963 KRIT was, he said, the largest FM station in the smallest town in the nation.

An AM man at heart, he built it as a mono FM. Gerald "Jerry" McLaughlin of Belmond, a former Top 40 disc jockey at KRIB in Mason City, was the first manager and would later own nearly 12 percent of the company, most of it stock Hull gave him in 1978; Dean Long was the newsman, Ione Peterson sold advertising and Becky LaRue was secretary. Hull himself was at the station by 4:30 every morning for the 6 a.m. sign-on and stayed most days until sign-off at 10:30 p.m.



Marv Hull at the KRIT control board in the station's first studio, upstairs from the Sumners Insurance Agency. Photo courtesy of the Heartland Museum, Clarion.

Above the insurance office. KRIT's first studios were on Main Street in Clarion, upstairs from the Sumners Insurance Agency, with the antenna on the roof. There was so much radio-frequency energy in the building, the story went, that the fluorescent lights kept glowing after they were switched off. In the late '60s KRIT moved to a former telephone office at 215 Sixth Street S.W., south of Wright County Implement, with a new tower; the Hulls lived across the street for many years.

What it meant to Clarion. In a county otherwise served by weekly papers, KRIT was the daily source of local news, sports and information. Most of the day it was a middle-of-the-road station playing big band and some country, but every afternoon *Teen Time* turned 45 minutes over to Clarion High School students, who played their own music. The local Jaycees sold ads for the station and voiced some of them on the air, splitting the income with Hull.

When a tornado hit Belmond on October 14, 1966, McLaughlin took the mobile unit there, and for the first 24 hours KRIT was the town's only link to the outside, relaying to the Red Cross what

Belmond needed.

Its signature was wrestling, which sports announcer Ray Arnold talked Hull into trying; it became the station's biggest moneymaker and biggest audience. Arnold, Dale Benjamin, Leroy LaRue and coach Dale Brand called local matches and followed Iowa State, and KRIT was there in 1970 when Dan Gable lost his only college match, at the NCAA finals. KRIT covered the Iowa high school state wrestling championships every year and broadcast the NCAA championships live, a small Iowa station on press row beside ABC and CBS.



KRIT founder Marv Hull (left) and sports announcer Ray Arnold. Photo courtesy of the Heartland Museum, Clarion.

Some of KRIT's best-loved voices weren't on the payroll. Alvina Sellers, known around Iowa as the Hat Lady, was KRIT's "Pumpkin Lady." Sam Douglas, Clarion's local weather observer, stopped by the studio around 7:45 every weekday morning to tell the joke of the day, one of the station's most popular segments.

Clarion's schools noticed too: in 1980 the Clarion Education Association (CEA) gave Hull its Friend of Education Award at its retirement dinner, where Dale Brand cited the many ways Hull

had aided the cause of education through his radio station, and even the table decorations, KRIT microphones and records, paid tribute to him.



MARVIN L. HULL of KRIT Radio Station was the recipient of the 1980 CEA Friend of Education Award at the CEA Retirement Dinner last week. In presenting the award to Marvin, Dale Brand cited the many ways Marvin, through his radio station, has aided the cause of education. An amusing skit, "Roving Reporters" by Denny Bowman, Marvin McAllister and Mary Jane Dahlgren showed Marv interviewing this year's retiring teachers. Even table decorations of KRIT microphones and records paid tribute to the 1980 Friend of Education.

Marv Hull of KRIT receives the 1980 CEA Friend of Education Award at the CEA Retirement Dinner, presented by Dale Brand. Wright County Monitor, *May 15, 1980.*

The Passing of Larry Hull and Ownership Change. The Hulls' son Larry, a 1965 Clarion High graduate, was drafted during the Vietnam War, finished college at Winona State and worked in finance in Kansas City, Tulsa and Salina before coming home around 1976 to be KRIT's sales manager and sports broadcaster. He died in November 1979 at 32, and afterward, Hull said, "it just wasn't worth it to work that hard all the time." Selling the station let the Hulls retire, and the original stockholders did well on their investment.

On August 1, 1981, Central Iowa Broadcasting took over, having bought the station for $370,000. It was owned in equal thirds by Fort Dodge native Don Rabbitt and brothers Miller and Ross Roskamp, who together also owned WFON-FM in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, where Rabbitt was president and general manager.



Page 10B Clarion--Let's Grow Together The Wright County Monitor Thursday, March 4, 1982

The new faces of KRIT Radio

Radio station goes to stereo

When Central Iowa Broadcasting purchased the KRIT Radio Station last summer, it started a new broadcasting era in Clarion.

Since the change in ownership officially took place on August 1, some new faces, new voices and a new sound have provided changes for the FM station.

The most recent change came with the naming of a University of Wisconsin graduate as the general manager. Mike Casper brings a degree in radio, television and film to Clarion, and is currently in the process of adjusting to his new job and community.

After graduating from the University of Wisconsin in Madison in 1973, Casper sold advertising and had some air time at a station in Plymouth, Wisconsin. In 1974, he went to work for KFIZ in Fond Du Lac, and has been with that station since.

KFIZ is a competitor to another station in Fond Du Lac, owned by Central Iowa Broadcasting. That company liked Casper's work and hired him to run the Clarion station.

"We made a couple visits to Clarion in January when you had all the snow," noted Casper. "Despite the weather, we felt Clarion was a pretty town, and would be a nice place to live. We still feel that way, and are looking forward to getting settled here."

Casper's wife, Louise, and 10 month old son Todd are still in Fond Du Lac where Louise will probably stay until their house is sold. They hope that time comes soon.

Mike played baseball for three years while attending the University. He's quite familiar with the Iowa Hawkeyes, and is already enjoying the rivalry.

The Monitor caught up with Casper on his first full day at his new job, but he was willing to talk about recent changes and about future plans.

The most noticeable improvement to the ears is the change to stereo. This has provided a "Fullness of sound--especially for our music" explained the new station manager.

Business manager Shelia Cowles helped new KRIT manager Mike Casper become acquainted with his new position during one of Mike's first days in Clarion. (Monitor photo)

"The new faces of KRIT Radio": Business Manager Shelia Cowles helps new General Manager Mike Casper settle in during one of his first days in Clarion. Wright County Monitor, *March 4, 1982. Bill Grady collection.*

KRIT went stereo, adopted adult contemporary and carried Minnesota Twins baseball, and the signal rose to 93,000 watts. Stereo brought a "fullness of sound, especially for our music," said Mike Casper, whom the owners named general manager in early 1982. A 1973 University of Wisconsin graduate with a degree in radio, television and film, Casper had worked since 1974 at KFIZ in Fond du Lac, a competitor of the owners' WFON; his work there got him noticed as an all-around broadcaster and leader which led to his first management job, running KRIT.

The "K97" air staff that fall was Steve Autey in the morning, Bill Grady at midday, Steve "Dr. Wax" Rose in afternoon drive with *The Wax Museum* oldies show and Dennis Lowe at night, with Dean Long continuing on news. Rose, Grady and Autey also called area football, basketball and wrestling. Grady had worked part time at KRIT while attending Iowa Central Community College in Fort Dodge and was hired for his first full-time job three days before he graduated in 1981. In 1983 he became news director, and Jon Pappenheim replaced Lowe at night. Over the years KRIT's news directors also included Bruce Brandt and Vern Beachy, and Kent Bailey and Stacey Herrington served as morning hosts and program directors.

AUDIO

Steve Autey and Bill Grady on KRIT-FM mornings, February 10–11, 1983 (2:53): dense fog over "the metropolis of Clarion," weather from meteorologist Fred Wagner sponsored by H&R Block of Clarion, a listener's request for aerobic dance music, and the two hosts in "official" Richard Simmons sweatsuits. Bill Grady collection.



Halloween 1983 in the KRIT studio in Clarion. From left: Jay Justice, Steve Autey, Bill Grady and Alvina Sellers as the Pumpkin Lady. Photo by Mike Casper. Bill Grady collection.

Out in the community. KRIT didn't just report on Clarion's big days from the studio; it was part of them. On Wednesday, July 27, 1983, RAGBRAI XI, the *Des Moines Register*'s annual bicycle ride across Iowa, made its overnight stop in Clarion. More than 7,000 riders poured into town that day, camping on the high school grounds, buying out the food stands run by local groups and filling the courthouse square for the evening's entertainment.

KRIT was part of the planning committee, and for weeks beforehand it ran stories and announcements getting the town ready. On the day itself the station broadcast continuously, relaying information to riders, their support teams and residents: what was happening, where to

go and which streets were blocked off. Afterward, riders' thank-you letters to the Chamber of Commerce called Clarion the "High Point" of the ride.

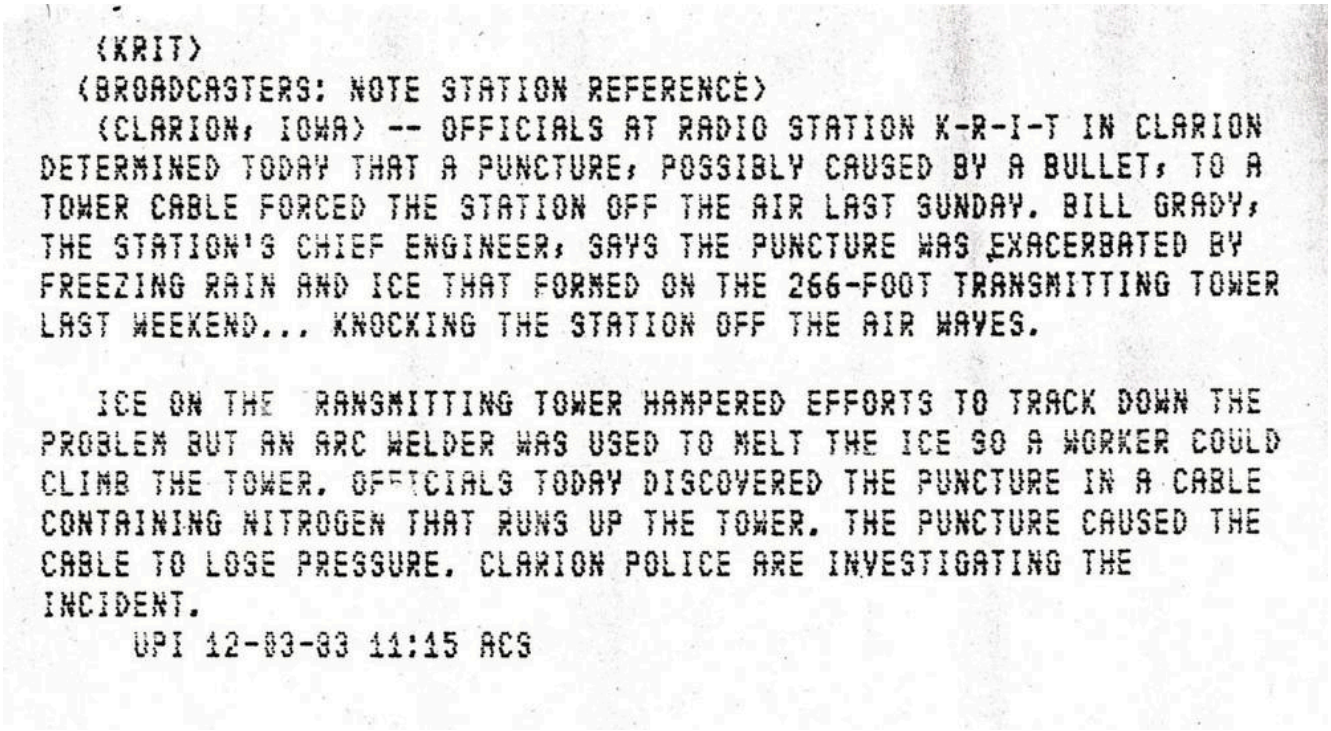


KRIT's Saturday morning coaches show, live from Conlon's Bakery in Clarion, September 1984. From left: Bill Grady, Gale Zellweger and Clarion Head Football Coach Bob Miller. Photo by Louise Casper. Bill Grady collection.

Off the air, then a new manager (1983–1985). The new owners put about $100,000 into the station, including a new transmitter switched on October 26, 1983; a month later KRIT went off the air for 22 days, from November 27 to December 19, 1983. Someone had shot a rifle bullet through the nitrogen-filled transmission line on the 266-foot tower; when the Thanksgiving ice storm hit, moisture got into the punctured line and the signal began arcing back toward the new

transmitter. Ice kept a climber from reaching the damage until crews used an arc welder from B.C. and T. Bunn, the welding company next door to the studio, to melt it off the tower, and Clarion police investigated.

Replacing 300 feet of line cost $6,000 to $7,000, and the outage cost advertising during the Christmas shopping season and fell in the middle of a November 20–December 12 ratings survey. "Because we've missed half of the rating period, we may not fully know the implications of this for six to nine months," Station Manager Mike Casper told the *Eagle Grove Eagle*. KRIT was back on the air the week before Christmas and continued serving the area.



(KRIT)
(BROADCASTERS: NOTE STATION REFERENCE)
(CLARION, IOWA) -- OFFICIALS AT RADIO STATION K-R-I-T IN CLARION DETERMINED TODAY THAT A PUNCTURE, POSSIBLY CAUSED BY A BULLET, TO A TOWER CABLE FORCED THE STATION OFF THE AIR LAST SUNDAY. BILL GRADY, THE STATION'S CHIEF ENGINEER, SAYS THE PUNCTURE WAS EXACERBATED BY FREEZING RAIN AND ICE THAT FORMED ON THE 266-FOOT TRANSMITTING TOWER LAST WEEKEND... KNOCKING THE STATION OFF THE AIR WAVES.

ICE ON THE RANSMITTING TOWER HAMPERED EFFORTS TO TRACK DOWN THE PROBLEM BUT AN ARC WELDER WAS USED TO MELT THE ICE SO A WORKER COULD CLIMB THE TOWER. OFFICIALS TODAY DISCOVERED THE PUNCTURE IN A CABLE CONTAINING NITROGEN THAT RUNS UP THE TOWER. THE PUNCTURE CAUSED THE CABLE TO LOSE PRESSURE. CLARION POLICE ARE INVESTIGATING THE INCIDENT.
UPI 12-03-83 11:15 ACS

The UPI wire story on KRIT's outage, December 3, 1983, quoting the station's chief engineer, Bill Grady. Bill Grady collection.

The Highway 3 bridge and Ownership Change. KRIT's people were part of Clarion's civic life off the air, too. In the fall of 1984 the Iowa Department of Transportation planned to tear out and rebuild the Highway 3 bridge just east of Clarion during the summer of 1985, routing traffic around town on a detour. Clarion businesses feared the kind of losses Goldfield had suffered during its own road project.

On November 19, 1984, Grady and businessman Mark Hensel took the concerns of a citizens' group to the Wright County Board of Supervisors, and that afternoon Grady opened a meeting of 54 people at the New Home Cafe, including State Representative Delwyn Stromer and county

officials, by laying out the problem. Before the meeting ended, DOT Commissioner Darrell Rensink called department headquarters in Ames and announced that the bids would be relet so the bridge could be rebuilt one half at a time, keeping Highway 3 open.

In December 1984, General Manager Mike Casper left to become general manager of KFIZ-AM in Fond du Lac, and ownership changed as well. The Roskamps bought out Rabbitt, and on January 1, 1985, Grady became general manager at 23. Starting as an announcer, he had gone on to serve as the station's news director, sports director, chief engineer and top salesman, and despite his youth he was the natural pick to succeed Casper.



KRIT-FM broadcasting live from Gazebo Park during Festival in the Park, Clarion, 1985. KRIT Program Director and Morning Host Stacey Herrington is in red above the word Sport. Bill Grady collection.

Silver Dollar Days in Eagle Grove. KRIT's promotions reached neighboring towns as well. In late September 1985 the station and the *Eagle Grove Eagle* organized Silver Dollar Days in Eagle Grove: eleven stores joined them in offering specials and registrations for a sack full of 200 silver dollars, and KRIT broadcast live segments from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Friday and Saturday. The drawing was held at the Sunday noon Flight Lunch at the Eagle Grove Municipal Airport. Tilbert Thompson, whose entry was registered at Eagle Grove Super Valu, won the silver dollars, presented by the promotion's organizers, Grady and *Eagle* Publisher John Neibergall.



Eagle Grove Eagle
Wednesday, October 2, 1985
Page 5-A

Handsful of silver dollars

Tilbert Thompson, (center), winner of 200 free silver dollars the Eagle Grove Silver Dollar Days drawing Sunday, had his hands full as Silver Dollar Days organizers Bill Grady (left), general manager of KRIT-FM 97 and John Neibergall, publisher of The Eagle Grove Eagle, presented him his winnings. Tilbert's winning registration had been entered at Eagle Grove Super Valu, one of 13 local sponsors of the special, savings promotion. Thompson said his first purchase from his winnings would be a new pair of rubbers to keep his feet dry through these rainy fall days. The winner expressed his appreciation to all of the participants for sponsoring Silver Dollar Days. (Eagle photo by Sandy Mickelson)

Silver Dollar Days winner Tilbert Thompson (center) receives his 200 silver dollars from organizers Bill Grady (left) of KRIT-FM 97 and John Neibergall of the Eagle Grove Eagle. *From the* Eagle Grove Eagle, *October 2, 1985; photo by Sandy Mickelson.*

The Eagle Grove ties outlasted Grady's time at KRIT. After he returned to Fort Dodge in 1991 as general manager of KVFD and KUEL, he rejoined the Eagle Grove Area Chamber of Commerce. He served on the steering committee for Eagle Grove's Old Fashioned Summer Fest, June 27–29, 1992, and took a turn as the Retail Association's quarterly chair in the fall of 1993, when the association ran its "All Your Christmas Wishes in Eagle Grove" promotion.



News Director Bruce Brandt, as the KRIT Kritter, walks beside his car and the KRIT-FM banner in the Festival in the Park parade, 1985. Bill Grady collection.

By January of 1985, Grady was KRIT's manager, a Chamber of Commerce board member and its retail chairman. In October of that same year he represented the Chamber in a Clarion delegation to its sister city, Clarion, Pennsylvania, for the Autumn Leaf Festival, and told Clarion, Iowa's story in an interview on the Clarion University television station. Throughout the week he also sent live reports on the festival back to KRIT listeners.



The Clarion, Iowa, delegation to the Autumn Leaf Festival in Clarion, Pennsylvania, October 1985. From left, with wives in front of their husbands: Bill Grady; Clarion, Pennsylvania, Mayor Melvin G. Riffer and his wife; Clarion, Iowa, Mayor Dennis Olson and Jo Ann Olson; Bruce and Jackie Bierma; Conger and Pearl Whyte; and Maurice and Gladys Riley. Bill Grady collection.

The visit was meant to cement the towns' new sister-city relationship: the two mayors, Melvin G. Riffer and Dennis C. Olson, were named grand marshals of the festival's 32nd annual parade, and more than 40 visitors from Clarion, Iowa, were to ride in it aboard the Knight's Inn double-decker bus. Grady stayed with William C. "Bill" Hearst and his family; Hearst ran WWCH, the Clarion, Pennsylvania, AM station his late father, William Curtis Hearst, had co-founded in 1960. The next June, during Festival in the Park, Clarion, Iowa, hosted a delegation from Clarion, Pennsylvania, that included WWCH News Director Alice Parker.



A WWCH remote in Clarion, Pennsylvania, October 1985. William C. Hearst is at right with the microphone and headphones. Bill Grady collection.

A future network meteorologist. One of the part-timers on Grady's staff at KRIT was Sean McLaughlin of Belmond, whose father, Steve McLaughlin, owned McLaughlin Brothers Chevrolet there and advertised on KRIT; Steve was a cousin of Jerry McLaughlin, the station's first manager. After earning a broadcast journalism degree at Iowa State University, he reported and anchored at KIMT-TV in Mason City and WOI-TV in Ames, did weather at KMIR-TV in Palm Springs, California, and spent about 12 years as chief meteorologist at KPNX, Phoenix's NBC affiliate. In July 2004 he joined NBC News as MSNBC's weekday meteorologist and the Sunday weather anchor on *Weekend Today*, and he filled in for Al Roker on *Today* more than 90 times. He later returned to Phoenix, where he has been a meteorologist and news anchor at KPHO, and has won eleven regional Emmy Awards.

Floppy comes to Clarion. One of the last big promotions KRIT ever did as a Clarion station, and one of its biggest, came that same fall. Duane Ellett and his beagle puppet Floppy had been on

WHO-TV in Des Moines since 1957, and a generation of Iowa children had grown up with them. As the Chamber's retail chairman, Grady worked out the details of the appearance with Ellett himself.

VIDEO

Duane and Floppy on WHO-TV, noon show, Wednesday, November 27, 1985: KRIT General Manager Bill Grady and Clarion Chamber of Commerce Executive Secretary Karen Weld promote the Clarion Christmas Kick Off Parade on Friday, November 29, with Duane Ellett and Floppy as its co-grand marshals (YouTube)

On Wednesday, November 27, 1985, Grady and Chamber Executive Secretary Karen Weld went on Duane and Floppy's noon show on WHO-TV to promote it, and two days later Ellett and Floppy rode as co-grand marshals of Clarion's Christmas Kick Off Parade, themed "Home for Christmas." Grady was Ellett's host for the entire morning before the 10:30 parade, and the two spent it trading stories. After the parade, Ellett and Floppy appeared in the IPS Community Room to a standing-room-only crowd. Ellett died in 1987, less than two years later.

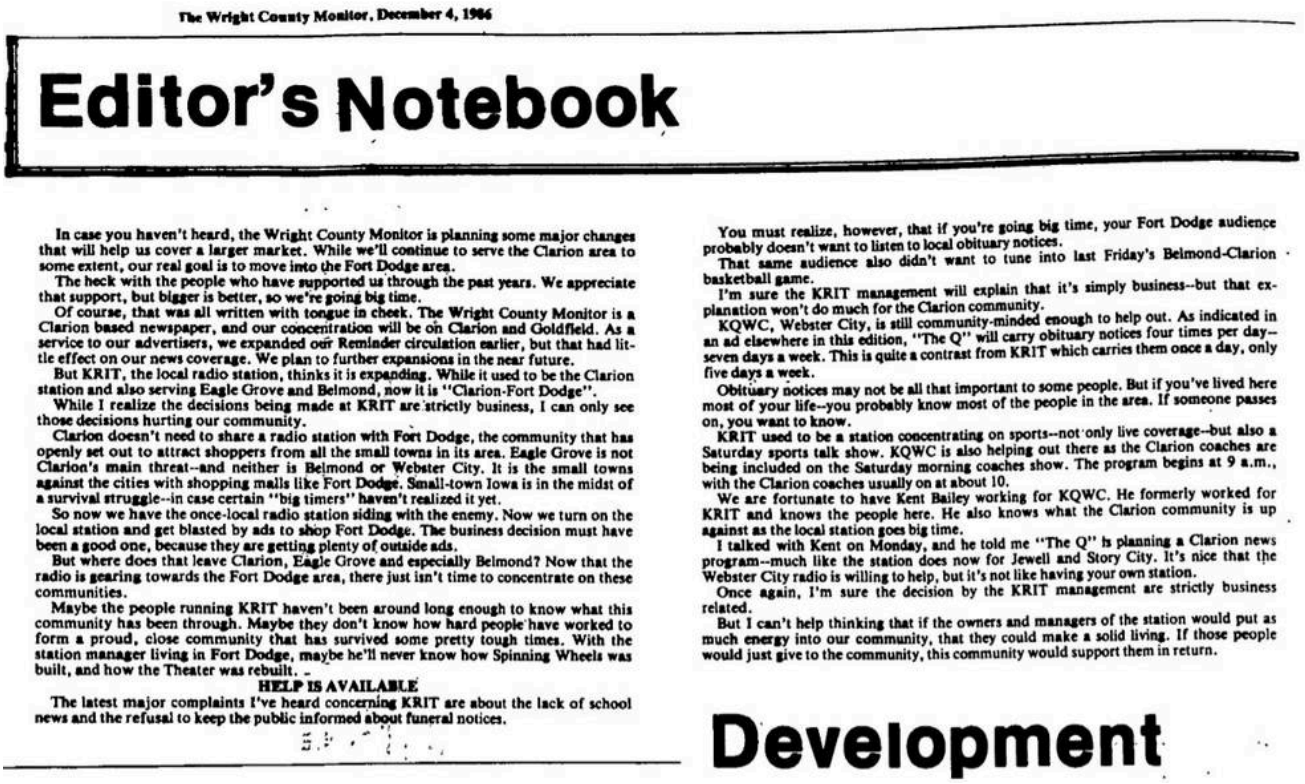


KRIT's Christmas ad for 1985 lists the staff: Bill Grady, Kent Bailey, Darlene Seifkens, Kerrie Woodley, Stacey Herrington, Randy Lee, Mike Weithorn, Vern Beachy, Lonnie Etter, Jackie McLaughlin, Lisa Waldon and Jodi Tapper. From the Eagle Grove Eagle, *December 18, 1985.*

Ownership change and the move to Fort Dodge. In May 1986 Linder Broadcasting of Mankato, Minnesota bought KRIT from the Roskamps through a company named Linder Broadcasting of Fort Dodge. The FCC filing listed the price as $110,000 in cash, but the full deal was larger: by Grady's account, about $220,000 plus the station's liabilities. The new owners built a 640-foot tower near Badger, in Humboldt County, and over the next year moved the station into Fort Dodge as "Super 97," with studios downtown at 1014 Central Avenue.

The plan was kept quiet at first. In October 1986 Grady learned that the station was leaving Clarion for Fort Dodge; by his account, the announcement was being held back so Clarion advertisers would keep buying time. Grady was opposed to the move and left later that month for KFIZ in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. He went on to manage WCWC/WYUR in Ripon and Fond du Lac before coming home to Fort Dodge in 1991 to run KVFD and KUEL.

Once the plan was out, it was not popular in Clarion. In December 1986 the *Wright County Monitor*'s editor complained that KRIT, now billing itself as "Clarion-Fort Dodge," was running ads for Fort Dodge stores, carrying funeral notices only once a day, five days a week, and doing less school news, while Webster City's KQWC stepped in with Clarion obituaries and coaches' shows. Readers wrote in agreeing, and two weeks later editor Ed Dorsey added that the "local" station "claims it cares about Clarion, and then broadcasts live from retail outlets in Fort Dodge, urging shoppers to spend their money in that city."



The Wright County Monitor, December 4, 1986

Editor's Notebook

In case you haven't heard, the Wright County Monitor is planning some major changes that will help us cover a larger market. While we'll continue to serve the Clarion area to some extent, our real goal is to move into the Fort Dodge area.

The heck with the people who have supported us through the past years. We appreciate that support, but bigger is better, so we're going big time.

Of course, that was all written with tongue in cheek. The Wright County Monitor is a Clarion based newspaper, and our concentration will be on Clarion and Goldfield. As a service to our advertisers, we expanded our Reminder circulation earlier, but that had little effect on our news coverage. We plan to further expansions in the near future.

But KRIT, the local radio station, thinks it is expanding. While it used to be the Clarion station and also serving Eagle Grove and Belmond, now it is "Clarion-Fort Dodge".

While I realize the decisions being made at KRIT are strictly business, I can only see those decisions hurting our community.

Clarion doesn't need to share a radio station with Fort Dodge, the community that has openly set out to attract shoppers from all the small towns in its area. Eagle Grove is not Clarion's main threat--and neither is Belmond or Webster City. It is the small towns against the cities with shopping malls like Fort Dodge. Small-town Iowa is in the midst of a survival struggle--in case certain "big timers" haven't realized it yet.

So now we have the once-local radio station siding with the enemy. Now we turn on the local station and get blasted by ads to shop Fort Dodge. The business decision must have been a good one, because they are getting plenty of outside ads.

But where does that leave Clarion, Eagle Grove and especially Belmond? Now that the radio is gearing towards the Fort Dodge area, there just isn't time to concentrate on these communities.

Maybe the people running KRIT haven't been around long enough to know what this community has been through. Maybe they don't know how hard people have worked to form a proud, close community that has survived some pretty tough times. With the station manager living in Fort Dodge, maybe he'll never know how Spinning Wheels was built, and how the Theater was rebuilt.

HELP IS AVAILABLE

The latest major complaints I've heard concerning KRIT are about the lack of school news and the refusal to keep the public informed about funeral notices.

You must realize, however, that if you're going big time, your Fort Dodge audience probably doesn't want to listen to local obituary notices.

That same audience also didn't want to tune into last Friday's Belmond-Clarion basketball game.

I'm sure the KRIT management will explain that it's simply business--but that explanation won't do much for the Clarion community.

KQWC, Webster City, is still community-minded enough to help out. As indicated in an ad elsewhere in this edition, "The Q" will carry obituary notices four times per day--seven days a week. This is quite a contrast from KRIT which carries them once a day, only five days a week.

Obituary notices may not be all that important to some people. But if you've lived here most of your life--you probably know most of the people in the area. If someone passes on, you want to know.

KRIT used to be a station concentrating on sports--not only live coverage--but also a Saturday sports talk show. KQWC is also helping out there as the Clarion coaches are being included on the Saturday morning coaches show. The program begins at 9 a.m., with the Clarion coaches usually on at about 10.

We are fortunate to have Kent Bailey working for KQWC. He formerly worked for KRIT and knows the people here. He also knows what the Clarion community is up against as the local station goes big time.

I talked with Kent on Monday, and he told me "The Q" is planning a Clarion news program--much like the station does now for Jewell and Story City. It's nice that the Webster City radio is willing to help, but it's not like having your own station.

Once again, I'm sure the decision by the KRIT management are strictly business related.

But I can't help thinking that if the owners and managers of the station would put as much energy into our community, that they could make a solid living. If those people would just give to the community, this community would support them in return.

Development

"Editor's Notebook," Wright County Monitor, December 4, 1986: editor Ed Dorsey takes KRIT to task for "siding with the enemy" as it turned toward Fort Dodge, and points readers to Webster City's KQWC for Clarion obituaries and coaches' shows.

The tower controversy (1986–1987). The new tower brought complaints of its own: listeners of Humboldt's KHBT-FM reported interference from KRIT's strong signal. In December 1986 about 20 Humboldt County residents told their county supervisors that they could no longer pick up KHBT, and some had trouble receiving WOI-TV, Channel 5 in Ames; KRIT offered filters for affected televisions, and the county attorney notified the FCC.

In January 1987 an FCC investigation found the problem lay in the listeners' radios, not the station, though KRIT remained responsible for fixing interference within 2½ miles of the tower;

General Manager and Vice President Burke Bartell said the station had installed filters on radio antennas at more than 50 homes.

The complaints kept coming. In March 1987 KHBT owner Bob Christensen got Senator Charles Grassley and Congressman Fred Grandy to sponsor a two-hour public hearing, where Humboldt-area residents, FCC officials and staff from both stations aired the problem. Bartell said KRIT had logged 83 complaints since moving to the new tower and had bought 28 new radios for listeners whose older sets couldn't filter out the stronger signal. James Dailey of the FCC's Kansas City office said he would recommend holding up KRIT's operating license until every interference complaint was resolved. On March 26 the *Humboldt Independent* reported that the FCC had given KRIT 30 days to "effectively address the outstanding interference."

What Clarion lost. When Marv Hull built KRIT, he held out for the biggest FM license there was, 100,000 watts, so a small-town station could reach all of Wright County. A 3,000-watt station would have stayed in Clarion, but the big license would later make KRIT a target.

FCC rules allowed a station to move its tower to improve its service, and to keep its city of license as long as its signal still covered that city. Linder followed the letter of those rules, not their purpose. The new tower near Badger put a strong signal over Fort Dodge, a market already served by four stations, the oldest of them on the air since 1939. The station's main office and studios moved to Central Avenue in Fort Dodge, where its staff lived and worked.

In Clarion, Linder rented an office to hold the station's public file, and that was the extent of KRIT's presence in its city of license. Clarion lost its radio voice, and Fort Dodge gained one more station splitting the same advertising pie.

For more than 20 years KRIT had been the daily news and information source for Clarion and the farms and towns around it, and a partner to the businesses that kept it on the air. By the 1986 Christmas season the same station was broadcasting live from Fort Dodge stores.

Clarion High School games soon disappeared from the station, along with the meet-the-candidates forums, breaking news bulletins, the live remotes from Festival in the Park and the Wright County District Junior Fair, the lost-pet and bake sale announcements, all the things small-market radio does best. Gone too were the volunteers and community partnerships, the jobs, and the payroll the station had supported for two decades.

KRIT was more than a music station that changed hands and changed format. For more than two decades it had been the area's only daily source of local news and information, licensed to Clarion and built to serve it. "Clarion went from having a voice to having a void," Grady says.

"KQWC tried to pick up some of what was lost once KRIT turned its attention to Fort Dodge, but it couldn't compare to what a full-service station in that town had been doing."



KRIT's Clarion studio at 215 Sixth Street S.W., standing empty on July 10, 1987, after the station moved to Fort Dodge. Photo by Bill Grady.

Super 97 in Fort Dodge (1987–1989). Once the move was complete, KRIT, now "Super 97," went after Fort Dodge's Top 40 audience head to head with KKEZ's Z94. Chris Robbins (Chris Walterman), a Brown Institute graduate who had started at KWMT in 1980 and done mornings on KX 92, joined on March 1, 1987, while the station was still in Clarion; he was its first program director in Fort Dodge and stayed until 1996.

Dave Haldin, who had left KKEZ for FM 108 in Waterloo when Jim Davis took over there, came to KRIT in April 1987, while the station was still in Clarion, and by the fall of 1988 Mike Parry had arrived as general manager, following Burke Bartell. It was a busy, fast-changing station: three program directors and three general managers over two years, counting Grady, who was still running the station when the move was set in motion.



Bud Sumners and Mack Gabrielson, representing the Wright County Insurance Committee met with the Supervisors Monday to present the insurance recommendations from the twelve-member committee. The committee had recommended that the county purchase earthquake insurance because of publicized increases in seismic activity from earthquake faults in the midwest.

that is why the committee recommended that you consider that coverage." He noted that the coverage would come under the fire and windstorm portion of the policy bringing that portion of the premium up to nearly $10,000.

Gabrielson also told the Board that with the exception of worker's compensation premiums, all other rates have remained either the same or have gone down slightly. Any areas of

The insurance package that the Supervisors accepted showed total premium dollars of $154,544 and does not include the cost of earthquake insurance. Supervisor Larry Olson first commented on the earthquake insurance recommendation saying that it bothered him to consider that type of insurance. Supervisor Roger Lonnevik then said, "I think we'd be fairly safe not to carry that."

Sirens to be tested Friday

Chief of Police Robert Shaw has announced that the tornado sirens will be tested on Friday, June 23 at 10 a.m. Shaw reminds people what the different sirens will sound like if they sound to warn residents of a dangerous weather condition. "Take cover siren is a long straight blast of about five minutes," said Shaw. "The pitch is actually the same but it sounds like it is changing because the siren rotates." He also said that the tornado sirens are located in the northeast part of the city on the east side of the elementary school an din the southwest area of the city on the north side of the county jail property.

The all clear signal is one long siren, again about five minutes, but with an up and down tone sounding much like the fire siren. The difference in the fire siren and all clear siren is location. The fire siren sounds only from the city's fire station, not through either of the other sirens located away from downtown.

Snip

Chris Miner, Forman for Deters Tower Service, Inc. of Des Moines prepares to cut the cables to release the KRIT tower south of Clarion. KRIT had the tower taken down on Friday. (Monitor photo by Darrel Mosher)

Falling

With the cables all snipped the tower begins its descent, falling a little north instead of a little south as planned. (Monitor photo by Barbara Dorsey)

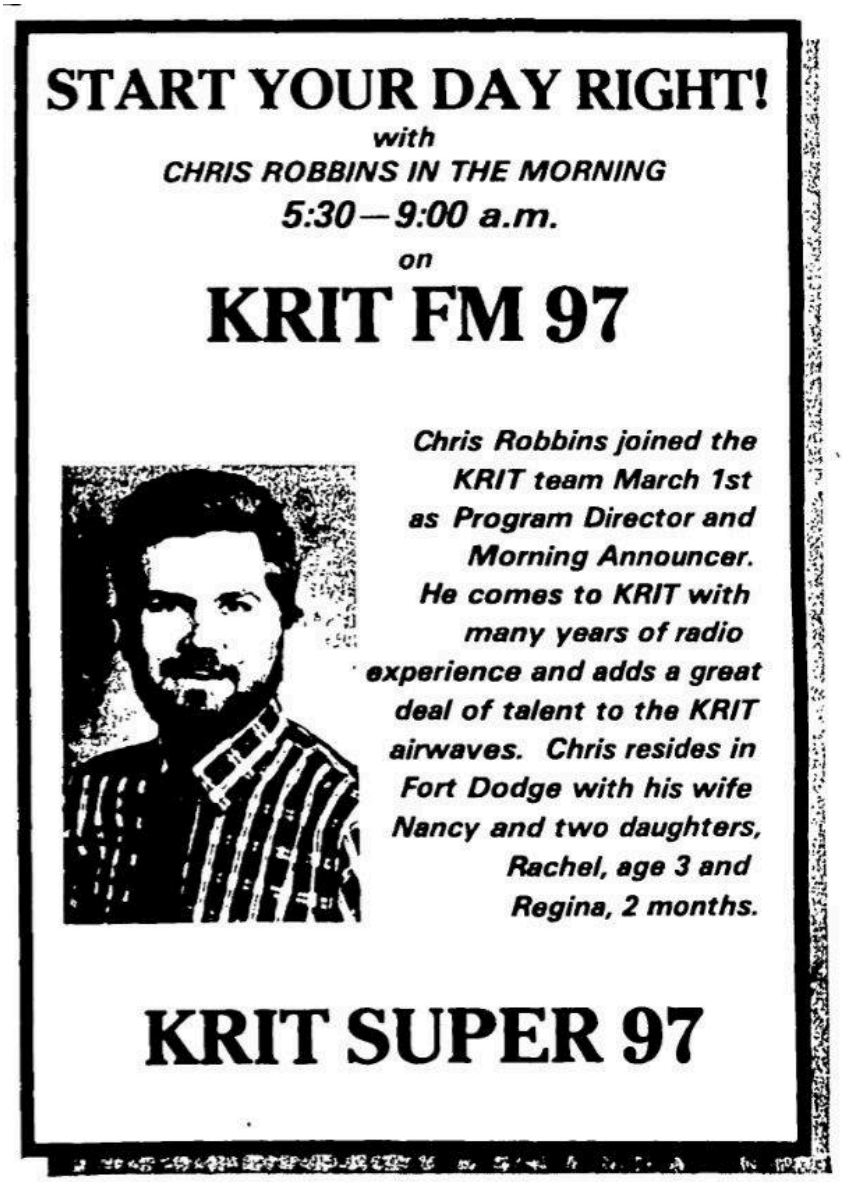
Down

Ted Bunn surveys the damage to the B.C. and T. Bunn building upon which the tower came to rest. There were a few knicks out of the top of the building but there didn't appear to be substantial damage. The top of the tower fell into the scrap and salvage yard to the east of the building. (Monitor photo by Barbara Dorsey)

"Snip," "Falling" and "Down": the old KRIT tower south of Clarion comes down on Friday, June 16, 1989, landing on the B.C. and T. Bunn building, as Ted Bunn surveys the damage. From the Wright County Monitor, *June 22, 1989; photos by Darrel Mosher and Barbara Dorsey.*

In June of 1989 the last piece of KRIT in Clarion came down. On Friday, June 16, 1989, a crew from Deters Tower Service of Des Moines, led by foreman Chris Miner, cut the guy wires on the old tower on the south edge of town. It was supposed to fall a little south; it fell a little north instead, landing on the B.C. and T. Bunn building and dropping its top into the scrap and salvage yard next door. The building came away with only a few nicks.

Marv Hull settled the last of his Clarion business in 1991 and retired to Henryetta, Oklahoma. He died on July 15, 1992, at 79, nearly 30 years after he first applied to put KRIT on the air.



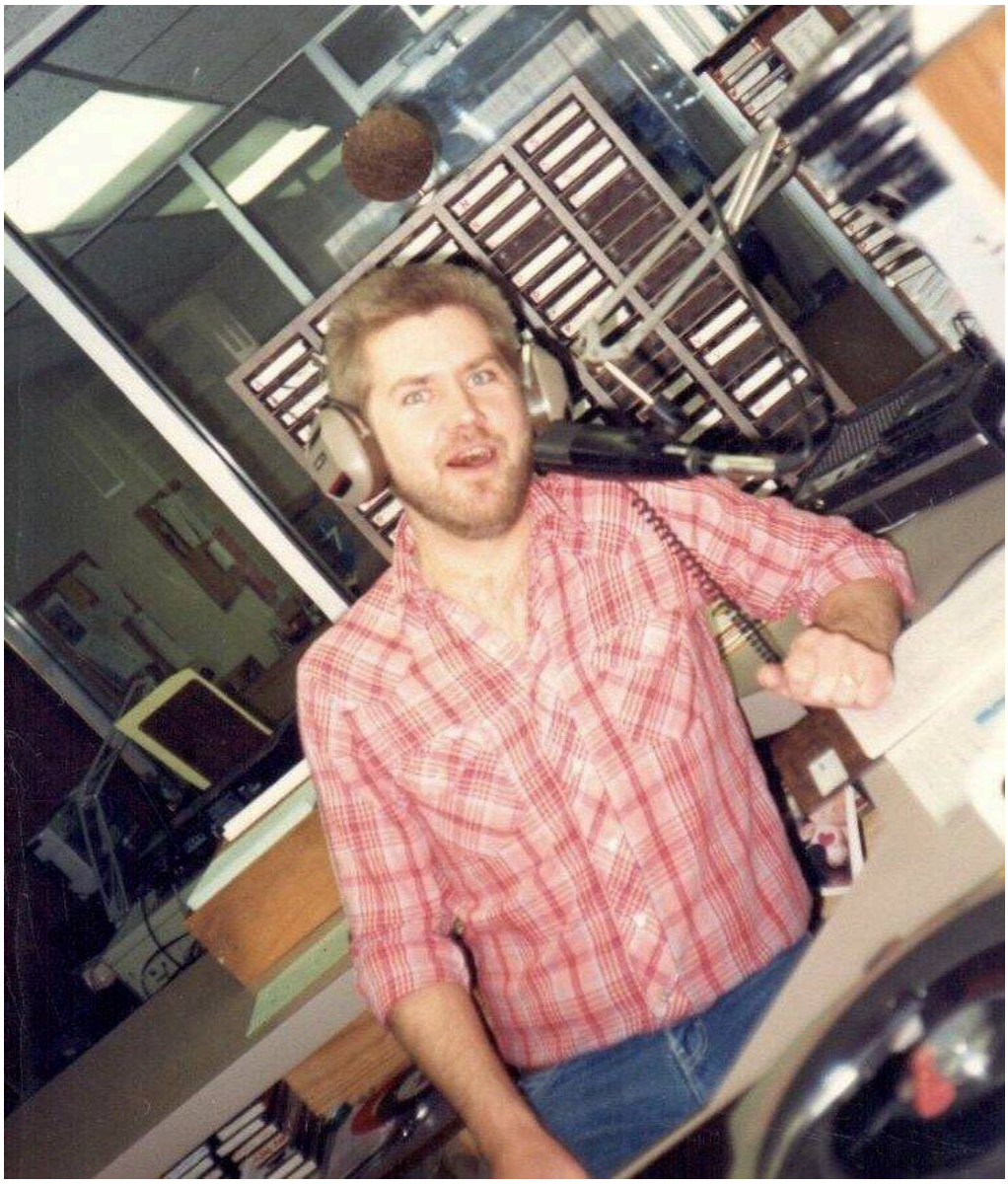
"Start your day right!" A KRIT Super 97 ad in the Wright County Monitor, *April 9, 1987, introducing Chris Robbins, who joined the station March 1 as program director and morning announcer, 5:30 to 9 a.m..*

The radio war. Drew Durigan, let go at KKEZ that spring, joined Super 97 for nights when it went on the air from Fort Dodge in May 1987. General Manager Burke Bartell, who had been listening to him, told him, "We need a personality. We need a presence at night." Fort Dodge was "such a vibrant, competitive little market back in the mid-80s," Durigan says: fewer than 30,000 people, five radio stations and four owners, "and they all made money. You'll never, ever see that again."

AUDIO

Drew Durigan, "the Minnesota Maniac," on Super 97, May to November 1987 (7:25; MP3): his first night on the air ("Super 97 is KRIT Clarion, Fort Dodge, the winning station"), two cuts from September and October that take aim at "the fools on the hill," and his last "Maniac Jam," with listeners calling in to say goodbye. Courtesy of Drew Durigan.

On the air he went after his old station without naming it, calling KKEZ "the fools on the hill" and reworking Super 97's positioning line into "Thanks for making the switch with me to the winning station." When Z94 promoted a concert-ticket giveaway for callers who heard a certain song, he would find out the song and play it himself; listeners who heard it on Super 97 called the KKEZ request line they had known for years to claim their tickets. "They just hated that," Durigan says. "I wasn't making any money, but it was one of the most fun times I ever had in radio."



Chris Robbins (Chris Walterman) on the air at Super 97, 1987, Fort Dodge studios. Courtesy of Chris Walterman.

Super 97 promotions. In Fort Dodge, Super 97 built its audience with big promotions. "Come Alive at 5" was Parry's idea: a live remote and happy hour every Wednesday from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Rock 'N Roll Reunion in the Trolley Center downtown, set up with the club's owners, Bob and Bonnie Giles, and with Steve Pederson of Pabst Blue Ribbon Distributing, which provided free beer. Parry introduced Charlie Chase on the air, and Chase announced and played the oldies from behind the front end of a 1955 Chevy.



Charlie Chase in 1989. Courtesy of Chris Walterman.

Chase had started at KRIT in Clarion, moved to KKEZ in 1980 and came back to KRIT in late 1988, after Parry took over; he had a huge record collection, knew the oldies and, Robbins says, "could really work a crowd." The promotion took off right away. The place filled every week, with listeners lined up for a block or more to get in, and it ran until the station switched to country in 1992. "This is absolutely the best promotion that we ever did," Robbins says.



The KRIT FM 97 "Super 97" van, with the Super Chicken riding on the roof, at the Hamilton County Speedway in Webster City. Courtesy of Chris Walterman.

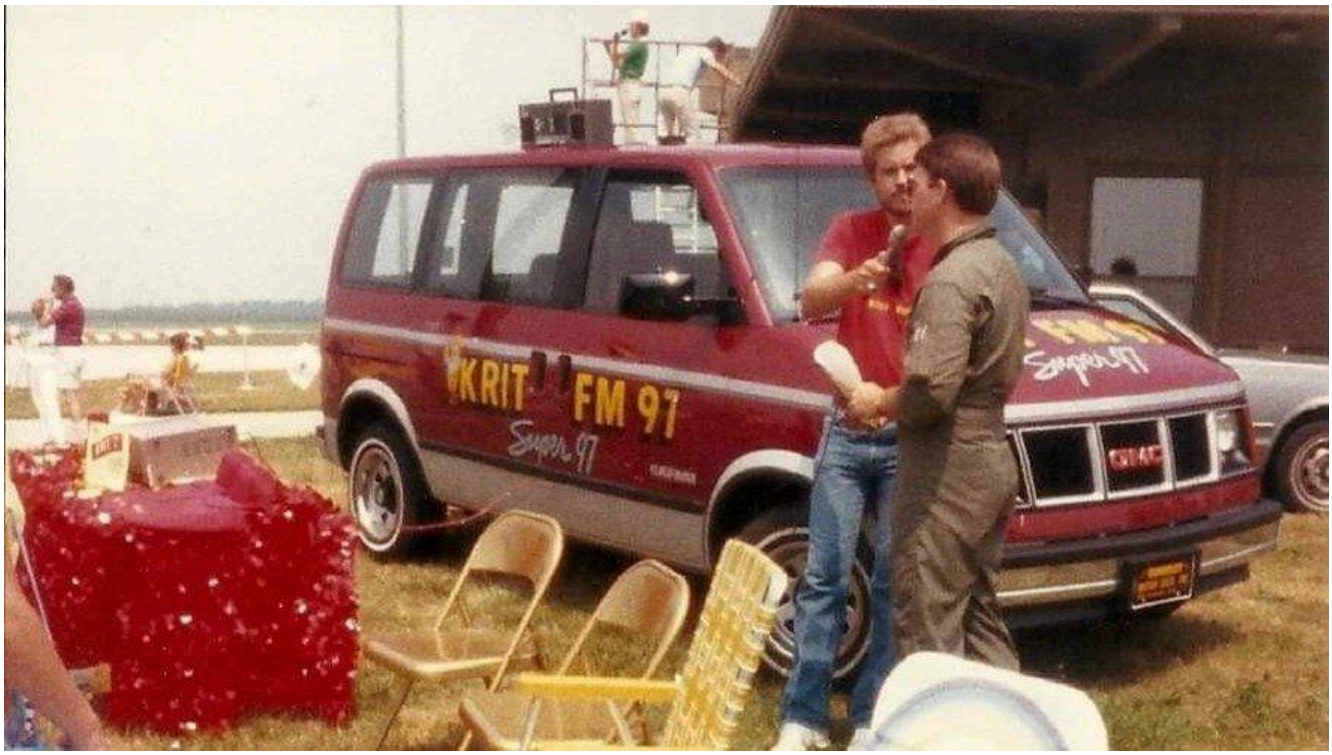
The station also ran bus trips to concerts and block parties, and its mascot, the Super Chicken, came to every event; Robbins calls Rusty McNeil "the best Super Chicken ever".

Around 1990 Wolfman Jack himself came to the Rock 'N Roll Reunion, drawing the biggest crowd the club ever had. Chase was ready to spin the records with him, Robbins remembers, but when he asked which ones to play, the Wolfman handed him a cassette: "put this in and let it roll and old 'Wolfie' will do his thing between the songs." "What a legendary night it was!" Robbins says.



Wolfman Jack at the Rock 'N Roll Reunion, about 1990. From left: Chris Robbins, Mike Parry and Lynn Pederson, KRIT's office and traffic manager, behind the Wolfman; Charlie Chase is behind the 1955 Chevy. Courtesy of Chris Walterman.

The Last Lap Show. Racing had its own show. Every Thursday night during the racing season, Parry, Robbins and local racer Dave Doughty gave results from area tracks and interviewed drivers on the "Last Lap Show," which ran for many years. Robbins had announced at several race tracks around the area, and after moving to St. George, Utah, he was the PA announcer for NASCAR races at Las Vegas Motor Speedway from 2014 to 2016.



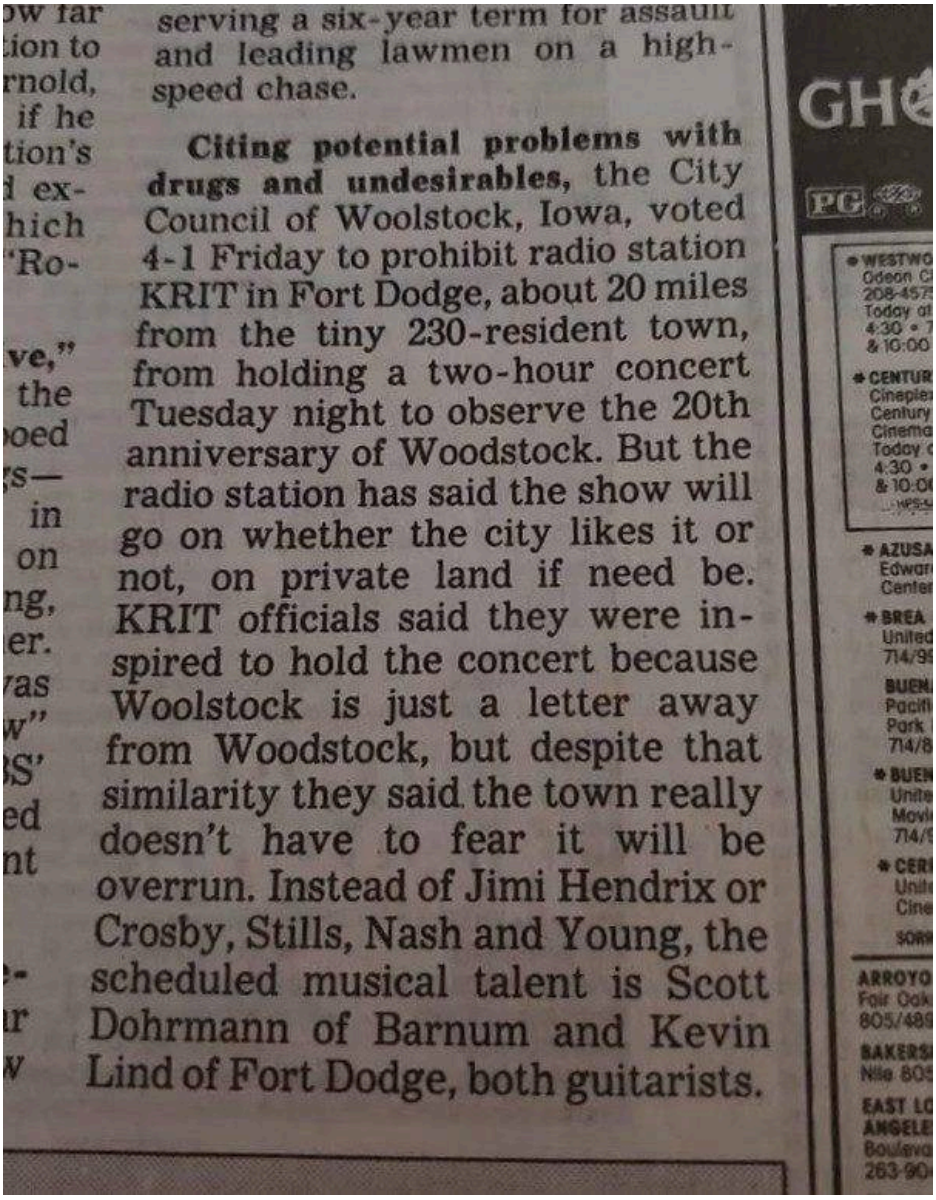
Chris Robbins (Chris Walterman), in red with the microphone, on a Super 97 remote at the Fort Dodge Airport, August 1989. Courtesy of Chris Walterman.

In the fall of 1988 the station had a hit of its own. Haldin and disc jockey Scott Dohrmann recorded "Kokotho," a parody of the Beach Boys' "Kokomo" that cast the little town of Otho as north-central Iowa's paradise, at Junior's Motel recording studio in Otho, where the Beach Boys' Brian Wilson had recorded in 1973.

The idea came from Parry, the station's new general manager, who had heard a similar song in Minnesota. "The phone calls are exploding," Haldin told *The Messenger*; hundreds of listeners called the first week, the station sold the song on tape for $4.97, with a Dohrmann original on the flip side, and a contest sent the grand-prize winner and a guest on an "Otho Getaway."

The biggest was "Woolstock" in August 1989, a tongue-in-cheek 20th-anniversary salute to Woodstock. It was Haldin's idea: driving down the road, he heard radio talk about Woodstock's coming anniversary and then passed a sign that read "Woolstock 7 miles." Parry, who later served in the Minnesota Senate (2010–2013), put the station behind it.

It was held at Woolstock, Iowa, a Wright County town of about 230 people. Some residents worried it would bring drugs and trouble to town. The town council kept the concert out of the city park, worried it would overwhelm the town, so it moved to the Grunwald farm just outside town.



serving a six-year term for assault and leading lawmen on a high-speed chase.

Citing potential problems with drugs and undesirables, the City Council of Woolstock, Iowa, voted 4-1 Friday to prohibit radio station KRIT in Fort Dodge, about 20 miles from the tiny 230-resident town, from holding a two-hour concert Tuesday night to observe the 20th anniversary of Woodstock. But the radio station has said the show will go on whether the city likes it or not, on private land if need be. KRIT officials said they were inspired to hold the concert because Woolstock is just a letter away from Woodstock, but despite that similarity they said the town really doesn't have to fear it will be overrun. Instead of Jimi Hendrix or Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, the scheduled musical talent is Scott Dohrmann of Barnum and Kevin Lind of Fort Dodge, both guitarists.

The Woolstock fight reaches California: the Los Angeles Times *reports the town council's 4-1 vote against KRIT's concert, August 1989. Courtesy of Chris Walterman.*

The dispute even made the *Los Angeles Times*, which reported the council's 4-1 vote and the station's plan to hold the show on private land. About 600 people came, in tie-dye and flashing peace signs; where the original was known for excess, Woolstock was known for its free hot dogs. "I saw the name Woolstock on a map and I said that works," Program Director Dave Haldin told KCCI, whose report carried the little Wright County festival to television viewers across central Iowa.

The stunt even reached Los Angeles, where KROQ's morning show had Haldin and Amy Alberts on to talk about it. "I consider August of 1989 the absolute peak of my radio career," Haldin says,

"and one of the peaks of competitive Fort Dodge radio history."

VIDEO

KCCI's 1989 report on Woolstock (YouTube)

On the air at Super 97. The Fort Dodge staff came together quickly after the move. Phil Fitzgerald, on the air as Phil Jaye, was an early hire, followed by Carol Vonn, Amy Alberts, Denny Lind, Staci Kelly, Drew Durigan ("the Minnesota Maniac"), Mike Tam, Mike Fellers and Charlie Chase. When Robbins moved to sales, Haldin became program director and did mornings with Amy Alberts; Chase had middays, Jaye afternoons, the Minnesota Maniac and later Kelly evenings, Mark Spangler late nights and Lind overnights.

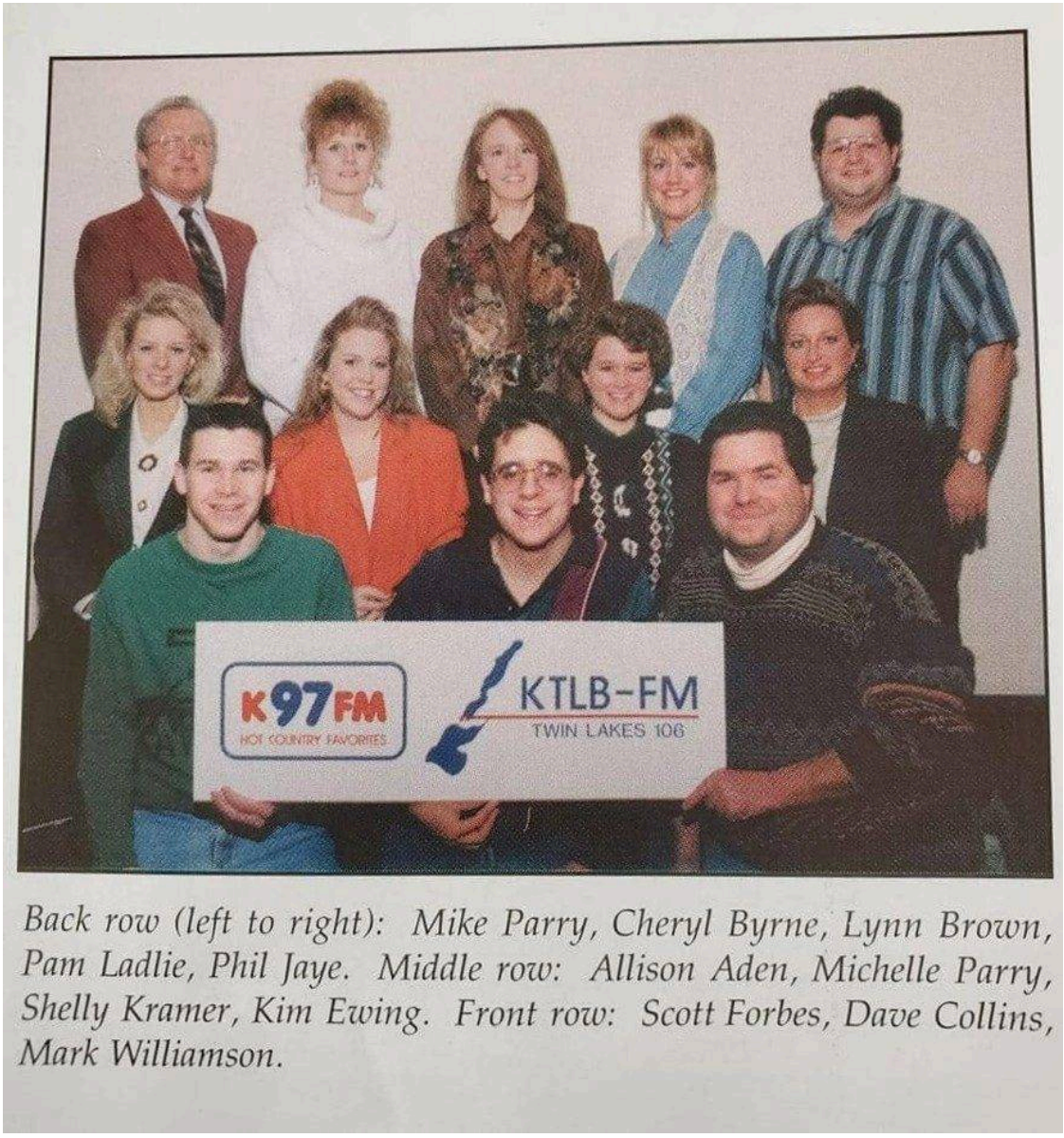


The KRIT FM 97 "Super 97" staff, 1989. Back row, from left: Chris Robbins, Mike Parry, Dave Haldin, Amy Alberts, Phil Jaye, Mike Tam and Charlie Chase; front: Jackie Johnson, Staci Kelly, Pam Ladlie, Senaida Mitchell, and Phyllis Dohrmann. Courtesy of Chris Walterman.

After Haldin and Alberts left, Chase became program director, a job Robbins believes he held from 1990 to 1992, and the husband-and-wife team of Mac and Dawn took over mornings.

Robbins believes Chase left when he learned the station was switching to country in 1992: "There was no way Charlie was going to play country."

KIAQ. In July 1992 Linder sold the station for $785,000 to James Ingstad's Fargo-based group, and on September 1 the call letters changed to KIAQ. Mike Parry stayed on as general manager under the new owners until 1996. KIAQ remained a Top 40 station for two more years; by 1994 it had switched to country, the format it still plays today.



The K97 and KTLB-FM staff, 1995. Back row, from left: Mike Parry, Cheryl Byrne, Lynn Brown, Pam Ladlie and Phil Jaye. Middle row: Allison Aden, Michelle Parry, Shelly Kramer and Kim Ewing. Front row: Scott Forbes, Dave Collins and Mark Williamson. Phil O'Reilly collection.

As a country station it ran bus trips to Mankato to see acts like Brooks & Dunn and John Michael Montgomery, and when Larry and Beverly Leiting opened the Silver Spur, a country bar, K97 gave it a Come Alive at 5–style promotion, with Phil Jaye playing music from behind a Peterbilt truck.

In 1995, Kim Ewing left to become sales manager of KVFD and KUEL, where she successfully led the sales department through their award years. In 1997, a year after Parry left, Ingstad sold both KIAQ and KTLB to Three Eagles Communications as a package deal.

Mike Parry's Thanksgiving call. The biggest "Come Alive at 5" of the year was the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, when, Chase's wife, Lynn Bohlke, remembers, the line to get into the Trolley Center wrapped around the building. Long after the promotion ended, Parry kept the night going: every year on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving he called Chase and did his "Come Alive at 5" introduction over the phone, and he never missed a year.

The last call, in 2023, reached the Bohlkes in New Zealand; Chase died that December. "He loved those Wednesday before Thanksgiving calls from Mike," Lynn Bohlke says; they "brought him so many wonderful memories." Parry now sends her a text each year on that Wednesday.

Since. Three Eagles kept the station until 2014. Once Three Eagles also owned KVFD and KUEL, from 2004, it moved K97 out of the 10th and Central storefront into the Dowd Building with them and left the old building empty. In 2014 the station passed to Digity, then to Alpha Media and, in 2025, Connoisseur Media. Today it is "K97," country.

KTLB 105.9, Twin Lakes

KTLB signed on October 5, 1975, licensed to Twin Lakes on 105.5 FM, and for nearly twenty years it was a family business.

The Donnellys. Founder Frank Donnelly (1930–2017) graduated from Fort Dodge's Corpus Christi High School in 1949 and earned a University of Iowa communications degree in 1956, and he spent 19 years selling advertising at KVFD before starting a station of his own. He and his wife Carol, who died in 1989, ran KTLB as the hometown station for Rockwell City and the surrounding towns, with local news and local sports. Their son Craig was station manager from May 1978 to February 1993 and called play-by-play for the area schools.

In August 1993 he bought KLMJ in Hampton, Iowa, through his company C D Broadcasting Inc., which also came to own KQCR 98.9 in Parkersburg. In November 2022 Craig and his wife, Kathleen, sold both stations for $1.25 million to On The Go Media, headed by Shawn Dietz of Hampton, a former announcer and general manager of the stations, keeping them locally owned.

Later owners. In July 1994 the Donnelly family sold KTLB for $370,000 to Ingstad Central Broadcasting of Iowa, part of a Fargo-based group that already owned KIAQ. Ingstad ran KTLB from KIAQ's offices at 10th and Central in Fort Dodge, and from then on the two stations moved together. Ingstad sold both to Three Eagles Communications in 1997, and Three Eagles later moved them into the Dowd Building. In 2014 Three Eagles sold KTLB and KIAQ together to Digity, and the station later went to Alpha Media and, in 2025, Connoisseur Media. The station's sports coverage outlasted the Donnellys: KTLB's Mark Williamson received the IHSAA Sports Media Award in 2005.

Today. Now on 105.9 at 25,000 watts, KTLB is "105.9 The Beach," an oldies station, a name it has carried more than once. It was The Beach, then classic rock "The Eagle" until March 2012, when The Eagle moved to 92.1 and KTLB went back to The Beach. On December 26, 2012 it stunted with the 17-minute version of "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida," and on January 1, 2013 it became "Hippie Radio 105.9," playing classic hits, before returning to The Beach.

Iowa Central's stations: KICB 88.1 and KTPR 91.1

Iowa Central Community College has trained broadcasters since 1971, and it gave Fort Dodge two noncommercial FM stations. When KVFD-TV left the air in 1977, its chief engineer, Ray Gales, joined Iowa Central's broadcasting faculty and taught there until he retired in 1992. Ben Jarman joined him in 1978, and the two ran the broadcasting program together until Jarman left in 1981 for the University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh. After Jarman's departure, KWMT announcer Bob Wood and KTPR-FM Program Director Michelle Beets would join Gales in running the Broadcasting Department for the next several years.



Iowa Central Community College's broadcasting class of 1981, with instructors Ray Gales (standing, far left) and Ben Jarman (standing, far right). Bill Grady is in the back row, third from left. Missing is Bob Wood. Bill Grady collection.

KICB 88.1. KICB, for Iowa Central Broadcasting, signed on in September 1971 as a 10-watt educational station; it grew to 200 watts and today runs 240 watts from campus. Students ran it.

First-year students worked KICB-AM, a carrier-current signal piped into the dorms; second-year students ran KICB-FM and filled every job, from general manager and program director to news, sports and underwriting sales. Today KICB is "The Point," on the air seven days a week, and Iowa Central describes it as the only FCC-licensed, student-managed community college radio station in Iowa. Students in the TV/Radio Production program go on the air from their first semester.



"Public Radio, the sound alternative": a KTPR 91.1 sticker. Courtesy of Webster County Historical Society, Roger Natte Archives Room.

KTPR 91.1. KTPR was Ben Jarman's idea, and it signed on September 15, 1980: Iowa Central's public radio station, with classical music by day, jazz at night, local news and a heavy schedule of NPR programs. Edwin Barbour, who had led Iowa Central since 1966, was its president. The

studio was a modular building behind the old 4-H building, linked to a transmitter at Bradgate, the same site as KVFD-TV's channel 21 tower.

It started at 65,000 watts and was running 100,000 watts from a 1,052-foot tower by 1989. Bob Wood later hosted a blues show on KTPR and helped found the Lizard Creek Blues Society, the group behind Fort Dodge's Blues Under the Trees festival. Wood died in April 2026. KTPR also launched public radio careers. Katherine Perkins hosted *Morning Edition* and served as program director before becoming Iowa Public Radio's program director for news/talk. John Pemble hosted the music program *Wild Rose Café* in the early 2000s and taught at Iowa Central before becoming IPR's technical producer for news.



Bill Grady taking the transmitter meter readings in the KTPR studio in 1980. Photo by Steve Williams. Bill Grady collection.

In 2000 Iowa Central transferred KTPR to Iowa State University (FCC approval March 23, 2000), and the station joined the university's public radio service, which later became part of Iowa Public Radio. The change had been approved by the Board of Regents in late 1999: Iowa Central, looking to reduce the cost of keeping the station on the air, offered its license to Iowa State, which managed KTPR through WOI Radio under an interim agreement until the FCC approved the transfer. Iowa Central agreed to contribute $80,000 the first year and $50,000 the second, and a Fort Dodge advisory committee found strong community support for the move.

The call letters changed to KNSH in September 2012 and to KNSK on December 24, 2013. In 2022 the license passed from Iowa State to Iowa Public Radio, Inc., and KNSK relays Iowa Public Radio today.

Fort Dodge Radio: the newest chapter, online since 2019

Fort Dodge Radio went on the air April 1, 2019, as an online classic rock station: no transmitter and no frequency, streaming to listeners across North America through Live365.

Where it came from. Founder Bill Grady began his career at Iowa Central, KTPR and KRIT, and from December 1991 to 2002 managed KVFD and KUEL through their award years. After he left traditional radio in 2002, his company, Star Communications of Iowa, turned to digital media. It launched You Are The Guest in 2005, the first podcast series from Iowa, and MyFortDodge.com in 2007. Fort Dodge Radio followed in 2019.

You Are The Guest. Once the noncompete agreement from his radio years was satisfied, Grady's first project was a podcast in 2005. He had spent a couple of years giving spoken seminars, and the search for a way to distribute them led him to podcasting. He first heard of it in a cable news story about Adam Curry, the former MTV VJ, and his podcast Daily Source Code.



2006 The Messenger/Fort Dodge, Iowa

PROGRESS-BUSINESS & INDUSTRY

m Page 9C

Podcasting

-Messenger photo by Hans Madsen

BILL GRADY, OF FORT DODGE, poses with the homepage for his Podcasting show, "You are the Guest" recently in his home. Grady's show, has featured guests from as far away as Australia and also showcases unsigned bands.

Bill Grady with the homepage of his podcast, You Are The Guest, *in the 2006 Progress edition of* The Messenger; *the show had featured guests from as far away as Australia and showcased unsigned bands. Messenger photo by Hans Madsen. Bill Grady collection.*

Grady's first idea was a classic rock review show. Through his membership in the Iowa Broadcasters Association, he called Washington attorney David Oxenford to ask how copyright applied to podcasting. Oxenford told him that, unlike radio, podcasting had no music clearance at the time; as Grady later told *USA Weekend*, "I couldn't really play 'classic rock' because of the copyright laws."

His next plan, pitched by email to friends on July 7, 2005, was "At The End Of The Day," a 15- to 20-minute show three days a week in which correspondents in small towns would tell him what people there were saying about the day's news, with Google News open on their screens as the

cue sheet. The goal, he wrote, was to "share the voice of what the average American, especially in smaller towns, are saying." That idea carried over when, instead, *You Are The Guest*, which debuted July 19, 2005, turned the microphone around: anyone could apply through the website to be interviewed. "You don't have to be rich or famous to be on," Grady said.


You Are The Guest UTF edit.txt

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
<rss version="2.0">
  <channel>
    <title>You Are The Guest</title>
    <description>You Are The Guest is a weekly show where we talk to
everyday people about their views on the news and issues of
the day.  Listeners can also be the guest.  Go to
www.youaretheguest.com for details.</description>
    <link>www.youaretheguest.com/index.html</link>
    <docs>http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/tech/rss</docs>
    <lastBuildDate>Fri, 15 Jul 2005 13:23:30 -0500</lastBuildDate>
    <pubDate>Fri, 15 Jul 2005 13:23:16 -0500</pubDate>

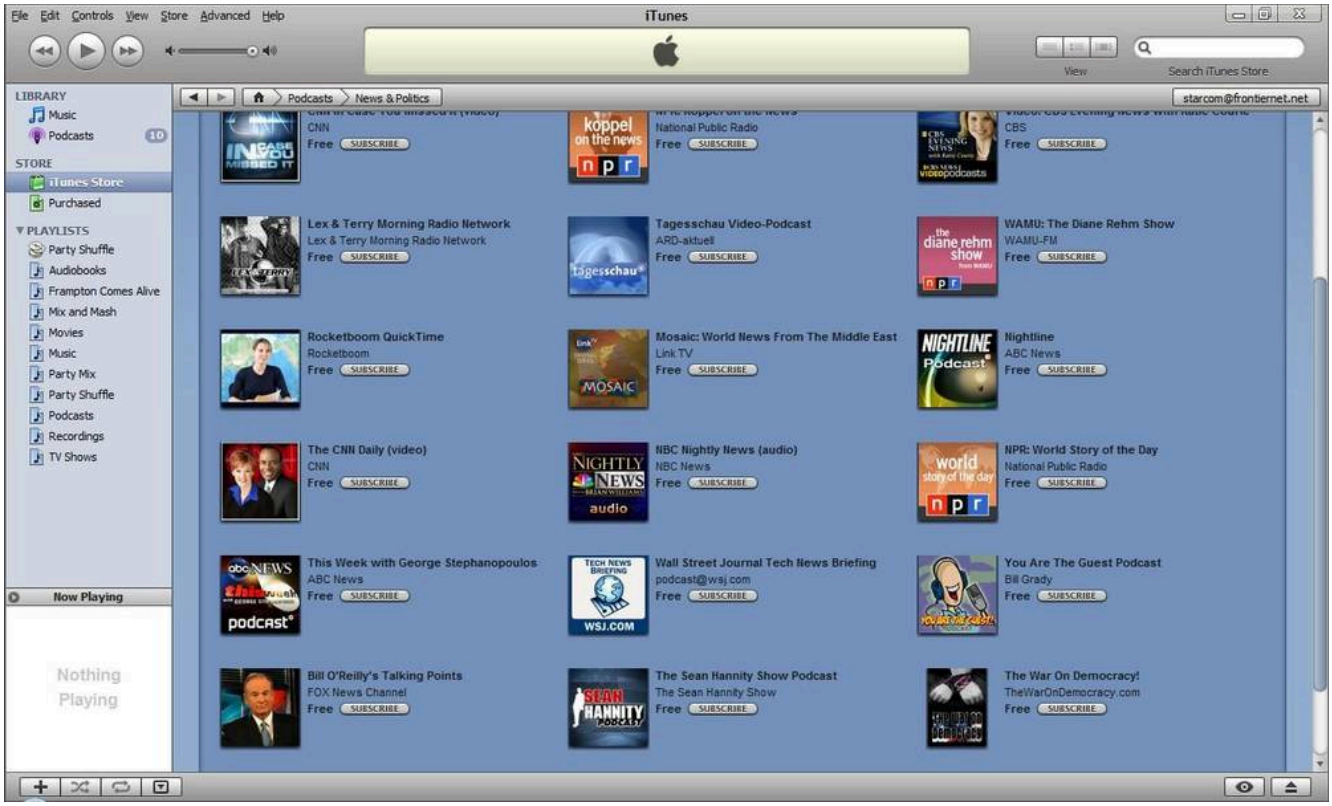
  <item>
      <title>You Are The Guest Show 1</title>
      <description>The first You Are The Guest Show.  Our first guests are a
couple from Maple Grove Minnesota and we talk about events
of the day.  We also play Celebrity Square root and Ask Bill
3.</description>
      <link>www.youaretheguest.com/pods.html</link>
      <pubDate>Fri, 15 Jul 2005 13:23:16 -0500</pubDate>
    </item>
  </channel>
</rss>
```

One of the first RSS feeds for You Are The Guest, written by hand and dated July 15, 2005, four days before the show's debut, with Show 1 already listed: "Our first guests are a couple from Maple Grove Minnesota and we talk about events of the day. We also play Celebrity Square root and Ask Bill 3." Bill Grady collection.

The show's original iTunes feed survives and dates the first episode to just before 1 a.m. on July 19th: 38 minutes with Steve and Diane Autey, friends from Maple Grove, Minnesota, on gas prices, taxes, Harry Potter, working from home and terrorism, plus two segments that became fixtures, the game Celebrity Square Root and "Ask Bill 3," in which the guest got to ask the host any three questions. Over time the conversations turned more and more to politics ("Funny how the conversation always turns to politics on this show," Grady wrote in one episode description), and by October 2005 the show had moved from iTunes' Talk Radio category to News & Politics.

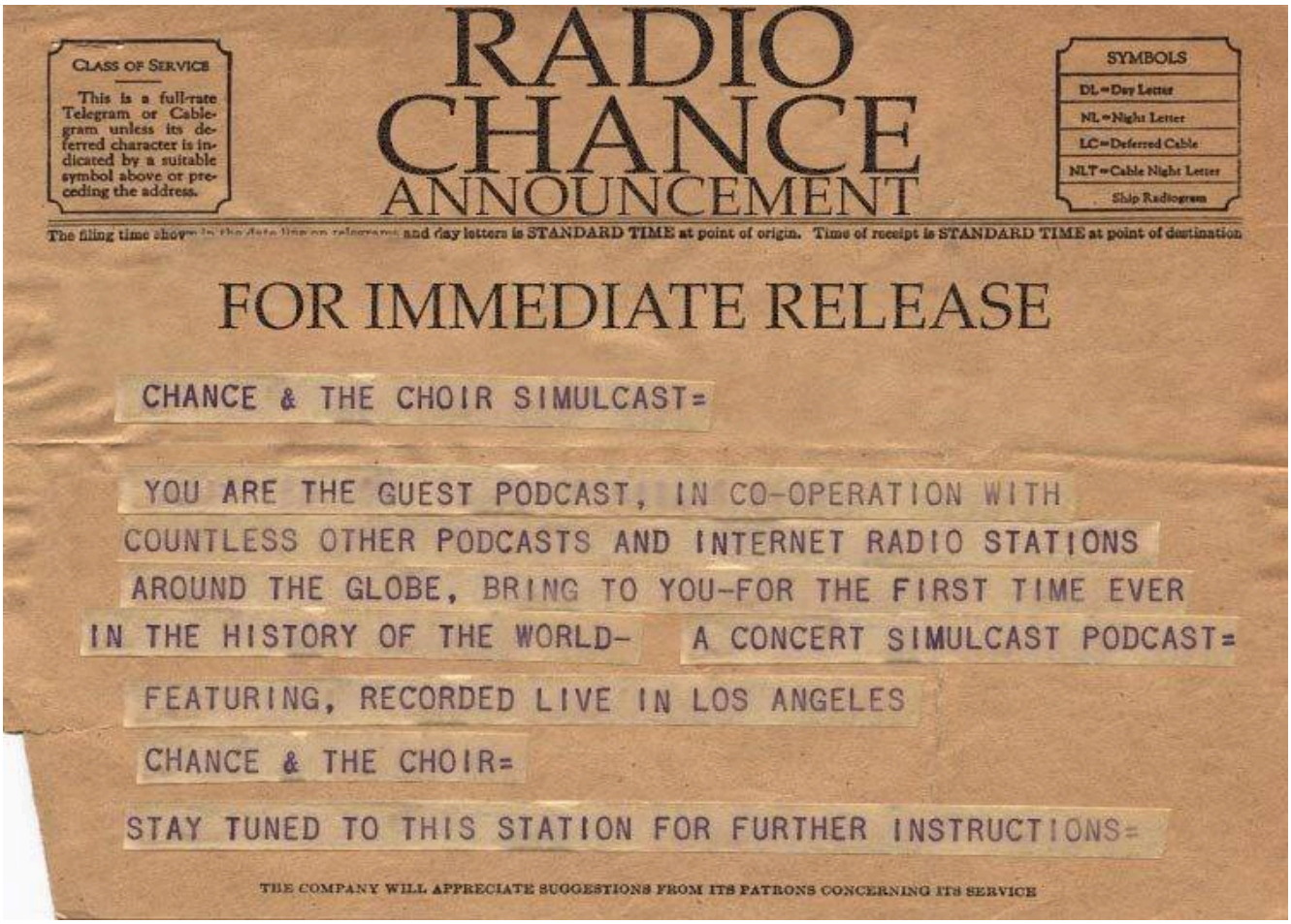
About two weeks after You Are The Guest debuted, its promo aired on Adam Curry's *Daily Source Code*, the show that had introduced Grady to podcasting. For music he turned to the Podsafe

Music Network from Curry's PodShow, where independent artists gave podcasters free permission to play their songs; by Grady's recollection, the most-played song there in 2005 was "Summertime" by Brother Love. It was, he said later, "the wild, wild west of podcasting," and the early podcasters built their audiences together by trading promos for each other's shows.



You Are The Guest in the iTunes podcast directory's News & Politics category, October 5, 2005, listed among shows from CNN, ABC News, NBC News, NPR and The Wall Street Journal. Bill Grady collection.

On October 9, 2005, You Are The Guest joined more than 30 podcasts and internet radio stations around the world in releasing a concert by Chance & the Choir, recorded live in Los Angeles, all at the same time; the announcement billed it as the first concert simulcast podcast ever.



CLASS OF SERVICE

This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.

RADIO CHANCE ANNOUNCEMENT

SYMBOLS

DL = Day Letter
NL = Night Letter
LC = Deferred Cable
NLT = Cable Night Letter
Ship Radiogram

The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHANCE & THE CHOIR SIMULCAST=

YOU ARE THE GUEST PODCAST, IN CO-OPERATION WITH COUNTLESS OTHER PODCASTS AND INTERNET RADIO STATIONS AROUND THE GLOBE, BRING TO YOU-FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD- A CONCERT SIMULCAST PODCAST=

FEATURING, RECORDED LIVE IN LOS ANGELES

CHANCE & THE CHOIR=

STAY TUNED TO THIS STATION FOR FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS=

THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

The telegram-style announcement for the Chance & the Choir concert simulcast, October 9, 2005, carried by You Are The Guest with podcasts and internet radio stations around the globe. Bill Grady collection.

Alan Colmes's pick. In January 2007 Alan Colmes, the longtime radio talk host then co-hosting Fox News Channel's *Hannity & Colmes*, named You Are The Guest one of his podcast picks in *USA Weekend*, and the magazine ran an online bonus feature, "Inside 'You Are the Guest.'" Colmes said Grady had found the "perfect form for the medium," and that he "can make anyone sound interesting" and is "not afraid to let the guest shine." "This podcast proves my point," he wrote: "everybody has a story worth telling."



Alan Colmes, co-host of Fox News Channel's Hannity & Colmes, *named* You Are The Guest *one of his podcast picks in* USA Weekend, *January 2007: "This podcast proves my point — everybody has a story worth telling." Bill Grady collection.*

The weekly show ran 30 to 40 minutes and featured guests from as far away as Australia, along with unsigned bands. A September 2005 guest from Learn Out Loud led to Grady's seminar "How You Can Create Advertising That Really Works" going up on LearnOutLoud.com that November, and the show drew notice from *Le Monde* on December 30, 2005, and from *USA Weekend* in January 2007. Grady produced 90 episodes; the last aired October 8, 2007, two days before the open house and Chamber ribbon cutting for his next venture, MyFortDodge.com.

The show's own RSS feed from October 2005 survives and records those first months week by week. Several early guests were builders of podcasting itself: C.C. Chapman, host of *Accident*

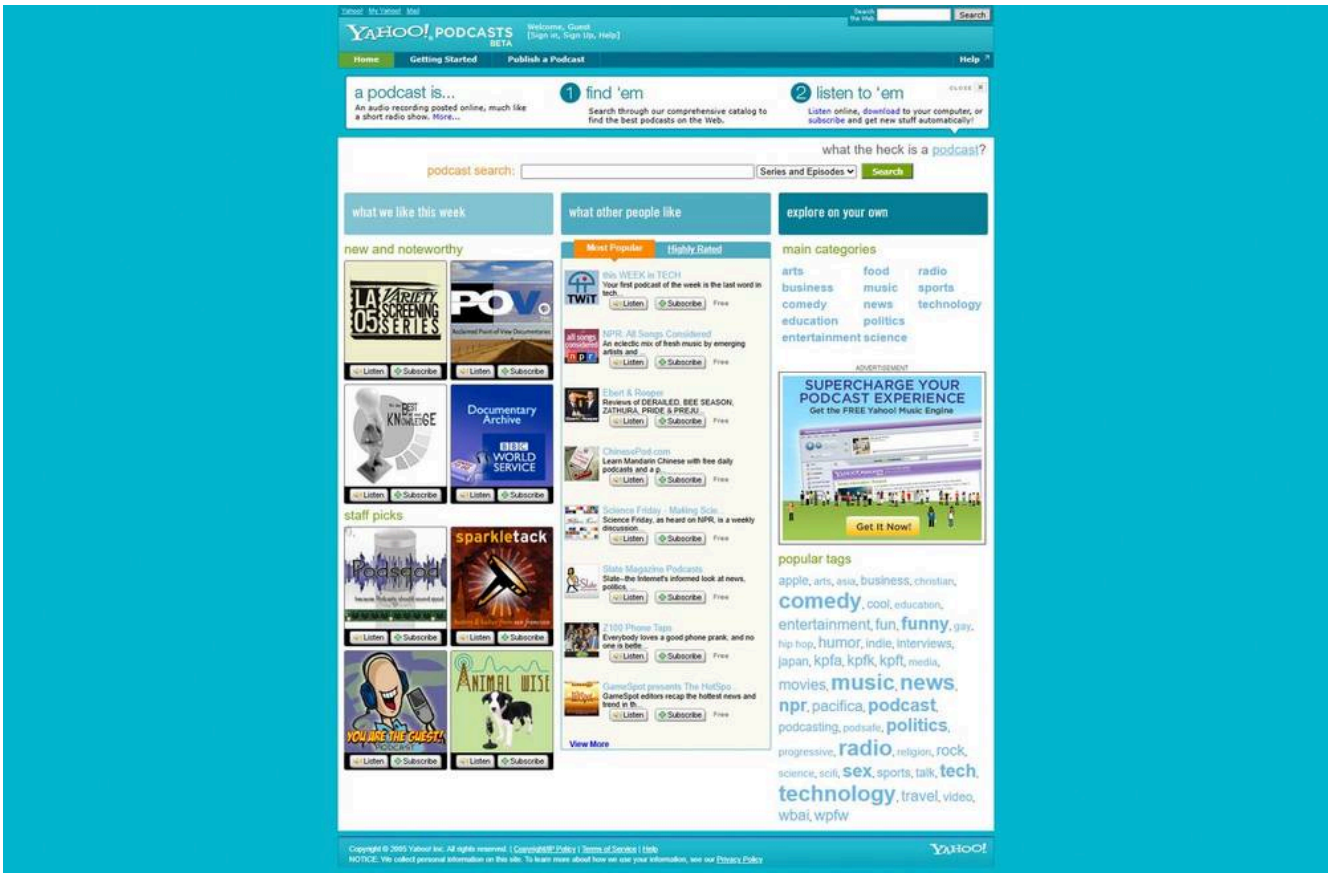
Hash and manager of the PodShow Podsafe Music Network (show 9, September 13), Jon of LearnOutLoud.com (show 11, September 27) and Gary of the Podcast Pickle directory (show 15, October 18). Others called in from London less than two months after the July 2005 bombings, from Israel, from a Navy posting in Japan and from Killcare, Australia, where Peter Reddy compared kangaroos with Iowa deer and asked whether the fort at Fort Dodge looked like the one on *F Troop*.

The production voice of the show. The show's intro, and the promo inside each episode telling listeners how they could become a guest, were voiced by Frank Hanford, who had worked with Grady at Sorenson Broadcasting. Hanford started at WMT in Cedar Rapids, where for years he called University of Iowa football and basketball with Ron Gonder, WMT's longtime sports director. He later managed KCUE and KWNG in Red Wing, Minnesota, which were part of Grady's region when Grady was Sorenson's regional manager. Under Hanford, KCUE won an NAB Crystal Radio Award in 1996, a year KVFD was also a finalist; KVFD won two years later, in 1998.

AUDIO

You Are The Guest, show 87, August 20, 2007 (35:00; MP3). Los Angeles filmmaker Sondra Lowell explains the "film sleepy," a genre she invented of movies made to put the audience to sleep, and her book *How to Make a Movie That Puts the Audience to Sleep*. Grady asks her the difference between a boring film and a sleepy one, and between a visionary and a crazy person, and puts the genre through a few common-sense scenarios. In the show's "Ask Bill 3" segment, Lowell turns the questions around: how he would market a movie that puts people to sleep, how he promoted his podcast and whether he would watch one himself. Bill Grady collection.

Historical significance. You Are The Guest was the first podcast series from Iowa, and its story is a record of the medium's first year. It debuted July 19, 2005, three weeks after Apple added podcasts to iTunes with a directory of just over 3,000 shows; that December the New Oxford American Dictionary named "podcast" its word of the year. There were no music clearances, networks or business models yet, so early podcasters borrowed what they knew from radio and made up the rest: trading promos, playing podsafe music and joining experiments such as the 2005 concert simulcast.

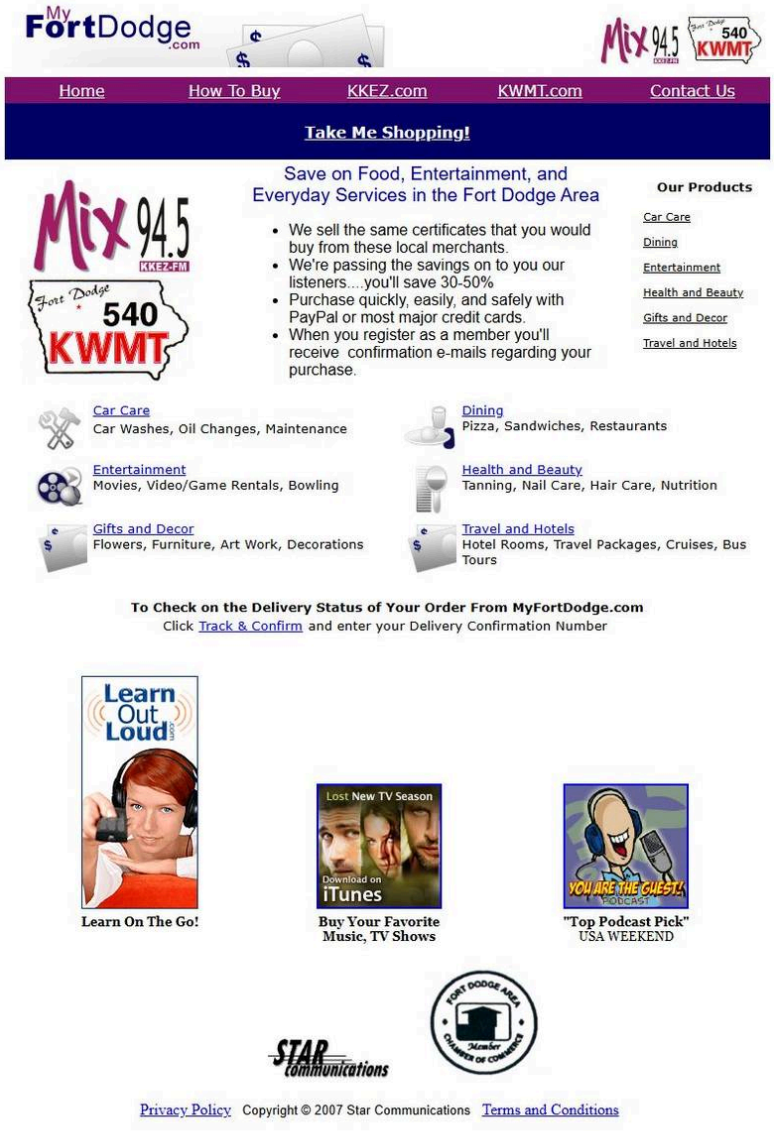


You Are The Guest among the staff picks on the Yahoo! Podcasts homepage, then in beta, alongside shows from NPR, PBS and the BBC World Service, 2005. Bill Grady collection.

The format set the show apart. Instead of a host with famous guests, it handed the microphone to everyday people who applied online, the idea that drew notice from *Le Monde* and *USA Weekend*. By early 2007, according to Grady's press release on the USA Weekend pick, the show had listeners in more than 40 countries, was one of the first podcasts offered as a direct download to cellphone subscribers, and had been a flagship program on BX Media's Cool Cast Radio streaming network since August 2005; Le Monde had called it "very original" and rated it 10 out of 10, and Yahoo! Podcasts featured it among its staff picks.

It also marks the point where this history moves onto the internet, leading directly to MyFortDodge.com and, later, Fort Dodge Radio.

MyFortDodge.com. Grady's first website was for *You Are The Guest* and his second for his seminar, "How You Can Create Advertising That Really Works." His third, MyFortDodge.com, began in February 2007 as an e-commerce site for the KKEZ and KWMT radio auction.



MyFortDodge.com's first look, in 2007, as the online store for Mix 94.5 KKEZ-FM and 540 KWMT, selling local merchants' certificates for car care, dining, entertainment and more to listeners at 30 to 50 percent off. Bill Grady collection.

When the stations changed hands later that year, the new owners did not continue the arrangement, and on July 3, 2007, five years to the day after his last day at KVFD, Grady relaunched MyFortDodge as a Ning social network.



The Fort Dodge Area Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting for MyFortDodge.com, October 10, 2007. Photo by Vern Beachy. Bill Grady collection.

Video was a big part of it from the start. Grady had always been interested in video, and he taught himself with a Sony camera he bought on sale as a floor model at Target; that camera shot all of his early videos. Within six months he was producing ads for cable television, and that work led to building websites for others around Fort Dodge. MyFortDodge remained a social network until September 2016, when he redesigned it around its most popular pages.



MyFortDodge.com at Fall Fest in downtown Fort Dodge, 2009: Congressman Tom Latham (left) and Bill Grady. Bill Grady collection.

VIDEO

Cheap Drinks performs at Shellabration, August 5, 2009, at the Harlan and Hazel Rogers Sports Complex in Fort Dodge (YouTube).

Early internet video. From 2007 until the 2016 rebuild, video was at the heart of MyFortDodge, in the years just before smartphones could shoot HD. In the fall of 2007 Grady began putting Fort Dodge Senior High Dodgers and St. Edmond Gaels football games from Dodger Stadium online, recorded and posted on a delay rather than live, at a time when very few high school games anywhere could be watched on the internet.

Most of the early videos were "talking head" interviews: the only microphone was the one on the camera, and the format saved editing time. As HD video cameras became available he could do more editing, and the work grew to include corporate and event videos.

VIDEO

Bill Grady of MyFortDodge.com talks with WHO-TV's Keith Murphy about how the internet was changing local television, during WHO's RV-TV Tour stop in Fort Dodge, September 8, 2009. "Eventually you're going to be able to watch what you want whenever you want," Murphy predicted (YouTube)

The video podcast. MyFortDodge also published its videos as a video podcast on iTunes from 2010 to 2012. One 2010 episode, from the annual Fur Ball, shows the format: Grady interviews Casey Johnson of Fort Dodge Ford, which was hosting the fundraiser at its dealership for the second time, with a crowd Johnson put at 700 to 1,000, raising money for a new humane society shelter. "Everyone has a dog and a cat story," Johnson said, and of the city: "This town's on a roll. We're not folding up by any means."

VIDEO

Casey Johnson of Fort Dodge Ford at the Fur Ball, MyFortDodge.com video podcast, 2010 (3:24; YouTube)

MyFortDodge covered community events and fundraisers, produced ads and shot a large catalog of live music, and the music videos led MyFortDodge to work with the Iowa Rock 'n Roll Music Association. Much of that live music came from Fort Dodge's summer festivals, from Shellabration at the Harlan and Hazel Rogers Sports Complex to Music and Art at Oleson Park, where Grady shot some of the first internet video of local acts. Between sets he got to know Heather Kelly and Kirk Kaufman of HipKnosis; he needed something to shoot, and they needed the promotion. That friendship later led to the Indie Music Room.

VIDEO

HipKnosis performs "Feel The Need" from the Oleson Park Bandshell during Music and Art at Oleson Park, 2010 (YouTube).

The Iowa Rock 'n Roll Music Association. MyFortDodge handled the association's early internet video, filming interviews and performances at its Hall of Fame events in Arnolds Park for the association's YouTube channel.



Head East at the Val Air Ballroom, February 14, 2012. From left: Roger Boyd (keyboards), Eddy Jones (drums, vocals), Bill Grady, Darren Walker (lead vocals, live bass guitar) and Glen Bridger (guitar). Not pictured: Greg Manahan (bass guitar, guitar, vocals). Bill Grady collection.

One of the best known is Grady's June 2011 interview with drummer Steve Huston, a founding member of Head East, the year the band was inducted. Huston told the story behind the band's name: in 1969 in Champaign, Illinois, the band's roadie, who went by the alias Baxter Forrest Twilight, woke everyone at 6 a.m. for an emergency band meeting to report that the rising sun had turned into a giant head and told him to name the band Head East. Wikipedia's article on Head East cites the interview as its source for how the band got its name. Huston died in 2023 at 73.

VIDEO

"Head East: The real story on how the band was named," Steve Huston with Bill Grady, Arnolds Park, June 2011 (YouTube; archived copy).

After the 2016 rebuild, Grady turned mostly from video to concert photography for MyFortDodge.



The Hawks at Shellabration 2017. From left: Frank Wiewel, Dave Steen, Larry Adams, Kirk Kaufman and Dave Hearn. The Fort Dodge and Otho band recorded two albums for Columbia Records in 1981 and 1982 and entered the Iowa Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame in 2007. Bill Grady collection.



ZZ Top at Shellabration 2018 in Fort Dodge. Bill Grady collection.

MyFortDodge.com today. MyFortDodge is now the news and events hub for Fort Dodge and the towns within about 60 miles, and the sibling of Fort Dodge Radio under Grady's company, Star Communications of Iowa; the station was brought onto the site in 2025. The design is deliberately simple: a short menu of Events, News, Local Weather and Live Radio, built as static pages served through Cloudflare's network so they load fast.

The events calendar shows the schema-first approach at work. Locals submit events through a form, and Grady approves each one; every three hours a script he wrote builds both a visible list and Schema.org Event markup directly into the page. It replaced an embedded calendar widget that search engines and AI crawlers couldn't read, and Google Search Console validates the markup, so an approved local event can turn up when someone asks a search engine or an assistant what's happening around Fort Dodge.

Fort Dodge Radio: Less Talk. More Classic Rock. Copyright rules had kept classic rock off Grady's podcast; this latest venture put it front and center. Fort Dodge Radio began streaming on April 1, 2019, playing classic rock released before 1990, every track from CD. The format borrows from Planet Rock in the UK, and the clock comes straight from small-market radio: the "56-Minute

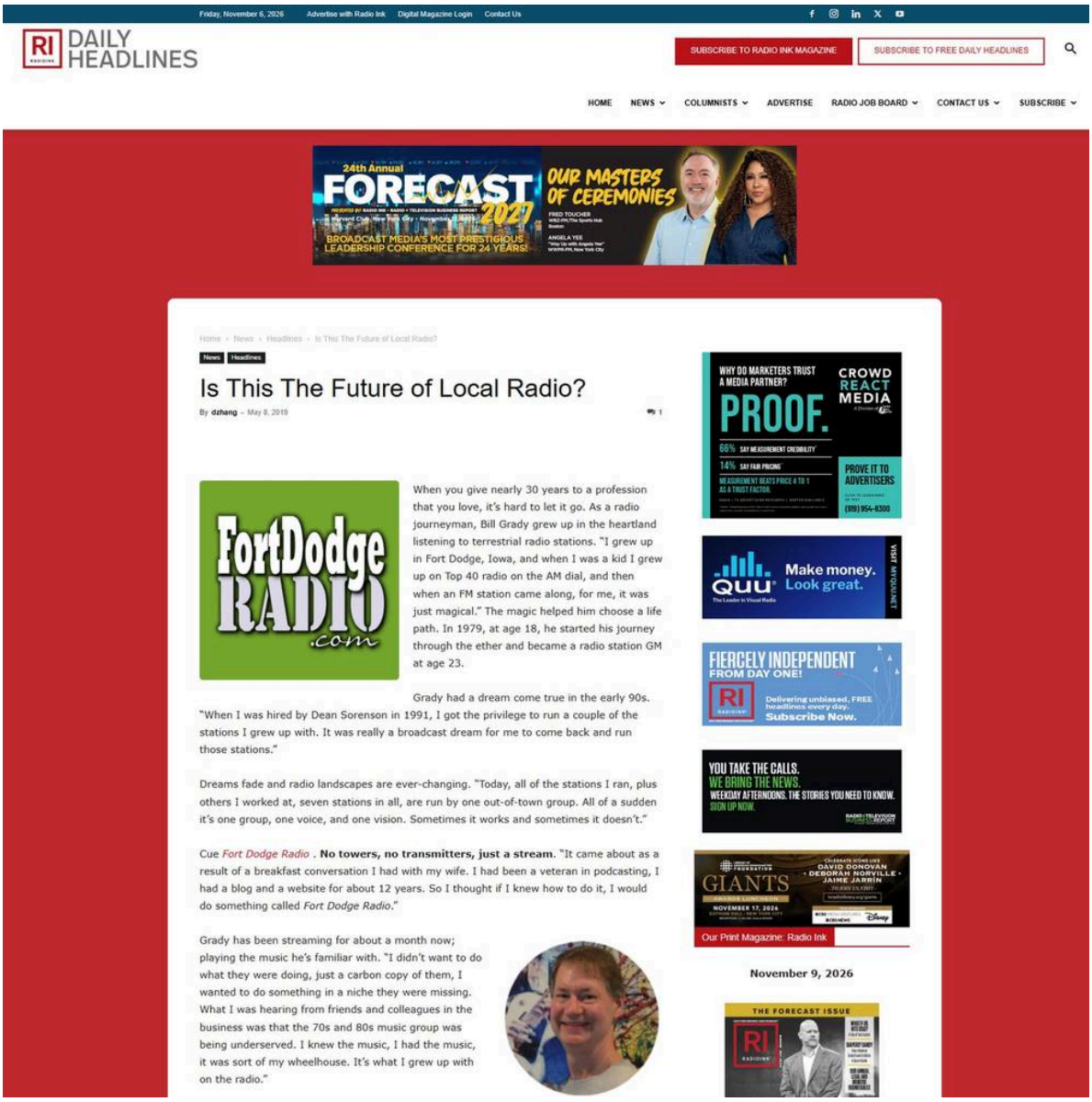
Workday Engine" plays six songs in a row before any break, with two short breaks an hour, wide artist separation and no repeats during the business day.



Sammy Hagar, one of the classic rock artists in Fort Dodge Radio's rotation, at Shellabration 2019 in Fort Dodge. Bill Grady collection.

Built by hand. Fort Dodge Radio started for less than $100, with no studio build-out, no consultant and no developer. Grady built the site himself, by hand and with no debt. Live365 streams the station and clears the music rights, and the site runs serverless on Cloudflare Workers for speed and efficiency.

In the press. Five weeks after launch, *Radio Ink* asked "Is This The Future of Local Radio?" (May 8, 2019) and quoted Grady's description of the station: "No towers, no transmitters, just a stream." The story noted that StreamFinder had named Fort Dodge Radio a Featured Station of the Month, and Grady used it to argue that broadcasting would be healthier with more owners holding fewer stations each. On September 28, 2020, Live365 made it a Featured Spotlight Station, describing the home studio and the sound processing for listeners on headphones and earbuds.



"Is This The Future of Local Radio?" Radio Ink's May 8, 2019, story on Fort Dodge Radio, five weeks after the station signed on. Radio Ink.

Schema-first. An over-the-air station is found on a dial. An internet station has to be found by search engines, smart speakers and AI assistants, and those read data; they don't listen. So Fort Dodge Radio was built "schema-first": every page carries machine-readable Schema.org markup describing the station, its programming and its owner, so software can identify it as reliably as a listener can.

Schema-Cast™ and the Grady Protocol™. Building on that schema-first foundation, Grady has pioneered two frameworks for how an independent station presents itself to machines.

In November 2019 Grady had RadioDNS working for the station; RadioDNS is the industry system that links broadcast signals to online information. Then he learned that registration required an FM, HD or DAB signal, which shut internet-only stations out. That gap led him to Schema-Cast™, which does for an internet-only station what RadioDNS does for a broadcast one: it acts as the carrier for the station's identity, telling search engines and voice assistants what the station is and where it is located. The Grady Protocol™, documented at fortdodgeradio.com, answers a different question. It doesn't locate the station; it proves that a human made the content.

Schema-Cast™, for which he filed a federal trademark application on May 21, 2026, is his name for the station's schema-driven framework: structured data as the foundation, so search engines and AI systems can understand programming that people chose. The voice side was built for machine discovery from the start, with markup that lets a listener say "Alexa, play Fort Dodge Radio" and hear the stream.

The Grady Protocol™ is a framework for marking content as human-made, using self-attesting markers in the site's data (such as `grady:humanOriginVerified`) and a formal likeness declaration to set terms against unauthorized AI training and synthetic voice cloning; version 2.1.1 was published April 30, 2026. The specifications for both are published on the station's site.



The banner for Bill Grady's Schema-First Broadcasting Lab, which documents the technical architecture behind Fort Dodge Radio and MyFortDodge.com. Bill Grady collection.

The Midwest lattice. The station's reach is mapped, not guessed. Fort Dodge Radio publishes a page for each of 20 Designated Market Areas, the Nielsen media markets that broadcasters and advertisers use, across Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska, South Dakota, Michigan and Oklahoma: a regional network that, by the station's count, reaches more than 30 million people. Each page is tied to Wikidata identifiers and filled with local detail (commute corridors, employers, music heritage), so a listener who asks a search engine or smart speaker for classic rock in that market can find it.

The map has a familiar shape for Fort Dodge listeners. KWMT, which billed itself as having "Iowa's largest daytime coverage," carried its 540 signal across Iowa and into Illinois, Missouri and Nebraska, the same core states the lattice covers today. Four states was a big footprint for a daytime AM station in its day; Fort Dodge Radio's lattice adds five more.

Why it matters. For a century a radio station's reach was set by its transmitter. The FCC licensed a frequency and a power, and the coverage map followed from the tower: KVFD could be heard as far as its watts would carry. An internet station has no tower, so in theory anyone anywhere can hear it, and in practice almost no one will unless they can find it. More and more listening now starts with a question to a search engine, a smart speaker or an AI assistant, and those systems answer by reading data, not by scanning a dial.



"The World's First Schema-Cast Is Live": the AI-generated graphic that announced Schema-Cast™ with Bill Grady's LinkedIn article "The Grady Protocol: A Human-Origin Standard for the AI Era," May 15, 2026. Bill Grady collection.

The lattice is the station's answer to that shift. Instead of building towers, it builds a page for each market that tells those systems, in their own language, that this is a classic rock station for listeners in Des Moines, Minneapolis or Omaha. Each market page does the job a transmitter site once did, defining where the station is "on the air," but it needs no license and a new one can be added in minutes. Grady calls the approach schema-first broadcasting, and it is meant to give a single independent station the kind of regional footprint that once took a chain of stations to build.

The commercials follow the listener the same way. People who hear about the station often expect Fort Dodge ads, but its two two-minute breaks an hour are filled by Live365's ad network, which picks ads by where each listener is: someone streaming in Minneapolis hears different spots than someone in Des Moines or Omaha, and where no ad is available for a region, a public service announcement plays instead.

On the smart speaker. "Alexa, play Fort Dodge Radio" works through Amazon's Radio Skills Kit, the same listing system Amazon uses for over-the-air stations, where Fort Dodge Radio is listed as a web-only station. Listening through Alexa has grown steadily since the station began in 2019 and now makes up more than half of its audience.

The Indie Music Room Podcast. On June 15, 2019, Fort Dodge Radio added the Indie Music Room, a podcast hosted by Heather Kelly that showcases independent artists and how they make their music, produced at Junior's Motel Recording Studio near Otho. The idea came out of a May 2019 meeting at the studio: Kelly no longer wanted to perform on stage but loved talking with musicians, so she offered to host. Kirk Kaufman handled pre-production, and Grady edited the shows and synced the video.

Within three months *Radio Ink* featured the show ("'Indie Music Room' Gives Locals A Shot," September 12, 2019), describing it as a showcase for artists to share their original songs and the ideas behind them, and as local content made by local people. When the pandemic kept guests out of the studio in 2020, the show moved to remote video interviews, which opened it to artists from farther away; it aired Saturdays and Sundays on Fort Dodge Radio.



The social media graphic for one of the first Indie Music Room episodes, "History of the Hawks: Dick Clark, CBS Records, and How It All Began," which aired July 19, 2019. Host Heather Kelly sits with guest Frank Wiewel of the Hawks, who appears again at right in the studio with Kirk Kaufman (in the white T-shirt). Bill Grady collection.

Kelly, a Fort Dodge native, began playing in 2004 as the violinist for the Blue Canoe Band of Humboldt, which led her to Junior's Motel and to Kirk Kaufman. The two formed H&K, renamed HipKnosis in 2010, a pop-rock band that released four albums before breaking up in 2015, and

Kelly went on as a solo songwriter and producer; across the band and her solo work she has released four full-length albums and 22 singles. "I don't make any money doing what I do, but I do it because I love it," she told *The Messenger* in 2022. In 2025 she was inducted into the Midwest All-Music Association Hall of Fame for hosting the Indie Music Room and more than 20 years in music.

VIDEO

The Indie Music Room, episode 15, August 1, 2020 (YouTube). Kelly interviews Grady about podcasting in 2005, Adam Curry's Podsafe Music Network and his radio career, and the two look back on how the show began.

Mike Fellers. In 2025 Grady wanted a third voice on the station besides his own and Heather Kelly's, and he turned to Mike Fellers. The two worked out the station's original imaging concept that year and expanded it in 2026. Fellers brought a career that runs through much of this history.



Mike Fellers at the microphone in the Star 102.5 studio in Des Moines, 2024. Courtesy of Mike Fellers.

He started in 1981, at 16, in the Fort Dodge Senior High radio club on KVFD, and went on to work at nearly every station in these pages: KICB, KTPR, KVFD and Kool 92, KKEZ three times, KWMT, Super 97 and KIAQ, and later as Sunny 97's imaging voice. He moved on to Des Moines, at KHKI, KKDM, KLYF, WHO and Star 102.5, where he finished his radio career in 2009, and he still does voice work.

Why it belongs here. Fort Dodge broadcasting began with local people building their own stations, and Fort Dodge Radio carries that on. It's built, owned and programmed by someone

from Fort Dodge, and its voices, Bill Grady, Heather Kelly and Mike Fellers, are all from Fort Dodge.

Fort Dodge Radio has no tower, but it's engineered as carefully as any station in this history. KVFD's engineers worked with tube transmitters, ground radials and antenna arrays; Grady engineered Fort Dodge Radio's transmitter in code, the behind-the-scenes data that tells search engines, smart speakers and AI assistants what the station is, so it can be found on whatever listeners use next. The tools have changed, but the Fort Dodge tradition of building it yourself hasn't.

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