

The History of Omaha Radio

An Inside Look At The Evolution Of Broadcasting

CARL MANN



Volume Three – 1980 to 2000

The Run-Up to Corporate Radio

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THE FM STATIONS

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PREFACE and INTRODUCTION

After some debate, it became obvious a follow-up volume to radio's earlier years was necessary. Radio's continued growth and resulting intense competition leading to 1996's historic deregulation spawned an unprecedented number of fascinating stories from these increasingly creative and struggling days of radio.

After the 1970's, broadcasting multiplied and intensified in those sixteen years leading up to the Telecomm Act of '96. Things got complicated, but what better way to record such a turbulent and fast-moving history than to examine the industry for these two decades and illustrate it with in-the-trenches viewpoints as experienced by these Heartland broadcasters.

By comparison, radio's earlier years were a piece of cake. The gravy train of the Golden Years were replaced by localized music and news formats.

As growth continued, the business became complex and survival began to nudge out the fun. More stations continued to sign on while many existing stations upgraded into new markets. The FCC loosened ownership limitations that helped smaller stations survive while at the same time finding ways to allow even more stations into the pool.

This led to the need for more creative thinking. Fortunately, professionals who loved radio were still entering the business, some with strong egos that would prove necessary, others with a daring business sense to build new stations or re-position programming on the old.

From what was once the basic choice of Top 40, Country, and Full-Service, came Soul, News/Talk, Religious, Adult Contemporary, Classic Rock, Progressive Rock, Spanish, and Oldies. From this came Dance, New Country, Traditional Country, Christian Music, Alternative Rock, and Classic Hits. There were more personalized music choices than ever for new generations of listeners.

Creativity was high. Bold business decisions were made. Some were genius, a few were disastrous. Some air talent got into ugly public clashes. But overall, broadcast radio's mutations helped it survive in the face of more stations and other increasing media. Supporting all of this were new, eager audiences that could always find a station or two to call their own, with formats that simply didn't exist in earlier years.

As slices of the pie got thinner, the Feds finally went all-in with the 1996 Telecommunications Act. It was an effort to modernize the playing field for those who were becoming weary, as well as for those who sought more. Arguments over the Act's usefulness rage on. But for now, this work will look at what led up to that game-changing event and how radio responded.

CHAPTER ONE – THE EIGHTIES – MORE STATIONS

What better way to end a decade already dubbed “The Greed Decade” than by closing out with record prices for radio stations? --Los Angeles Times, December 27, 1989.

WALL STREET DISCOVERS RADIO

A new path for radio emerged in the Eighties, one that set the course for what would become corporate radio in the following decade.

The FCC began paving the way to allow more stations to enter an already competitive playing field while at the same time making rules that would allow radio to survive the very environment it was creating.

As the decade began, FM in Omaha had just reached parity with AM. Now, with two bands of radio broadcast stations, listeners had much more from which to choose and advertisers had more avenues to reach them.

The ad dollar was being sliced thinner, not just among the growth of radio stations but with print and TV and the burgeoning cable services. Radio could still influence music sales, though the Internet was preparing to toss a monkey wrench into the record company sales model, and after that, become yet another distribution and advertising power.

The first big change came in 1982 when the FCC loosened regulations regarding station ownership. The Commission eliminated an anti-trafficking rule that required broadcasters to own a station for at least three years before selling it. Investors took note. Stations could become commodities, another way for broadcasters to make money.

In 1985, the FCC admitted that many stations were struggling. The Commission began loosening ownership rules in the belief that group ownership would increase the survival rate for smaller stations. The old 1953 licensee rule limiting owners to a total of 7 broadcast licenses in each service (AM, FM, and TV, known as the 7-7-7 rule), was upgraded to the 12-12-12 rule. Investors' risk could now be spread over more stations.

With that, Wall Street started to show real interest. In 1986 media chains began looking for acquisitions. Radio added the real estate business to its being an entertainment and advertising business. Suddenly big price tags and frequent ownership changes were keeping bankers and investors busy.

Inside the stations, the pressure was on. Programming became even more important as station prices were often based on a station's billings.

By 1988 the buying and selling frenzy saw more than 1,000 of the nation's 9,000 commercial FM and AM radio stations change hands. Buying and selling stations became another profitable avenue.

Feeding the frenzy were FCC rulings ensuring there would be more signals for the marketplace. For FM, Docket 80-90 released in 1986 created 600 new stations. Omaha's first arrived in 1990; a new Class A station on 105.9, KKVU.

The docket also mandated FM upgrades for Class C stations that would otherwise face reclassification to a lower class. This, along with less-restrictive short-spacing requirements, allowed some rural stations to increase coverage to reach a nearby larger market thus becoming a de-facto medium to large market station.

For Omaha, it was an Iowa FM on 103.7 in Atlantic some 60 miles away that upgraded to become the market's first rimshot station. That was quickly followed by a Lincoln station on 101.9 upgrading and moving its tower eastward putting Omaha into its primary coverage area as well.

There were new opportunities on the AM band, too. The final break up of the historical clear channel stations which had been dragging on since the 1940s finally concluded in 1980. This resulted in a new Omaha station on 1180 when KKAR signed on in 1987, taking the formerly clear channel that had belonged to WHAM Rochester, New York. An expansion of the AM band in five more years will add even more signals nationwide, including one from nearby Bellevue, Nebraska.

Advertisers were spreading thin. National spots were dwindling, migrating to radio networks where they would air on affiliates for a mere fraction of what was once paid in direct buys. Beers, soft drinks, and fast food buys seemed to hang on locally the longest. Local retailers, bars, restaurants, and car dealers became more and more important in keeping the lights on.

Some struggling stations found that the stick value was higher than the revenue coming in. The shift from mom and pop operations to scientific positioning was entering a new phase: commodity speculation. Here's how it looked from Omaha's perspective.

THE MAJOR AM PLAYERS

590 WOW Omaha

WOW entered 1980 as the Top 40 leader in Omaha with KGOR 99.9 close on its heels. But, not for long. A surprising switch to Country is in the cards.

The FM challenge strengthened. By the Spring 1980 ratings WOW was down from second place to third, displaced by KEZO 92.3 Album Rock.

Erik Foxx left for greener pastures and Don Davis took over as PD at WOW. He instituted "*Morning Magazine*" 8 to 9 a.m on Dave Wingert's morning show offering a broad variety of all-talk features. (*OWH* Oct 21, 1980) It was discontinued in August the following year. Wingert left a month after that for a short-lived gig at KMOX St. Louis.

Just a year later WOW was displaced as the Top 40 leader by KQKQ 98.5. Calling itself *Sweet 98* by this time, KQKQ was helmed by manager Bill Cunningham who first learned his craft in Omaha. He was on the sales staff at Don Burden's KOIL in the early 1970s.

Cunningham went from Omaha's KOIL to Florida, becoming a consultant after contributing to the FM success of Fort Lauderdale's WHYI. Soon, he was consulting KQKQ 98.5, then was brought back to Omaha and placed in charge.

In the style of Don Burden, Cunningham ran a cash-heavy promotion where KQKQ jumped from seventh to third in the market, dropping WOW to 6th place.

WOW management clung to its Top 40 format for the spring 1982 ratings period but showed signs of a shift when choosing to promote its "Newswitness News" rather than music and contests. WOW's news image was always a strong point, thanks to sister WOW TV's newsroom shared in the same building.

In 1982 WOW abruptly dropped its Top 40 format, flipping to Country. The plan was so undercover that the country music library was stealthily purchased from outside the market. WOW Operation Manager Ralph Caldwell went on a secret trip to Kansas City to raid a music store for the needed records. Caldwell had been promoted from the FM side where was production director on sister station KEZO 92.3.

Fearing his eight-hour buying spree would attract attention, Caldwell outfitted himself in western wear and tried talking in a Texas drawl. Kansas City's country music leader WDAF was consulted and recommended a record store for him. Caldwell drove up in a rented Lincoln and loaded it with two thousand dollars worth of country records. (Caldwell interview *OWH* Oct 12, 1983).

WOW's Top 40 ended on the afternoon of July 30, 1982 with a Steve Winwood song going into the 3 p.m. news. Then, Alabama's "Still in the Game" launched the Country format.

Meredith Broadcasting followed this with another sudden surprise, announcing just days later its intent to sell WOW and KEZO along with its Kansas City properties KCMO and KCEZ FM. No reason was given other than to say the properties had not met "growth objectives." The asking price for the two Omaha operations was nearly 7 million dollars.

It may have been that Meredith was aware of interest in its property by the Wichita-based owners of an Omaha AM and FM Country combo. Jumping the gun on the format, coupled with national trends seeing Top 40 migrating to FM while Country was remaining longer on AM, may also have been contributing factors in what turned out to be a good decision.

Great Empire Broadcasting owned Omaha's KYNN 1490 and KYNN FM 94.1. The company had been seeking a way to improve its AM signal. KYNN 1490 running just 1000 watts was considered a "local" class station on a crowded frequency.

Great Empire a year earlier had applied for the newly available and hotly-contested frequency of 1180 kHz, seeking to put 2.5 thousand watts days and one-thousand watts nights on the air from Council Bluffs (*Broadcasting*, April 26, 1982). That frequency later went to Mitchell Broadcasting to become KKAR, licensed to Bellevue.

The Fall 1982 ratings showed a three-point increase for WOW's newly-launched Country format giving it fourth place in the market. However, Great Empire's Country stations, KYNN on 1490 and 94.1, combined for over a seven share for the lead.

By Spring 1983 the ratings showed WOW down to fifth place behind three FM stations. WOW was still airing some strong programming elements with Paul Harvey, Accuweather, and Farm reports.

But, by the time those spring numbers came out, Meredith Corporation had sold its stations. WOW 590 went to Great Empire Broadcasting of Wichita (July 27 1983 *OWH*). Ralph Caldwell's job with WOW ended with the sale to Great Empire.

With WOW's 5000 watts on 590, Great Empire's AM signal would rival that of Omaha's most powerful station, KFAB. To clear the way for the purchase, Great Empire had to sell off KYNN 1490.

This resulted in a rather convoluted deal. Meredith would sell WOW 590 to Great Empire and sell KEZO 92.3 to Albimar Broadcasting, with Albimar also buying Great Empire's AM on 1490 for \$500 thousand. The result: Albimar entered the market with an AM/FM combo and Great Empire got one of the two best AM signals in Omaha to pair with its FM on 94.1.

Albimar paid Meredith 2.95 million for KEZO 92.3 plus another 450 thousand for a no-compete agreement, and another half-million to Great Empire for its AM on 1490. Great Empire paid Meredith 1.9 million dollars for WOW 590. Meredith departed with just over five million dollars for its AM/FM.

FCC approval for the deal came on July 25, 1983. With that, Great Empire dropped out of the race for the newly-opened 1180 kHz slot for the region.

Great Empire's Country position in Omaha was now vastly improved with an established regional AM signal. WOW 590 became part of its group of stations that at this time included KFDI AM and FM Wichita, KWKH and KROK FM Shreveport, KTTS AM and FM Springfield, Missouri, and KBRQ AM and FM Denver.

Great Empire's KYNN AM and FM had just moved before the sale from 3615 Dodge to new quarters at 615 North 90th Street. The KYNN staff stayed put on North 90th simply shifting the studio-transmitter link to the WOW tower and began calling themselves the WOW Ranch Hands. The old WOW quarters on John Galt Boulevard now had the KYNN calls but the staff was greatly reduced in favor of an automated Country format. The move was completed on September 16, 1983.

The prominent KYNN calls on the building at 90th and West Dodge were changed over to WOW, spelled out in the same style as the old with wood planks nailed together forming the letters.

With the KYNN calls now belonging to Albimar, Great Empire had to lose the KYNN calls on FM 94.1, changing them to WOW-FM to match the AM. It was a return for those historic call letters on FM, last heard on 92.3 before vanishing to make way for KFMX in December 1971.

Beyond that, WOW-FM was unaffected and still emanating from atop the KCRO 660 tower at 60th and Hartman Streets, coincidentally just blocks away from the WOW AM tower at 56th and Kansas Streets. Rather than move the FM antenna to its own WOW tower, Great Empire continued to rent antenna space on the 660 tower while seeking a much taller tower,. The search went on for six years.

Formats after the move remained unchanged. Albimar Broadcasting's KYNN adjusted to a mostly-automated Modern Country format after Great Empire moved out, staying with it for nearly two years. Meanwhile, WOW 590's Country programming inherited the lucrative farm reports as well as keeping Accuweather and ABC's Paul Harvey News and Comment.

Ken Fearnow, who joined Great Empire in 1979, became VP/GM of WOW AM/FM with the move, leading the stations for the next sixteen years.



*WOW VP/GM Ken Fearnow
(Courtesy: Nebraska Broadcasters
Association).*

The WOW AM and FM studios near 90th and West Dodge Road occupied a single-story building that once was a domicile, then a funeral home. Various rooms were converted into studios, newsroom and offices. The living room with fireplace became Manager Ken Fearnow's office.

Downstairs in cramped quarters was the production room. In back was parking for three mobile units and soon an RV converted into a rolling studio for remotes.

The two stations held fairly steady ratings with reasonable fluctuations as the 1980s progressed, the FM peaking at a 7.5 in 1987 and the AM hitting a 5.6 in 1988. Combined, the combo was generally in the market's Top Five. The only Country competition was from KYNN 1490, but only until 1985.

WOW AM and FM aired separate Country programming for most of the broadcast day with live personalities around the clock. The AM on 590 played the more traditional country music than did its FM sister on 94.1. The AM format concluded each hour before the top-of-hour newscast with a featured hymn called the "Song of Inspiration," of which there were many by country artists.

The folksy morning show was hosted by Cathie Fife and George Woods, the latter also hosting the Saturday "Cracker Barrel" talk show. Woods left in late 1989 going to KFAB.

1985 WOW AM/FM "Corral of Country Hits" playlist. Note WOW 590 prominently promoting its AM stereo.

Corral of Country Hits
TOP 40 FOR THE WEEK OF
DECEMBER 8, 1985

WOW Events / Information
—Air traffic reports from SKYHAWK 1 mornings on WOW-AM & FM STEREO
—Traffic reports weekday afternoons with Jeff Lewis
—Crestion Blue Jay Basketball on 59 COUNTRY
WOW-AM
—Register at Tim O'Neil Chevrolet for your chance to win WOW 1985 Chevrolet Blazer valued at over \$18,000. Then listen to WOW-AM & FM for your name to be called.
—Open your heart to give a needy child a Merry Christmas this year during the WOW Christmas for Kids. Listen for details.
—WOW may stuff your stocking with some real big goodies. Listen for details on how you may win.
—Fly to Vegas with the Ranch Hands for a last minute Christmas Shopping Trip. Listen for chance to win.

New to the Country

Hot Country Albums

RANCHHANDS
AM 590 STEREO MONDAY THRU FRIDAY FM 94.1 STEREO

FCC deregulation in 1982 dropped news requirements for stations, but radio news remained quite competitive for several years afterward. WOW held its own going head to head with KFAB, the market's perceived news leader.

(The Broadcast Deregulation Act of 1982 amended the Communications Act of 1934 to prohibit the Federal Communications Commission from regulating programming of radio broadcast station licensees. This meant government hands-off of programming, formats, ascertainment, and commercialization. However, the Fairness Doctrine remained in effect for another five years.)

1986 WOW AM/FM live concert promotion

Third WOW Annual
14 AM Country
ANNIVERSARY PARTY
Starring
Bobby Bare
Also Starring
The Girls Next Door & Johnny Western
And the True Value Country Showdown

WOW News under the leadership of News Director Morris James developed into strong competition for KFAB 1110. By the time News/Talk KKAR 1180 entered the news arena in the late 1980s, WOW was boasting on area billboards that it had become Omaha's "New News Leader." By that time WOW had eleven employees in the station's news department--five full-time and six part-time.

WOW's newscasts with no national network were all locally produced and delivered. The AM and FM shared a large news department that keyed on local "street news" using several mobile units and multiple police scanners. Besides twice-hourly news, WOW 590 aired lots of traffic and live on-scene bulletins during regular music programming.

At night while on the scene of breaking news, WOW newscasts would be delivered from the mobile news unit. The newsperson would grab a stack of news copy while heading out the door to fill out the scheduled newscast from the scene of what would be the lead story.

WOW General Manager Ken Fearnow said, "More often than not, we are the first on the scene to cover the news... We are exclusive on many stories that we cover. We feel like we do the best job of news in Omaha" (*OWH* Dec 9, 1989)

Public Affairs programming continued after deregulation. Most notably for WOW it was Saturday morning's live call-in show, "Cracker Barrel." The show aired only on the AM side where news and talk had a stronger emphasis.

WOW's success will reach an astonishing peak in the 1990s during a Country music renaissance led by a Texan in the White House and new patriotic fervor during the Gulf War. The stations will generate enough revenue to finance the construction of new studios and a new FM tower of its own, all adjacent to the TV antenna farm at 5002 No 72nd Street.

1110 KFAB Omaha

KFAB was the perennial ratings leader with its emphasis on news and talk-information programming. Its music had a fair amount of non-offensive pop-adult and country in its mix.

The station continued to lead the market, top-heavy with older demos, but with numbers so strong that KFAB was ranked number one in the country by TV/Radio Age magazine in its April 1981 issue.

After its best-ever 34.1 showing in the fall 1979 ratings, KFAB stayed well above the competition during the first half of the 1980s. It topped the market with a 22.7 in spring 1982, and 23.9 in Fall 1982, then a 24 in Spring 1983, and 28.3 in Fall 1984, its peak for the decade.

Much of Lyle Bremser's success in building KFAB into such a powerhouse was the consistency and stability of a highly competent air staff, much of it intact since the early 1970s. The names and voices were constant companions for KFAB's core audience. Mornings were driven by Don Cole.



KFAB morning host Don Cole.

The studios on the second floor of 5010 Underwood in the Dundee neighborhood housed both KFAB 1110 and KGOR 99.9 FM. By this time the ancient automation that ran “Serenade in the Night” overnights on AM had been moved to the transmitter site. Newer automation had been installed for KGOR *Rock 100* and its jockless Top 40 programming. An air/production studio “down the hall” was used during drive times for KFAB live-assist and middays for KGOR production.

KFAB joined NBC’s *Talknet*, NBC’s evening programming block, in March 1982 replacing *Mystery*

Theater. *TalkNet* provided several advice-oriented call-in talk shows, the most notable personalities being Bruce Williams and Sally Jessy Raphael.



KFAB offices and studios, 5010 Underwood

At a time when talk radio was mostly a local format, *Talknet* brought the format to a national level. *Talknet* did a quick fade when GE purchased the NBC Radio Network and its assets, *The Source* and *Talknet*, in 1986 for \$50 million, then selling off the radio division to Westwood One. Despite *Talknet*’s early demise, national talk radio would become a strong element before the end of the decade.

But it was the big football ratings that cemented KFAB as Omaha’s top gun. Support for the football Huskers in Nebraska is immense and can be summed up in KKAR Sports Director Torri Pantaleon’s observation when he entered the Omaha broadcast market in 1979: “If it wasn’t Husker football, it didn’t count. I remember one summer there were decent pennant races in a couple of divisions of both the American and National Leagues. Lead sports story in the *World-Herald*? ‘Osborne says Huskers are okay.’ I couldn’t believe it. That was part of the culture shock for me. I had to learn just how important Husker football is to the day-to-day Nebraskan.”

KFAB had been airing the Nebraska Cornhuskers since the 1930s but gained exclusive rights to the Huskers starting with the Nebraska-Wyoming game in September 1983. Before then it was a four-station origination for broadcasts. Even then KFAB as one of the four was by far the Husker Nation ratings leader.

It was Athletic Director Bob Devaney who finally narrowed broadcast rights to one originating station to gain higher fees (*OWH* July 22, 1982). KFAB's top bid of 475 thousand dollars per year for 5 years plus CPI raises beat out bids from KLIN, WOW, KLMS, and KFOR, all thanks to Lyle Bremser.

A year later in 1984, after 45 years of play by play on KFAB, Lyle Bremser retired from calling Husker Football. Bremser declined future invitations to games saying, "I've seen it all." (*Lincoln Journal Star*, Aug 25).



KFAB's Lyle Bremser and Kent Pavelka.

Bremser handed the Huskers job over to Kent Pavelka. Moving into the booth as Kent's color man was Gary Sadlemyer who had been with KFAB since 1976. Sadlemyer joined the KFAB Husker crew in the early '80s as KFAB's first sideline reporter. Also assisting in the broadcasts were Larry Moehlenbrink and Jack Payne.

By Fall 1983 KFAB's ratings reached an astounding 27.4. Again, it held America's highest station listenership in the top 100 metropolitan markets. The next closest was KGBT in McAllen, Texas with a 21.6 share.

Upon Bremser's 1984 retirement, Ken Headrick was named general manager. Headrick then went on to sign 30 new Nebraska affiliates and 13 more stations in seven other states, all in the first year that Kent Pavelka took over play by play in 1984.

A 1985 change in AM and FM ownership rules signaled the start of radio stations becoming commodities. Ownership limits were upped from seven to twelve stations on each band per owner, opening the way for national group owners to buy and expand.

KFAB and KGOR were hot properties and good targets for investors. KFAB was the market leader at the time with a 19.8 share. KGOR was fourth at 9.9. Before long an offer arrived that couldn't be refused. The pair of stations was purchased by a San Francisco firm in a deal that reached \$22 million.

It was KFAB's first real ownership change since it was bought by Lyle Bremser, Harold Soderlund, William MacDonald, and Harry Burke in 1954.

The sale was somewhat convoluted, such transactions becoming the norm in the 1980s. First, May Broadcasting sold its 49 percent of KFAB and KGOR to Lee Enterprises. Lee was publicly owned, based in Davenport, Iowa, and already owned most of KFAB's remaining stock.

Lee was heavy into television and newspapers. It owned six TVs and 18 newspapers including the *Lincoln Journal Star*. Lee's 89 million dollar purchase from May included more than just KFAB and KGOR but also included May's KMTV 3 in Omaha and KGUN TV Tucson.



*KFAB General Manager
Ken Headrick
(Courtesy: Nebraska
Broadcasters Association).*

Lee Enterprises only wanted the TV stations and easily sold off the Omaha radio combo. It went to Henry Broadcasting of San Francisco for 22 million, the third-largest ever radio deal to date (Sept 1, 1986).

Henry Broadcasting was principally owned by Charlton H. Buckley, who owned three AM's and four FM's, most recently acquiring KDON AM/FM Salinas, California. Ken Headrick remained in place as general manager for KFAB and KGOR.

As the 1980s progressed, radio news competition increased, spurred in part by KFAB's huge success. WOW 590 had built a strong news department with a large staff, radio-equipped mobile units, and lots of police scanners. It focused on government, courts, and street news.

In addition to WOW, a new station signed on to the AM dial in 1987 clearly targeting a share of KFAB's listeners. It was Mitchell's News/Talk KKAR 1180, new sister to KQKQ 98.5. Mitchell outfitted his crews with video cameras believing it would be beneficial for recording detail in radio field reporting.

KFAB responded by adding news at several times throughout the day and extending its 5:30 morning news block to 10 a.m. It also added a noon news hour, and lengthened its afternoon newscast. KFAB had 12 full-time newspeople.

FM competition and shifting demographics began to erode KFAB's massive ratings during the second half of the 1980s. KFAB was toppled by KEZO 92.3 album rock. In the spring 1988 ratings, the numbers being close, 17.0 to 16.1. It was the first time that a station displaced KFAB at the top of the overall ratings since at least 1970.

KEZO Z-92 General Manager Jeff Crabtree attributed much of his win to the changing tastes of aging listeners. He said Z-92 benefited from its ability to hold onto most of its longtime listeners who continue to enjoy rock music into their 40s, as well as adding younger listeners.

In the face of KEZO's celebrations, KFAB General Manager Ken Headrick took a realistic tone, saying, "I don't think anyone wants to be No. two, but it's not an unexpected thing" (*OWH* Aug 6, 1988). Headrick pointed out the trend developing across the country where AM stations were losing listeners to FM. Headrick went on to say he's pleased that KFAB continues to attract the 35+ audience. He added that many AM stations still play major roles in their markets and that he expected KFAB to do the same. Indeed, heritage AM powerhouses like KFAB continued to be strong in their respective markets.

KFAB drifted downward in ratings, but in the summer 1988 book KEZO dipped enough to give 1110 the top spot once again. It was short-lived, however, as KQKQ 98.5 went to number one with its Top 40 format in the winter 1989 ratings, final proof that the FM band had taken over.

Ken Headrick retired in 1989 openly admitting he didn't enjoy corporate radio and saying he liked the hands-on programming days of old-school radio. Bob Sweet took over as general manager.

After 35 years at KFAB, Headrick's departure was the strongest signal yet of the KFAB dynasty drawing to a close. However, KFAB maintained its lead in the News/Talk arena even though it had not yet adopted the format full time. KKAR, failing in its bid to take a chunk of KFAB's listeners, backed off from the heavy news approach of its start-up year in favor of talk programming. WOW had built a news image with an emphasis on "street" news with an ambulance-chasing focus, an approach already favored on local television newscasts.

The three-way news battle would continue into the 1990s, but it would be the last hurrah for local radio news gathering. Newsrooms would be the first to feel the budget cuts in the 1990s.

1290 KOIL Omaha

KOIL 1290 struggled in the 1980s following its blackout and tumultuous return to the air in the preceding decade. The station had enough juice left to continue finding a reasonably successful niche by playing less raucous pop music mixed with some oldies, if only for a while.

Still operated by Beneficial Broadcasting and now managed by former KOIL salesman Larry Campbell, the station was nearly Adult Contemporary airing a softened Top 40. The presentation on KOIL was changed “to take the hype out,” according to Campbell, referring to a perception left over from the KOIL Burden days.



1980 KOIL Logo

It was a mixed message, as KOIL continued to cater to teens with Sprite Nite at Peony Park’s Royal Grove Ballroom airing live with a KOIL personality each Thursday night 9 to midnight. Peony at 81st and Cass Streets for years was a popular destination for teens, offering rides, swimming, and picnicking. Its Royal Grove had long been a venue for live Big Bands and still scheduled Tuesday dances for the over-28 crowd as well.

A fresh network was added to help mature the station’s image a bit. It was the newly organized RKO Radio Network in New York with news and 90-second “lifestyle” features. (Feb 14 1980). RKO was the first new network in decades, thanks to the ease of using satellite delivery rather than phone lines. The Mutual Broadcasting System had been using satellite delivery since 1979, and before that, National Public Radio pioneered satellite delivery in 1978.

PD and morning drive personality Jimmy O Neill was inexplicably fired by GM Larry Campbell in 1980. Speculation was that KOIL could no longer afford O’Neill’s salary.

It was another setback for the *Shindig* host of the 1960s. O’Neill was talented and brought his even-tempered “California cool” to the Midwest, but radio was rapidly changing. His on-air persona was pleasant but no longer enough to rise above the increasingly competitive and fragmenting radio presentations.

O’Neill decided to stay in Omaha working free-lance and forming an ad agency with Don Bellino, another ex-KOIL staffer. Bellino had gone into business for himself owning Bushwhackers, a Country dance bar in La Vista, and later started a thriving although seasonal fireworks business.

Their agency folded the following year when its major client, the Freight Furniture Warehouse, liquidated without paying their commissions. O’Neill was already wrestling with alcohol and reliance on lithium. He vanished from Omaha in summer 1981, later turning up in California at brother-in-law Troy Donahue’s home (*OWH* Aug 3, 1981). From there, he put his family and life back together, staying on the West Coast.

Terry Mason became interim PD taking over O'Neill's responsibilities, soon gaining the title permanently. He found himself leading a staff that was facing another blackout.

The license for KOIL had been pending since its three-month blackout in 1976. A struggle for KOIL ownership had been going on since then for five years. Now, conflicting stories about the future of KOIL 1290 began emerging in early August.

An affidavit filed with the FCC said that Nathan Novak, the head of of Beneficial Broadcasting, was going to shut KOIL down sometime between August 13 and 15, 1981. The affidavit was a supplement to a motion asking the FCC to expedite its decision on who of the three applicants will receive the KOIL license.

When contacted by the *OWH*, Novak denied any close-down, but confessed there will be some changes in the coming week, adding it was too early to know what they are.

Terry Mason was left to tell his air staff he had no idea of what KOIL's immediate future may be. With that, newsman Clay Michaels left for a job with Broadcast Music Inc., while air personalities Mike Cody and Rick Lane (later known on-air in Omaha as J.J. Morgan) resigned to go to KATI Casper, Wyoming.

KOIL remained on the air. Nathan Novak took over as KOIL's General Manager upon Larry Campbell's resignation on September 1 and announced the station would be vacating its once-grand home at 8901 Indian Hills Drive.

Novak had been paying eight-thousand dollars a month for equipment and office space. He called the move and management reductions a money-saving effort, the move alone cutting overhead by 20 percent. The plan now was to just stay on the air until the FCC decided on who gets the license.

(Don Burden had already sold much of his treasured showcase headquarters in 1978 to Continental General Insurance. The new owners doubled the building's size in 1979 with a new wing while keeping the original design and winning a city beautification award in 1981. Its investment in the building totaled \$3.3 million.



KOIL studios and offices, 8901 Indian Hills Drive, vacated in 1981 for a move to 30th and Farnam Streets.

Some years later the building was purchased by Methodist Hospitals and was turned into an endoscopy center, the irony not lost on Burden's former employees.)



Norm Gruenke and Rod Meyer in KOIL's new studios in the Twin Towers Building.

PD Terry Mason now faced a major task to oversee KOIL's move. The new studios were to be on the ground floor of the Twin Towers Building, 3000 Farnam St. The building also housed Novak's Omaha Computer Service.

During the move to the Twin Towers Building, the jocks had to do their shows from the lonely and cramped 60th & Harrison cinder block transmitter shack for about a month.

Soon the FCC finally awarded KOIL's license to Nebraska-Iowa Broadcasting. The company, with offices at 1175 Woodmen Tower, consisted of eight area businessmen owning about 13 percent each. But the fight for the license continued.

A losing contender for the license, Omaha Broadcasting Service, appealed the decision in 1982 and won an FCC reversal. The two battling companies finally resolved their differences in October 1982 by merging and becoming NewKOIL Inc. At last, the KOIL 1290 license debacle was over.



1982 KOIL year-end survey showing a mix of rock and adult-contemporary music.

NewKOIL took control on January 11, 1983. The new company purchased the equipment from Don Burden, but still leased his transmitter towers site. Records show that KOIL in that first month sought to relocate its transmitter site, but plans were scrapped and it remained on Don Burden's property at 60th and Harrison Streets for years afterward.

NewKOIL chairman Richard Lozier named KOIL's former creative director and one-time Burden right-hand man Steve Brown as general manager and adviser to the executive committee. Little else changed. The format remained Adult Contemporary, broadcasting from the Twin Tower studios at 30th and Farnam with Terry Mason as PD.

Mason grew up in North Omaha and was an avid radio fan. For a while, he worked at Radio Shack selling stereos at a time when World Radio was the stereo leader buying heavy schedules and weekly remotes on KOIL. Mason's mind soaked up detail like a sponge and his outgoing personality and social skills made him a good PR man for whoever and wherever he worked.

On the air, Mason was a natural. He had a bright, straight-ahead delivery, a quick and fun mind, and excellent knowledge of pop music. Mason did the morning show with returning newsman Clay Michaels, now calling it the *Mason and Michaels Show*.

As PD, Terry Mason immediately added oldies into the format with a daily two-hour rock oldies show and *Solid Gold Weekends*. He implemented fun promotions, enjoyed doing remotes, and kept in touch with a wide array of radio people both inside and outside of the market.

Oldies first appeared in radio formats in the 1960s as top 40 developed. Programmers began to mix in previous hits to dilute the mix of current hits. Besides safely slowing the rotation with familiar hits, it strengthened the format by broadening the demographic base, hanging on to some core listeners with their old favorites as they aged.

Oldies were on the verge of becoming an individual format. Heritage Top 40 stations like KOIL were naturally identifiable with oldies as they had originally played the songs when new making for the greatest likelihood in transitioning towards that format.



*KOIL's Terry Mason and Clay Michaels.
(2001 photo by author)*

With the Oldies added, a KOIL *Nostalgia Reunion* event in October 1984 took place featuring an appearance by Jimmy O Neill and Joe Light, both briefly brought in from California. Light was found working at KIQQ Los Angeles doing the *Jeff and Joe Show* with Jeff Thomas.

KOIL moved studios, again, in 1985 to a small strip of offices near the Westroads Mall at 10617 Burt Circle. It was in an industrial zone just northwest of the I-680 and Dodge Streets interchange in the Old Mill area.

KOIL's numbers hovered in the 5-share region going into the mid-1980s. But, in April 1985, KOIL's Oldies and Currents format was challenged by All Oldies KEDS 1490. KEDS made some impact but fell short gaining only to a 3.1, while KOIL dropped but stayed ahead with a 3.9.

The station still looking for a niche, General Manager Steve Brown was fired from KOIL at the start of 1986. His replacement was Geoff Hammond, hired by mid-year.

On April 19, 1986, A crowd of over six thousand turned out for a KOIL oldies concert at the City Auditorium Arena featuring Three Dog Night and Tommy James & The Shondells. Concert tickets were distributed free through co-sponsoring advertisers. Mason used the occasion to announce before the show that KOIL would switch to an All-Oldies format the following Monday, going head-to-head with KEDS 1490.

Another KOIL oldies concert at the Auditorium followed on June 14, featuring the Monkees, Herman's Hermits, the Grass Roots with Rob Grill, and Gary Puckett & the Union Gap.



Oldies were enjoying a rising interest on a national level. Terry Mason told the *OWH* the station has been receiving request calls for the Monkees and Beatles "from voices we know are under 25."

KOIL was now calling itself *Vintage KOIL*. The new letterhead logo included a bunch of grapes to underscore "Vintage" as in fine wine.

Mason said the station's "Vintage Rock" format was designed to appeal to adults 30 to 40 years old. Having teenagers listening was a "welcome surprise."

All-Oldies formats were gaining in popularity but still being fully refined. KOIL's format of oldies was a mix of hits from the 50s, 60s, and 70s that included the harder, album-oriented rock songs that shared the charts during the Top 40 years, particularly beginning in the mid-1960s. It started with garage bands like The Kingsmen and was catapulted by the British Invasion with the Kinks, the Yardbirds, The Who, the Animals, and the Spencer Davis Group.

The Oldies format on a national level would soon shake out and become two separate formats appealing to two different audiences in the same general age group. The pop songs would remain Oldies and the harder rock format would become Classic Rock. The distinction hadn't yet been realized by Mason and staff, and the odd mix of the two was a bit of a detriment.

A few months after KOIL's switch to All-Oldies, KEDS 1490 gave up its Oldies format and went to simulcasting its sister FM, KEZO 92.3. *Vintage KOIL's* numbers jumped back up from a 2.3 low the previous fall to a 4.1.

That same year morning man Don Glaze joined KOIL from KLMS Lincoln. A driven personality, Glaze enjoyed doing promotional stunts for the station and for worthy causes. In May 1985 while at KLMS, Glaze raised funds for his pet charity Easter Seals by doing the "one-man wave," sitting in all 76 thousand seats in UNL's Memorial Stadium.

At KOIL in June 1987, Glaze spent 30 hours in a bathtub filled with pasta and tomato sauce raising 6500 dollars for Easter Seals. The remote broadcast from 84th and L Streets lasted from noon Saturday to 6 p.m. Sunday.

Vintage KOIL struggled financially, some say due to management problems. The vine was plucked in 1988 as NewKOIL sold the station to an ex-KOIL DJ from the 1970s who by this time had the chops for station management and was getting into ownership.

The buyer was former KOIL personality Bob Dean, who was the evening DJ for four years before KOIL's 1976 blackout. He bailed just ahead of the FCC-imposed silencing of KOIL, going to WHB Kansas City. From there he evolved from DJ to sales and later gained management experience at KSTR Grand Junction, Colorado.

Dean had returned to Omaha to manage KESY AM and FM in 1980. At the time of his KOIL purchase, he was in the process of buying an FM station in Atlantic, Iowa with intentions to increase its signal to include Omaha. When he found KOIL was available, he seized the opportunity to have an AM/FM combo.

Dean's financier was Robert Greenlee of Boulder, Colorado. Greenlee gained much of his wealth by building up and selling KBCO FM in the Boulder-Denver market. He also had an interest in a station in Green Valley, Arizona near Tucson.

It was many a DJ's dream, buying the station where he once worked as an underling. Even more satisfying was its being the historical Don Burden station that once owned the market. Greenlee and Dean bought KOIL for 900 thousand dollars (*Billboard* Dec 26, 1987).

KOIL engineer Dick Dennis had owned 20 percent of KOIL at the time and says he lost 50 thousand dollars in the sale. He said afterward that he believed NewKOIL sold out to pay off back taxes.

Bob Dean's Valley Broadcasting of Atlantic, Iowa took over KOIL on February 1, 1988. Under the terms of the transaction, all KOIL employees were terminated on January 29 and asked to re-apply for their positions. Most were immediately rehired and the on-air staff remained largely intact. Terry Mason continued as Program Director and morning drive personality along with newsman Clay Michaels. Overnighter Bill Hoover and newsman Phil Rooney were let go. Rooney eventually was hired as a reporter for KFAB.

Dean announced the station would be going "back to the old KOIL style." By now Oldies formats were refined and had settled into a list of pop songs from the late 50s into the early 70s, carefully omitting the "establishment" artists such as Patti Page and Johnny Mathis who charted during those years. The hard rock that developed in the 60s also was culled to only the biggest hits with the broadest appeal.



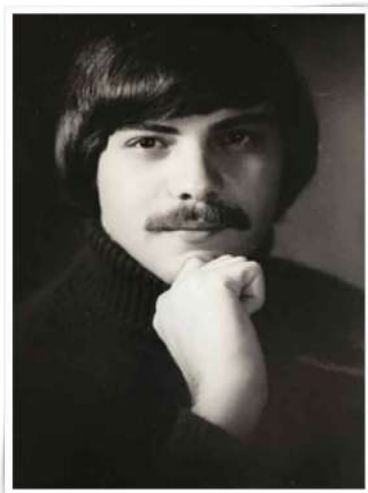
KOIL Studio at 1108 Douglas Street. David White at the mic.

Mason then went into the basement and brought out the old jingles from the 1960s and 1970s, and again KOIL became "*The Mighty 1290.*"

KOIL then went through its third studio move of the decade. New offices and studios were constructed just north of the Old

Market area at 1108 Dodge Street in a historic 1891 building owned by architectural firm Alvine Engineering (March, 1988). It would also house Dean's FM station from Atlantic, KJAN-FM, soon to become KOMJ. The FM was undergoing an upgrade and would become Omaha's first "move-in" signal while remaining licensed to Atlantic.

KOIL enjoyed a renaissance with its newly-focused Oldies format. The playlist was a well-researched list copied from WHB Kansas City that contained about 400 pop songs from the late 1950s into the early 1970s.



*Bob Dean, 1975
KOIL promotional photo*

The *Mighty 12-90* increased to a respectable 6.6 share in the summer 1988 ratings and ranked second in the coveted 25-54 adults group. The station's sales revenue kept Valley Broadcasting flush for a while as its Atlantic FM worked to gain a foothold in the market.

Bob Greenlee became the controlling partner with 70 percent ownership in the summer of 1988 when Bob Dean sold the license assignment of both Omaha stations to his money-man for 180 thousand dollars (*Broadcasting* July 25, 1988). Nothing else changed--Greenlee stayed in Colorado while Dean ran the Omaha stations. Dick Dennis remained the on-site engineer, though only part-time. Valley Broadcasting then switched its incorporation from Iowa to Nebraska at the start of 1989.

Changes happened quickly in the late 1980s. First, KGOR 99.9 announced plans to flip from Top 40 to Oldies in November 1988. Terry Mason immediately saw it as the end for his Oldies format on AM and soon resigned after 12 years with KOIL, moving to WGTO Orlando. Mason would kick around at various Florida stations, even working for the nearby Disney World, but will return to his hometown of Omaha in several years.

Mason later summed up his KOIL years this way: "For 12 years it was my great pleasure to be at the Mighty 1290 for the 'interesting' years of its history. From Nathan Novak's Beneficial Broadcasting with Jimmy O'Neill, Chris Collins, Lundy, Peters, Mark Todd, the late greats Big Bruce Vidal and Jim Morgan; to being evicted from 8901 and forced to the transmitter on Harrison where Dennis Anderson threatened suicide; to 30th and Farnam where Rod Meyer wanted to know if we had bulletproof glass...(I told him there were aim-proof curtains); to 106th and Burt and the granting of a permanent license to NewKOIL, Inc. with Steve Brown as GM; to Vintage KOIL and Geoff Hammond; to Bob Dean and Valley Broadcasting buying KOIL to couple with his KOMJ, Atlantic move in and Carl Mann asking me to take the station all-oldies and putting Clay and me back together, then moving the station to 11th & Douglas. As the Grateful Dead best put it...'what a long strange trip it's been.'"

The following year KOIL was again set to change hands along with sister FM KOMJ. Bob Dean and Bob Greenlee agreed to sell both stations to Ovation Broadcasting Co. of Phoenix for 5.575 million dollars (July 14, 1989). Ovation was headed by Phil Motta and Stanley Laybourne, and was in the process of also buying an AM/FM combo in Abilene, Texas.

Quite by surprise, this dealing brought Joe Light back to Omaha. Light was a popular and well-known KOIL personality in the 1960s and 1970s and had worked with Phil Motta at KRIZ Phoenix, the two becoming associates when Ovation was formed.

Light was set to be KOIL's general manager. He made visits to the station during the pending sale, renewing acquaintances with Bob Dean and Operations Manager Carl Mann.

The license reassignment was approved by the FCC on August 30. But for reasons unknown, the acquisition of the stations by Ovation Broadcasting failed to close. Dean had soured on the deal early on, and after discussions "just fell apart," the agreement was canceled in November (*OWH* Nov 11).

Valley Broadcasting was in the process of buying a radio station in the Des Moines market, KDMG 103.3, Pella, Iowa for 2.75 million (Oct 1989). That sale was approved by the FCC in January 1990, but it, too, failed to close. Dean and his Colorado partner Greenlee kept KOIL and KOMJ into the 1990s.

Joe Light returned to Omaha one more time. After about a year of managing Ovation's AM and FM in Abilene, Texas, Light was hired by old friend Steve Brown at KKAR 1180 in January 1991. Their relationship went back to 1959 when Brown first hired Light at KICN Denver marking the beginning of Light's career with the Don Burden stations.

Light held the afternoon news anchor position at KKAR for just under 90 days. Again, it was because radio had changed through the years. Joe Light's antics and wisecracking humor no longer fit and were seen as more of a liability. Light resigned and left town when he was asked to switch to feature reporting and sales. It was Joe Light's last appearance in Omaha.

THE OTHER AM STATIONS

660 KCRO Omaha

The once-famous 660 channel (as KOWH 660 it launched the Top 40 format in the U.S.) was still restricted to daytime-only operation. By now it was airing religious programs and music. Air time was sold in blocks to evangelists and religious organizations.

The station had evolved into a religious broadcaster in the 1970s when it was bought just before the end of that decade by a group in Indianapolis headed by Jeff Smulyan. The group also owned WNTS in its home market.

The Omaha arm was called Radio Omaha, Inc. The calls were changed to KCRO, *Christian Radio Omaha*, in 1979. (Smulyan soon left the Indianapolis group and became quite well-known launching Emmis Broadcasting in 1981. Emmis developed into a major group owning dozens of stations in the following years.)

Ratings for religious broadcasters were never strong, KCRO's hovering at the bottom with a 1.3 in 1984 being typical.

KCRO had a low profile during much of the 1980s, its most successful promotion probably being the "Alcohol-Free New Year's Eve" events in 1985 and 1986 when King Louie Rose Bowl and KCRO hosted the parties for non-imbibers at its bowling alley, 1110 Northwest Radial.

Live religious broadcasts, particularly from churches, began to fade in the 1980s. KCRO was the last remaining Omaha radio station to carry live religious broadcasts, airing until AT&T raised its rates in July 1988.

Manager Bill Butler said he had two remaining programs that aired live via phone lines. One of the two, "*Count It All Joy*," switched to a prerecorded format a month earlier, the other likely would follow.



KCRO Logo, 1989

Longtime Omaha broadcaster Gene Piatt joined KCRO as operations manager in 1988 for the sunset years of his career. Piatt had been kicking around the market for a few years at KESY and KROM. Before then he was well-known for his years at WOW AM and TV from 1957 to 1970, and at KFAB from 1972 to 1979. It's a typical maturity point of an air person's career cycle as he waits out his retirement.

Paul Rehm began a long run as general manager in 1989. Rehm came from KFAB where he did morning "Eye In the Sky" traffic reports and a midday shift. At KCRO he co-hosted the *Paul and Marty Show*. Rehm remained with KCRO until 2003 when he left for Des Moines joining KPSZ 940, the one-time Top 40 KIOA now with a religious format.

1180 KKAR Bellevue

KKAR on 1180 kHz signing on in 1987 was Omaha's first new AM station in thirty years. It went through five years of typical red tape that began in April 1982 when 1180 kHz opened up in the Omaha region and set off a flurry of competing applications for the channel.

Among them was Great Empire Broadcasting, owners of KYNN 1490 and KYNN FM 94.1. Hoping to find a better AM signal, Great Empire filed a proposal to build a Council Bluffs station on 1180 using 2.5 thousand watts days and a thousand watts at night with a directional north-south signal, the pattern a requirement on the frequency to protect existing stations, primarily WHAM in Rochester, New York.

Two applicants in Lincoln sought the 1180 kHz frequency for their community of license as well. Sioux Man Broadcasting Inc. with no other broadcast interests applied for 1000 watts unlimited on the channel, and Union College, licensee of noncommercial KUCV FM, sought a five-thousand-watt signal, one thousand watts nights, directional.

Mitchell Broadcasting, the owner of KQKQ 98.5 and KLNG 1560, sought 1180 with Bellevue as the community of license and wanted five-thousand watts days, one thousand watts nights, directional. Mitchell had additional holdings as principal owner of AM and FM combos in Kearney, Nebraska, and Mountain Home, Idaho.

In June, yet another group joined the filings. Long-Pride Broadcasting Co. of Texas also chose Lincoln for the station. Owners were Jim Long, co-founder of TM Productions in Dallas, and Country singer Charley Pride. The duo were owners of an AM/FM combo in Wichita.

The applications were resolved two years later in April 1984 when Mitchell Broadcasting won the construction permit for the new station. The calls KNPE were assigned in August. The community of license was Bellevue, a historic community just south of the Omaha metro adjacent to Offutt Air Force Base.

Some considered it the Omaha market's first radio station originating in Sarpy County, although KOTD 1000 Plattsmouth had been on since 1970. KOTD was considered a local station for its own market, but still could be heard in much of Omaha and indeed often appeared in the *OWH* radio/TV listings.

Executive vice president and chief operating officer of Mitchell Broadcasting Ralph Beaudin said Mitchell apparently would have to sell off its current local AM station, KLNG 1560, when 1180 goes on the air. Duopoly rules still limited ownership to one AM and one FM station per market.

Ralph Beaudin was hired by John Mitchell in 1986 as general manager of Mitchell's Omaha stations. He was an Omaha native who got his start in sales at KOIL and KOWH in the 1950s.

From there Beaudin held successful management positions for ABC Radio including general manager of WLS in Chicago. Now back in Omaha, he would work out his pre-retirement years with John Mitchell's stations.

Beaudin brought in Gene Taylor to initially head news operations at KKAR. Beaudin and Taylor pioneered Chicago's WLS 890 into a Top 40 station in the early 1960s. Taylor worked his way up from DJ to WLS station manager. The duo's colorful past later made for some fascinating conversation with the staff during after-work cocktails.

Mitchell hoped to have the new station on the air in six to twelve months but many details remained to be resolved. Among them were the call letters, the studio site, the towers site, and programming studies. In reality, it would be yet another four years before 1180 would light up.

Construction was slow. Part of the problem was that one of the four towers was found to be out of the correct alignment, forcing more modifications to bring the signal pattern into required specifications.

After several extensions, two transfers, and a permit renewal, Mitchell Broadcasting Company finally signed KKAR 1180 kHz on to the air on March 19, 1987. The KNPE calls had been changed to KKAR in January.



1988 KKAR Logo.

The transmitter was a Harris SX-5 solid-state unit, likely the first no-vacuum-tubes transmitter to be placed in service in the Omaha market. Nautel introduced 10 kW and 50 kW solid-state AM transmitters in 1982. By the early 1990s, solid-state transmitters were being widely used in radio broadcasting, while sales of vacuum tube transmitters began to decline

KKAR's daytime power was five-thousand watts using two towers. Nighttime power went into a four-tower array, restricted to 250 watts until authority for 1000 watts was received in July.

A stereo exciter was installed, even though the selected News/Talk format didn't necessarily need stereo or its improved fidelity.

Studios were co-located with sister FM KQKQ 98.5 in the LeDioyt Landmark Building at 10th and Farnam Streets. Both the AM and FM studios were well-designed showcases inside the historic brick building, the interior walls retaining the brick character of the Old Market district in which it resides.

KKAR was Omaha's first all-news radio station. Steve Brown, who had been fired from KOIL as the General manager a year earlier, was appointed Manager. Bob Murray, formerly with KMTV and KFAB, anchored the morning news show. He stayed at KKAR for about a year before returning to television at WIBW TV Topeka.

A sports director was added with the hiring of Torri Pantaleon. He hosted the sports shows and did play by play of various games including the Omaha Royals, staying until 1993. Pantaleon gained his play by play skills as sports director at Cox Cable during much of the 1980s.

The mobile units were called "K-Cars." 17 local reporters worked the streets, courts, and government offices in Omaha. The reporters were provided with video recorders for field reporting, the idea that video could provide a better reference in writing and updating.

KKAR carried some sports and had an evening mix of talk shows by Sally Jessy Raphael, Tom Snyder, and Larry King. Daytime was made up of local news blocks supplemented by CBS news and features.

In the station's first year, Brown admitted KKAR did not attract a large audience, achieving only a .8 in the fall survey and building to only a 1.6 the following spring. Meanwhile, the targeted competition, KFAB, did indeed fall from its top spot by 1988, toppled by an FM rocker, but remained strong with shares in the mid- to upper teens.

KKAR's signal was part of the problem, never a match for KFAB's 50 thousand watts. The ground conductivity at the transmitter site was disappointingly less than expected. Also, the north-south beams from the transmitter site on the east edge of Council Bluffs meant a weaker signal for much of the west side of the Omaha metro.

Adding to the signal problem, listeners in NW Omaha initially reported interference from WOW 590's second harmonic on 1180 kHz. It was an oversight by the FCC permitting a station on 1180 in a market where a station could produce a harmonic on that frequency.

(Harmonics are multiples of a station's frequency. Unless properly filtered, the station can produce weak signals on its harmonic, each higher harmonic becoming weaker. In this case, it was WOW's frequency of 590 x 2 producing a second harmonic signal showing up on 1180 kHz.)

KKAR's stereo exciter was turned off in 1988 because the station's reach appeared to be further in mono. Steve Brown said the station started with stereo thinking it would have additional clarity, but "for some unexplained reason, we find we have greater receivability in more places with mono" (*OWH* Nov 29, 1988).

KKAR arrived in time to take advantage of the end of the Fairness Doctrine that was repealed in August 1987. Without equal time required for issues and views, talk shows could now become more interesting.

The Doctrine was established in 1949 to guarantee fair coverage of controversial issues in those earlier years of radio when the limited number of stations could result in too much singular control of information.

Talk Radio had been hamstrung by the Fairness Doctrine. Hosts had to remain unbiased. Before the 7-second delay was invented in 1957, listeners only heard the caller's comments when repeated by the host. Successes in talk radio shows originally were from personality-driven hosts who could bond with the audience, often with guests or weirdos. Besides discussing issues, non-political topics were explored, such as sex, finance, and home improvement.

By the mid-1980s, broadcast ownership was so numerous and diverse that the Fairness Doctrine was no longer seen as necessary. The Doctrine was repealed clearing the way for the electronic press to enjoy the same First Amendment guarantees that the print media have had since day one. It should be noted that the personal attack rule and the "political editorial" rule requiring those targeted to be notified and allowed reasonable response time remained in effect until 2000.

This cleared the way for commentators to express opinions without having to provide equal time. Conservative commentators emerged, the most famous and flamboyant being Rush Limbaugh, whose show from New York went national in 1988 thanks to the now more common use of satellite delivery enabling the development of new boutique networks.

KKAR's programming consultant Bruce Marr recommended that the station add "this new syndicated talk personality." KKAR became Rush Limbaugh's 37th affiliate.



Rush Limbaugh during an Omaha visit, flanked by Mary and John Mitchell. (Courtesy: Mary Mitchell.)

The conservative Limbaugh presented problems for station owner John Mitchell who once was the state executive director of the Nebraska Democratic Party. Several party leaders demanded the conservative talk show host be taken off the air. Mitchell stuck to his business sense and was steadfast in refusing to do so.

When it started airing, Rush Limbaugh's show attracted the most attention. It prompted a "massive reaction" from KKAR listeners, both negative and positive according to Station Manager Steve Brown.

Limbaugh's show became such a success that he was seen by many as the major savior of AM radio, cementing the talk radio format for AM as music was migrating to FM. His "Rush to Excellence" appearances were well received, and his first in Omaha at the Peony Park Ballroom was quickly sold out.

Bruce Williams of NBC's *Talknet* took issue with the "savior of AM radio" assessment, expressing his annoyance by saying, "There wouldn't be a business for them to save if it weren't for Larry King, Sally Jessy Raphael and me." Indeed, all had followings well before Limbaugh. King started in the late 1970s on Mutual's national overnight show and Williams went national on *Talknet* in 1981.



Limbaugh on air with Steve Brown during an Omaha appearance in 1990. (Courtesy: Norm Gruenke_

In December 1988 KKAR backed off from its schedule of recycling news blocks in middays by adding four more talk shows. Joining the line-up were Michael Jackson, Dr. Dean Edel, Rush Limbaugh in the opening weeks of his national show, and Dr. Joy Browne.

Middays still had hourly news--five minutes at the top for CBS national news, and five shorter breaks for local and regional news. KKAR still aired all-news mornings until 10 a.m and in afternoon drive starting at 4 p.m.

Despite getting in on the ground floor of what would become a highly successful national show, Rush Limbaugh initially was of little help to KKAR. The station's numbers remained below a 2, even dropping to a .8 in the Fall 1988 ratings before recovering to a 1.9 in the next ratings period.

Sports director Torri Pantaleon recalls, "We were constantly reminded by management that we 'AM types should be happy that *Sweet 98* is paying your paychecks.' "

KKAR continued in a three-way race as radio news competition ramped up. WOW 590 had developed a strong news department, calling itself Omaha's "New News Leader." KFAB 1110 extended its morning news block, added a noon news hour; and lengthened its afternoon newscast. Through it all, KKAR lagged but refused to give up as it entered the 1990s.

1420 KESY KOOO KROM KESY Omaha

KESY AM 1420 was simulcasting its FM Beautiful Music format as the 80s got underway while looking for an opportunity of its own. An opening arose in February 1980 when KEFM 96.1 dropped its short-lived Country format.

Just a month after KEFM 96.1 flipped from Country to Rock, the KOOO call letters returned and country music was brought back to 1420. The FM remained KESY FM 104.5 Beautiful Music.

It was an odd move. KOOO 1420 was Omaha's first Country music station, well established through the 1960s and much of the '70s. But this time it would return to face heavy competition from Great Empire Broadcasting's WOW AM and FM, each with separate Country music programming.

KEFM's old PD, Blaise Matz, came aboard, taking over and joining former KEFM morning man Jim Morgan who had been at the AM since the previous August. Morgan had a Country radio background and returned to his morning show after an on-air absence of several weeks before the station flipped to *Outlaw Country* in April. The music was Modern Country rather than Traditional Country like that found on WOW AM.

Morgan sought to provide a zaniness on his show with skits and his character voices. He was also fortunate to have inherited a sidekick newsman, Bruce Karlquist, a part-time comedy writer whose on-air persona was Animal P. Mudd.

Karlquist recounts how his unusual air name came about: “When KOOO went *Outlaw Country*... I took over AM Drive. The GM, Gary Clouse, tagged me with the name Animal based on a character on the Lou Grant (TV) Show, and the fact that I wasn't exactly ‘country’ looking. The name Mudd came about when I was named news director, the story being that I was Roger Mudd's (CBS) illegitimate son. I added the ‘P’ and Animal P. Mudd was born! Morgan joined me a couple of years later.”

KOOO PD Matz launched a promotion that fall that created some positive buzz. A mysterious cowboy with his horse began giving away cash to charitable organizations and random people on the street. Station Manager Gary Clouse confirmed it was KOOO's promotion and 2500 dollars had been given out (*OWH* Nov 7, 1980).

But financial problems continued to plague the station through 1981. KOOO and KESY filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in November. Centennial Broadcasting was represented by attorney Clay Rogers who understood the business workings of radio as he was not only Don Burden's son-in-law but had worked in sales at KOIL in the 1970s.

Within weeks of the filing, the stations were sued for copyright infringements, accused of playing music without paying the required royalty fees. Centennial President and CEO Ray Hambric said the amount was 20 thousand dollars and is one of the reasons the stations are in chapter 11. Meanwhile, General Manager Gary Clouse was trying, though unsuccessfully, to arrange for his purchase of KOOO 1420, the station having been placed on the sales block for about 500 thousand dollars in April.

Country music on 1420 finally sputtered out on August 31, 1981. KOOO flipped the format to big band music with vintage vocals using Al Hamm's *Music of Your Life* automated format.

The Nostalgia format had recently been taking shape as an alternative music format for dying AM stations. Al Hamm's syndicated “Music of Your Life” was just three years old, automated, and distributed on reels of tape, using well-known Hollywood personalities as announcers on the tracks. They were celebrity DJs and singers, ranging from Peter Marshall and Wink Martindale to Patti Page and Mel Torme's son, Steve. MOYL announcer Gary Owens coined the catch phrase, “The Stars Who Play The Stars.”

Al Hamm's music mix was primarily big hits by standards artists with some big band classics and some baby boomer pop. His syndicated programming was doing well nationally, particularly on AM stations desperately seeking a new, niche format.

KOOO then sought the call letters KFAV for "Favorites." KFAB immediately objected to this obvious ploy to confuse call letters in hopes of gaining some of KFAB's listening credit in ARB diaries. The call change, sought in September, was quickly denied. Clouse indicated his second choice would be KMEM for *Memories*, but the KOOO calls remained intact.

To help localize the programming, former WOW personality from the 1950s Joe Martin was picked to join the air staff for a morning show. Mike Metz, a newsman whose credits included KIMN Denver in the 1960s and later was a talk show host at KLNG, came aboard as a newsman and announcer. Also joining the local crew was Cathie Fife who soon worked her way up to PD. Eddie Hudson of WOW and KOIL fame later joined KOOO to do afternoons in January 1982.

KOOO's ratings increased from 1.2 to 3.7, but that turned out to be the high point as the numbers settled in at around a 3.0 share.

As the financial struggles continued, the owners filed for reorganization. KOOO 1420 and KESY 104.5 were transferred for 150 thousand dollars to Marshall and George Hambric and others, the group presumably assuming debts as well. (Sept 1981, granted Feb 5, 1982).

It was around this time that the offices and studios of the two stations were moved across Dodge Street to the old Donald Jack Photo Studios, a two-level structure with a mezzanine at 4807 Dodge.

In mid-1982 a senior at Creighton Law School began a weekly 4 p.m. one-hour show on KOOO 1420, "Sunday With Sinatra." Willie Watters was a huge Sinatra fan and did a 100-page thesis on the singer. Watters' weekly program on KOOO ended with show number 100 in March 1984, after which he moved his show to KIOS FM to air Sundays at 11 a.m.

Before the end of 1982 and while still in bankruptcy court, Centennial, owned by Bruce Mayer and Marshall R. Hambric, sold KOOO 1420 along with sister FM KESY 104.5 for three million dollars.

The buyer was Richard Marshall Capital Corporation of which Marshall Hambric owned 40 percent, resulting in his keeping partial ownership of the stations. Also part of the new ownership group was Sherry Sanders, wife of Mack Sanders, with 40 percent. Mack Sanders was the former owner of the station 20 years earlier and had originally sold the AM/FM combo to Centennial for 1.2 million in 1978. The deal was completed in May 1983.

Program Director Cathy Fife continued to promote the station's Big Band and Music of Your Life formats. In June 1983 she hosted a "Tea Dance" playing favorites at Varieties, a restaurant at 130th and Arbor Streets, from 5 to 8 p.m.

1983 KOOO record hop for the older crowd, hosted by Cathy Fife (© Omaha World-Herald)

But, the local talent brought aboard in 1981 was being cut loose. In August 1983 Cathie Fife, the last of the full-time announcers, was fired by Bob Dean, now vice president and general manager of KOOO and KESY FM. Dean, one-time evening personality on KOIL before the station was blacked out, had returned to Omaha and was moved up from sales manager, a position he held at the stations during the earlier management reign of Gary Clouse.

Fife said she was paid \$1,000 a month, had no contract, and received no severance or vacation pay. Dean called Fife's departure an economic move, saying, "Everything that the FM makes in terms of dollars is lost on

KOOO." He said KOOO would lose about \$12,000 this month, about \$2,000 more than KESY's profit. In the time he has been at the station, Dean said KOOO has broken even only one month (OWH Aug 22, 1983). At the time, KOOO was ninth out of twelve stations in the overall market shares.

Fife, who also hosted a big band music show on KOOO, was considered at KIOS FM for a similar program, but the station dropped the idea. She instead landed part-time at WOW.

Fife remained a popular personality in the market. She easily connected with her listeners, sharing her joys and sorrows and the details of her life. Even so, Fife was quite itinerant over the years, with stints at KOIL, KOTD Plattsmouth, KLIN Lincoln, and KISP Blair.

News Director Lee Barron began a weekend big band show in October 1983. Barron was a local bandleader from 1936 to 1966 touring ballrooms in the region. He did three shows on Saturdays, two of them on the FM, and one in the afternoon on AM.

The Nostalgia format's music was being adjusted as well. The station began phasing in tapes from TM Productions in Dallas introducing more post-1970 songs at the expense of big band tunes, clearly with the intent to soon replace the *Music of Your Life* format.

Big Band as a niche format was short-lived but would remain as a feature on adult-oriented music stations, usually scheduled in blocks during evenings or weekends. MOYL, meanwhile, survived another 30 years by continually updating its library mix with more modern artists.

The KESY stations, 104.5 FM and KOOO 1420 AM, went through another sale in 1984. Richard Marshall Capital Corporation sold the AM/FM combo to MediaOmaha for 2.2 million dollars plus a 300 thousand dollar no-compete clause. The buyer was required to buy KOOO 1420 for 400 thousand dollars if it wasn't sold by the FM approval date plus 15 days. By this time the AM ratings with the now-diluted "Music of Your Life" had dipped to a .9 as of the spring 1984 ratings.

MediaOmaha Inc. was Jayne Woods, wife of Frank Woods, and John Biddinger, who headed the SunGroup investment capital firm in Indianapolis of which Frank Woods was President. The sale was granted March 12, and the KOOO 1420 purchase followed as per the agreement on April 12.



*KROM owner Lyle Nelson.
(Courtesy: Nebraska Broadcasters Association.)*

The new owners in just weeks spun off KOOO AM 1420, finding an Omaha radio pro who wanted a station of his own. Lyle Nelson, an accomplished sales manager at KFAB for 11 years and at WOW in the years before that, felt assured that grabbing just a portion of KFAB's massive listenership would make his new station viable.

Nelson bought KOOO 1420 for \$650 thousand, \$25 thousand of it in cash, the remainder in a note in June 1984. Nelson Broadcasting took over in September 1984.

Nelson filed for the call letters KROM for “*Radio Omaha*” in July that were granted by September. He built offices and studios in the Blackstone Center at 36th and Farnam in Omaha’s historic Gold Coast District.

The Blackstone (302 South 36th Street, built in 1915) was an elegant and historic hotel in its day. It had just been renovated for office use and was declared an Omaha Landmark a year earlier. KROM set up shop in the basement at the south end of the building.

Nelson hired live DJs including former KFAB newsman Gene Piatt to do mornings. Nelson described the music as “upscale adult,” more specifically as Middle-of-the-Road pop hits from the 60s to the 80s, targeting the 25 to 54 age group. For some of the music library, Nelson bought a collection of old discontinued music tapes from KFAB.

The format included lots of news-- CBS newscasts, local and regional news, and Time World News Service that offered features from Time magazine 15 times a week.

Sports included carrying Kansas City Royals baseball on weekends and Notre Dame football in the fall. KOOO's Ak-Sar-Ben horse racing coverage continued in season with Frank Allen who had a resume stretching back to WOW, KOWH while it was still Top 40, and KOIL. Allen was an avid horse racing fan whose handicapping record rivaled track announcer Terry Wallace, the latter making selections for a radio network that included WOW 590.

Nelson was met with a number of challenges in trying to take some of the KFAB audience. KROM was daytime only, its power only 1000 watts, on a higher frequency of lesser ground wave coverage, and was facing a national trend to FM.

Nelson said the station adequately covered the metropolitan area during the biggest radio revenue time of 6 a.m to 6 p.m. He also was encouraged by an engineering study he commissioned that indicated gaining permission to broadcast 24 hours might be feasible.

KROM explored a possible loophole that might allow it to carry some Husker football games. Nelson announced in March 1985 that KROM would pick up the Learfield Communications radio network that carried the games of four Big Eight teams: Oklahoma State, Missouri, Iowa State, and Kansas.

Four Husker matchups were in Learfield’s thirteen game schedule that year. KROM could conceivably broadcast those Husker games in direct opposition of KFAB’s “exclusive” Huskers coverage contract.

The idea went no further. KFAB had paid 515 thousand dollars for the season of Husker football and basketball and found strong support from the schools' athletic directors, particularly Nebraska's Bob Devaney, in nixing Nelson's plan.

KROM just couldn't gain a foothold in the market. 1420's signal was never a match for KFAB's around-the-clock 50,000 watts. After just over a year of operation, during which Nelson never missed a payroll, Nelson defaulted and returned the station to KESY's owners for assumption of liabilities.

Nelson afterward remained in radio, going to KEFM 96.1 as vice president and general sales manager. He was proud to say that he paid off his KROM debts within two years.

MediaOmaha found itself with an AM station once again. Bob Dean and his operations manager Bob Palmer simply went back to the FM simulcast of Beautiful Music. The calls were returned to KESY AM 1420 by November 1985. The last of the sports programming leftover from the Nelson ownership was the season closer for Iowa State playing Oklahoma State.

MediaOmaha sold its interests in both stations to SunGroup Inc. in 1986. It was more of a shift than a sale as the sellers, a limited partnership, already were connected with SunGroup. MediaOmaha was made up of Frank Woods' wife Jayne, and John Biddinger, the head of SunGroup.

SunGroup owned five radio stations in Texas and Alabama and was seeking to expand. It announced that KESY AM and FM were acquired for \$6.2 million in stock plus the assumption of liabilities. Frank A. Woods, president of SunGroup said plans were to continue the Beautiful Music format.

Bob Dean left in 1987 to avoid conflict of interest with his efforts to upgrade an Atlantic, Iowa station to cover the Omaha market and become the city's first move-in station. He was replaced by Dana Webb.

Just before the end of the 1980s, the FCC loosened rules for daytime-only stations allowing some to operate at night at reduced power. KESY 1420 around 1989 was authorized 330 watts at night, dropping down from its daytime power of 1000 watts.

KESY 1420 entered the 1990s simulcasting the slow changeover from Beautiful Music to Soft Pop of its sister FM. But, more changes for an identity of its own were on the way.

1490 KYNN-AM KEDS KEZO-AM Omaha

1490 underwent numerous changes in the 1980s after having such an interesting history in getting to this point. For one thing, it now had a sister station KYNN-FM on 94.1.

Years before that as KBON, 1490 programmed standard fare, launched the city's first personality DJ (Sandy Jackson) and became the market's first News/Talk station as KLNG. The station was limited only by its meager thousand-watt signal. Entering the 1980s as Country station KYNN-AM, it would try Oldies and rock before the decade is out.

The lineup in 1981 was an experienced staff of professionals. Omaha native Walt Gibbs of KSWI fame was on the news team. Ken Fearnow was the Sales Manager who would soon rise to manage Great Empire's Omaha stations.

KYNN was also Percy Ziegler's home as Chief Engineer, working out his pre-retirement years. Ziegler's resume included being Johnny Carson's engineer at WOW in the early 1950s.

Another radio legend, Lyle DeMoss, was on board as a holdover from the previous ownership. The only "outsiders" were PD Roy Coffman from KEOR-AM in Atoka, Oklahoma, and Chris Taylor as MD.

In 1983 Chuck Urban was doing mornings on the AM/FM combo but was soon only on the AM side when George Woods, freshly fired from mornings at KGOR, was hired for the FM morning show. Woods had extensive experience having worked at Country-formatted WOW.

1983 was a year of change for KYNN. That year new FCC regulations permitted Class IV stations to run their 1000 watts full time rather than power down to 250 watts at night. Also, the station got new owners.

Great Empire was forced to spin off KYNN AM when it purchased WOW 590, a trade upward for a much better signal.



KYNN "Pony Express" News staff included local legends Walt Gibbs and Mike Bradley. Geoff Hammond later became manager at KOIL.

KYNN-AM's new owners came from the East Coast, Albimar Broadcasting, a Boston firm that also purchased KEZO 92.3 at the same time. Albimar paid 500 thousand dollars for the AM station.

The KYNN 1490 sale was finalized in July 1983. The old WOW studios on John Galt Boulevard now belonged to KYNN 1490. With the KYNN calls remaining with Albimar and the FM no longer associated with the company, Great Empire changed calls on its 94.1 FM from KYNN FM to WOW FM.

The Albimar KYNN picked up some of WOW's fired sales, administrative, and air staff, but also cut some staff as its programming was shifted to automation. KYNN 1490 remained Country, but was adjusted to Modern Country. The new identifier was *15 Country*.

AM 1490 KYNN FM 94				AM 1490 KYNN FM 94			
TOP 40 FOR WEEK OF Sept. 14th - Sept. 20th				BACK FORTY (EXTRAS/NEW ADDS)			
TW	LW	SONG	ARTIST	SONG	ARTIST	LABEL	
1	2	Charlotte's Web	Stallier Brothers	Mercury	Thirty Cents A Gallon	Tom T. Hall	RCA
2	3	Let's Keep It That Way	Mic Davis	Casablanca	Cold Lonesome Morning	Johnny Cash	Columbia
3	7	*Put It Off Until Tomorrow	The Kendalls	Ovation	Two Hearts Beat Better	Kay Austin	E.I.O.
4	6	Old Flames	Dolly Parton	RCA	Long Arm of the Law	Roger Bowling	NSD
5	8	Lovin' Up A Storm	Razzy Bailey	RCA	Always	Patsy Cline	MCA
6	11	Do You Want To Go To Heaven	T.G. Shepard	Warner	The Devil Stands	Jack Grayson	Hittbound
7	10	*Heart Of Mine	Oak Ridge Boys	MCA	Mexico Winter	Bobby Hood	Chute
8	13	*When	Shirley Williams	Epic	*The Boxer	Emmy Lou Harris	Warner
9	12	He's Out Of My Life	Johnny & Jamie	Columbia	Baby, I'm A Want You	Stephanie Winflow	Warner
10	14	Starting Over	Tammy Wynette	Epic	She's Leavin'	Kenny Price	Dimension
11	1	Looking For Love	Johnny Lee	Asylum	Rolands, Doan Pills	Dave Dudley	Sun
12	18	*Faded Love	Ray & Willie	Columbia	Rose's Are Red	Freddie Hart	Sunbird
13	17	Women Get Lonely	Charlie McClain	Epic	If You Ever Change	Crystal Gayle	Columbia
14	16	Free To Be Lonely Again	Debbie Boone	Warner	Until The Bitter End	Kenny Seratt	MDJ
15	15	The Last Cowboy Song	Ed Bruce	MCA	Tommy	Wichita Lineman	Chute
16	20	Bombed, Boozed and Busted	Joe Sun	Ovation	Out Run The Sun	Jim Chesnut	U.A.
17	19	While I Was Making Love	Susie Allanson	U.A.			
18	23	*Rock And Roll	Bill Anderson	MCA			
19	26	*Theme From Dukes of Hazard	Waylon	RCA	NEW ADDS		
20	21	Yesterday Once More	Moe Bandy	Columbia	Could I Have This Dance	Anne Murray	Capitol
21	22	If There Were No Memories	John Anderson	Warner	Cowboy Boots and Rolls	Jacky Ward	Mercury
22	25	Gone	Ronnie McDowell	Epic	Another Texas Song	Eddy Raven	Dimension
23	28	*I Believe In You	Don Williams	MCA	Night Games	Ray Stevens	RCA
24	29	I'm Not Ready Yet	George Jones	Epic	Night Lies	Bill Wencore	Rustic
25	34	On The Road Again	Willie Nelson	Columbia	A Little Ground in Texas	The Capitols	Ridetop
26	32	Hard Hat Days	Red Steagall	Elektra	Never Be Anyone Else	R.C. Bannon	Columbia
27	30	Sweet Sexy Eyes	Christy Lane	U.A.	Dixie Dirt	Jim Rushing	Ovation
28	31	Working My Way To Your Heart	Dickie Lee	Mercury			
29	37	Over The Rainbow	Jerry Lee Lewis	Elektra			
30	36	Hard Times	Lacy J. Dalton	Columbia			
31	33	They Never Lost You	Con Hunley	Warner			
32	35	Raisin' Cain In Texas	Gene Watson	Capitol			
33	38	Steppin' Out	Mel Tillis	Elektra			
34	39	Pecos Promenade	Tanya Tucker	MCA			
35	NEW	Tumbleweed	Sylvia	RCA			
36	NEW	*Pair Of Old Sneakers	George & Tammy	Epic			
37	NEW	Texas Shout	Jerry Reed	RCA			
38	40	You'd Better Hurry Home	Connie Cato	MCA			
39	NEW	In Memory Of My Mother	Johnny Pauchack	Epic			

1980, still owned by Great Empire, KYNN "Corral of Country Hits" music survey.

Jim Abens was made program director and morning show personality. The former associate news director at WOW, Mike Nelson, became news director for KYNN and KEZO. That was the only live talent on KYNN.

General manager Jim Carter promised live disc jockeys eventually would be heard throughout the day, but he said the station intended to provide as much music and as

little talk as possible. "More music, no bull," was one of the station's image liners.

In less than two years KYNN found itself 12th among the 14 commercial stations in the market. The morning show was still the only live portion of the broadcast day. Time for a change. It was a flip to Oldies.

Country KYNN became Oldies KEDS on April 9, 1985. Ops manager Bruce McGregor, who was doing double-duty handling KEZO 92.3 across the hall, described it as "classic hits of the '50s, '60s, and '70s." KEDS became Omaha's first All-Oldies station. KOIL at the time featured oldies only two hours daily and on "Million Dollar Weekends."

McGregor also noted the station would also play old radio commercials and "hundreds and hundreds of old television show themes." This attempt of using dated elements to connect with the past was soon discarded by Oldies stations. They simply made listeners feel old. The music was all that was necessary to succeed, standing on its own.

The KEDS call letters were believed to be a tie-in to the popular 1950s tennis shoes with that name. The calls more likely were a reference to the Edsel, the Ford car from the late 1950s. This is validated by the station letterhead logo, an Edsel grill. That the Edsel was a failure was not a good omen for the station's new format.

Personalities were Dave Wingert, freshly fired from KGOR and now mornings on KEDS, Chuck Ashby, and program director from the Country format, Jim Abens.



1985 KEDS logo.

KEDS also aired Chicago Cubs baseball and overnights aired Larry King's national call-in show from the Mutual Broadcasting System. Initial ratings went to a 3.1, but KEDS was still bested by KOIL's part-time Oldies getting a 3.9.

KEDS couldn't beat KOIL's superior signal. The KEDS signal on 1490 had problems especially at night when fighting co-channel stations and electrical noise. Some west Omaha listeners had trouble even finding the station at night.

In July 1986 Dave Wingert left, devoting his morning show on KEDS to saying goodbye, calling it "So Long, Wingy, Week." He again would leave Omaha, this time for a morning show on KUDL-FM Kansas City. Like his other departures from Omaha, it would be short-lived.

After about a year, KOIL 1290, already airing some oldies in its contemporary format, switched to All Oldies. KOIL's superior signal and heritage Top 40 reputation spelled the end for KEDS.

In July 1987, just a few months after KOIL adopted its new sound as *Vintage Oldies*, Album Rock appeared on 1490. The oldies were gone, replaced by a simulcast of sister station KEZO 92.3, in mono. It was the cheapest way to keep an AM on the air, a turnaround from FM's earlier years when the AM side was simulcast on struggling FMs. Soon the calls were changed to match; KEDS 1490 became KEZO-AM 1490.

In placing a positive spin on the 1490 change, KEZO general manager Jeff Crabtree called the simulcasting "a power move" to increase Z-92's market share (*OWH* July 10, 1987). In reality, there was little expectation that KEZO AM 1490 could add anything by airing album rock in mono on the AM band. KEZO 92.3 already had long been in the top three and by now was second in the market behind KFAB. A variety of formats were yet in store for 1490 in the decade to come.

1560 KLNG Council Bluffs

KLNG 1560 began the decade with another sweeping change. After a decade in which KLNG went through two call letter changes and three format flips, from MOR to Top 40 to News/Talk, the station in April 1980 became KLNG 1560 "*The Wizard*."

The format was the brainchild of consultant Bill Cunningham of Resultants Inc. in Miami. Cunningham was an aggressive radio executive who gained much of his swagger while a driven salesperson at Don Burden's KOIL in the early 1970s.

After moving to Miami he was one of the driving forces behind the success of Y-100 rocker WHYI Fort Lauderdale in the highly competitive South Florida market.

Mitchell Broadcasting retained Cunningham as a consultant to assist KLNG and its sister FM KQKQ 98.5. His concept at KLNG 1560 was to put music first.



*1980 KLNG "Wizard" logo
(Courtesy: Richard Warner)*

Cunningham designed a mix of R&B that would appeal to jazz, disco, and Black listeners, carefully omitting rock and country, and interestingly, banning 45 rpm singles. Cunningham called the format, "Classy Rhythm" (*OWH* Apr 8, 1980).

Omaha's Black community had been without a Soul station since 1979 when KOWH-FM flipped to Country. But The Wizard was not necessarily Cunningham's plan to fill the void. Richard Warner recalls, "We carried the National Black Network news... But just because we carried the network doesn't confirm it was Black programming ... we might have been finishing a contractual agreement."

(The National Black Network launched on July 2, 1972 in New York City with 25 affiliates. Later, in the early 1990s, NBN merged with its main competitor, the Sheridan Broadcasting Network, formerly the Mutual Black Network, to form the American Urban Radio Networks.)

There was little servicing for or interaction with the Black community. Other than the NBN, *The Wizard* was all music with little personality. Newscasts ended at 9 a.m. The rest of the day had no DJs, just canned promos and IDs. There was a *Wizard* station promo twice an hour, ID on the hour, and a rare commercial. Plans were for the station to eventually go live again with up to five DJs.

Russell Carey's talk show from the previous format was dropped but he stayed on to segue records for much of the day, 10 a.m to 7 p.m. Sweet J Ray's weekend soul music show was dropped, as was the daily 90-minute Big Joe Polka Show. Big Joe had been with the station for 16 years.



Early 1980s KLNG “K-16” logo
(Courtesy: Richard Warner).

The Wizard had no magic. It finished 11th out of 15 stations in the Spring 1982 ratings. Bill Cunningham by this time had left Florida and moved back to Omaha to take over as general manager of KLNG 1560 and sister FM KQKQ 98.5.

Cunningham flipped the AM 1560 format from *The Wizard* to Top 40 on August 3, 1982, admitting the change was hastened by WOW 590's recent flip from Top 40 to Country. The morning show was a simulcast of Dave Wingert's show on KQKQ FM. Music the rest of the day was generally mainstream Top 40 with some new wave rock.

1560 had tried Top 40 before, in the 1970s while seeking the audience left behind when Top 40 KOIL 1290 was forced to go dark for three months. In this latest move, KLNG almost disappeared from the ratings with a .6 in Spring 1983. (*OWH* July 26, 1983).

Undaunted, KLNG kept its format. It aired the syndicated “Dick Clark National Music Survey” on Sunday afternoons, bringing Clark into town on September 19 for a private cocktail party. The event at the Old Mill Shopping Center was attended by KLNG listeners whose names were drawn after registering at various sponsor locations.

The Big Joe Polka Show returned to 1560 after about two and a half years, on November 4, 1983, airing on Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. He lost no momentum during the interim as his show had been in production for a small network of stations via tape recording for a number of years.

Meanwhile, owner John Mitchell was awarded the license for the region's newly authorized AM slot at 1180 kHz. His planned station would soon become KKAR 1180, licensed to Bellevue. Duopoly rules would force him to sell off KLNG 1560 when 1180 signed on.

KLNG continued to languish in its format. In 1986 sister FM KQKQ 98.5 moved to new quarters in Omaha's Old Market leaving the AM behind at 36th and West Broadway in Council Bluffs.

KLNG soon found a new owner, but it remained in the Mitchell family. Mitchell sold KLNG in June 1987 to his son, Dr. John Mitchell II of St. Paul, Minnesota for 300 thousand dollars.

The young Dr. Mitchell had worked in radio for several years with Mitchell Broadcasting. Upon ownership of this, his first station, he silenced KLNG in July while deciding on a format, saying it would return within 45 days. The studio at 36th and West Broadway in Council Bluffs meanwhile was relocated to the Quonset hut at the KLNG tower site on the South Omaha Bridge Road.

It was a low point for Omaha AM radio. KEDS-1490 at the same time was giving up Oldies in favor of a simulcast of its FM sister KEZO 92.3.

KLNG returned to the air in November 1987 as a religious station focusing on Christian music, a niche favorable to AM, and thus became the third religion-formatted broadcaster in the city right behind KCRO 660 and KGBI 100.7.

By the following year, the station was calling itself, "the Southern Gospel Voice of the Great Plains." General manager Thom Corritore said KLNG would sell airtime at a "very reasonable" price to anyone who wants it, providing the programming is not offensive.

Several religious ministries already were running regular programs, and Corritore was open to secular programming as well, from other organizations including ethnic groups and local businessmen who want a business show or soccer parents who want to air their kids' games (*OWH* June 4, 1988).

The station in 1989 again changed hands for what would turn into a long-lasting ownership. Bob Wilkins of Spartanburg, South Carolina formed Wilkins Radio Network, Inc. by making KLNG his first station purchase. Wilkins started in Christian radio as a ministry consultant, placing local, regional, and national Christian programs on stations across the United States, KLNG being one of them.

KLNG then became the flagship station for what would become a large Christian radio network. Wilkins Radio would grow to six markets in ten years and go on to own and operate eighteen Christian Talk Radio Stations in major markets.

In June 1989 Big Joe Siedlik, tired of the weekly grind, ended his Big Joe Polka Show on KLNG and KJSK Columbus. He had reached the 25-year mark of being on the radio. Before quitting he said, "I didn't wait until I was axed. I did it the other way. I axed myself." Big Joe denied the recent station sale to Wilkins Radio was the reason behind his decision. (OWH June 17, 1989)

Siedlik walked out of the KLNG studios in the middle of his June 11 show allegedly to show listeners he was serious about ending his career. Still, he remained under contract with cable outlet RFD-TV for three polka shows per week.

Siedlik's program was on KLNG for more than 23 years. At its peak, the "Big Joe Polka Show" was heard on 29 stations each week.



Big Joe Siedlik, whose first polka show aired on KOOO 1420, retired after 25 years, 23 of those years on KLNG 1560.

THE FM TAKEOVER

92.3 KEZO Omaha

KEZO entered the 1980s as Z-92, broadcasting with 100 thousand watts at 1210 feet from the TV antenna farm in North Omaha. It played hard rock from its west Omaha studios at 11128 John Galt Blvd. sharing space with AM sister station WOW 590. Ratings were good, third in the market behind KFAB 1110 and KQKQ 98.5.

The highly-successful morning team of Otis Twelve and Diver Dan began on Z-92 on April 14, 1980. Otis Twelve (Doug Wesselmann) and Diver Dan (Jim Celer) had been friends since 1967 while at Creighton University. The two were co-founders of a comedy group at Creighton and teamed up on numerous creative projects, from stand-up comedy to live theater. They broke into Omaha radio at KQKQ 98.5 doing a weekend show, *Midnight Mondo*. That's where Z-92 found them.



KEZO's Diver Dan and Otis Twelve at work.
(© Omaha Magazine)

The duo was just right for the times. FM still had the creative edge while consultants were in the early stages of taking control and homogenizing radio programming.

Two creative comics working a morning show was a natural for radio. Otis and his pleasant-

sounding baritone was smart and acerbic. He had a somewhat eccentric and irreverent take on life's events. Diver Dan was a creative writer and sidekick.

The duo's humor was at times mature, mixed with slapstick and sometimes dark takes on sacrosanct icons. Among their more popular skits becoming popular features were "The Mean Farmer," "Lance Stallion Radio Detective," and "Space Commander Wack."

Bruce McGregor Joined as program director in 1983 and began adjusting KEZO's hard rock music mix. He sprinkled in classic rock that had developed in the 1970s, a more mainstream element that would attract baby boomers in the 25+ age group. The move was successful, increasing ratings enough in the coming months for KEZO to become solidly entrenched as one of Omaha's top three stations.

KEZO flexed its promotional muscles with a twenty-five-thousand dollar car giveaway in June 1983. With heavy pre-promotion, the car went to caller 92 immediately following the play of three specific songs in sequence. Northwestern Bell was overwhelmed for a few minutes that Wednesday evening as the avalanche of callers created a citywide phone disruption.

Also of note in mid-1983 was the emergence of compact discs. CDs were poised to replace vinyl recordings with its cleaner and clearer fidelity. KEZO along with classical music stations KIWR and KVNO was among the first to put CD players in the studio. KEZO used its new toy several times an hour, often mentioning it whenever it came into play.

While riding high, Meredith Broadcasting divested itself of its Omaha properties in August 1983. KEZO 92.3 went to Albimar Broadcasting as part of a deal where Great Empire Broadcasting bought Z's sister AM, WOW 590. The price for KEZO was 2.95 million-plus a 450 thousand no-compete agreement.

As part of the convoluted deal, Albimar also bought Great Empire's KYNN 1490 resulting in KEZO getting a new and different AM sister station in WOW's old space. FCC duopoly rules at the time prohibited Great Empire from having two AM stations in a single market.

It was an unusual move into the Midwest for the Boston-based Albimar Broadcasting. The two principals of the company until now had interests only in East Coast operations. Bertram M. Lee had a financial interest in WNEV TV Boston. and E.W. (Skip) Finley Jr., former president of Sheridan Broadcasting Network, had a financial interest in WOL(AM) Washington. It would prove to be a lucrative move.

One casualty of the sale was Sandy Palmer, the KEZO newsperson and "lifestyle editor" known for her bantering with the eccentric morning team of Otis Twelve and Diver Dan Doomey. She left for a news director position at WMET FM Chicago.

The Otis Twelve and Diver Dan morning team enjoyed six years together before breaking up. Otis sought more security and took an advertising job, leaving the station for Culver and Associates in 1986.

During this time KEZO rose to the number two spot in the market behind KFAB 1110 and ahead of KQKQ 98.5 (*OWH* December 29, 1986). Nearly half its audience was in the advertiser-coveted 25 to 49 age group. The station was playing a mix of classic rock from the 1960s and early 1970s, a smattering of heavy metal, some current hits, and some alternative music.

Otis Twelve's absence from KEZO was brief. Calling his departure perhaps a "mid-life crisis," Otis was looking for a return to radio in 1987. KEFM 96.1, *Lite 96*, was interested in him for mornings, but he needed a sidekick. Otis called Sandy Palmer at WMET Chicago. Otis asked if she would like to return and work with him on an Omaha radio show.

Palmer agreed. But before the KEFM deal closed, KEZO learned Otis was looking for a return to radio and stepped in inviting Otis back to Z-92 along with Sandy Palmer. The pair returned to the Z.

The shuffling at Z-92 to accommodate Otis and Ms. Palmer included pushing Diver Dan, Otis' former sidekick, to a late-night shift. For a while, the situation was tense. Rumors surfaced that Otis and Diver Dan, longtime friends, were on the outs (*OWH* March 8, 1987).

Diver Dan left the station the following year. He stayed in Omaha doing stand-up, writing, and co-hosting a Cox Cable Omaha sports talk show. Diver would return, however, replacing Palmer whose contract was not renewed in April 1990.

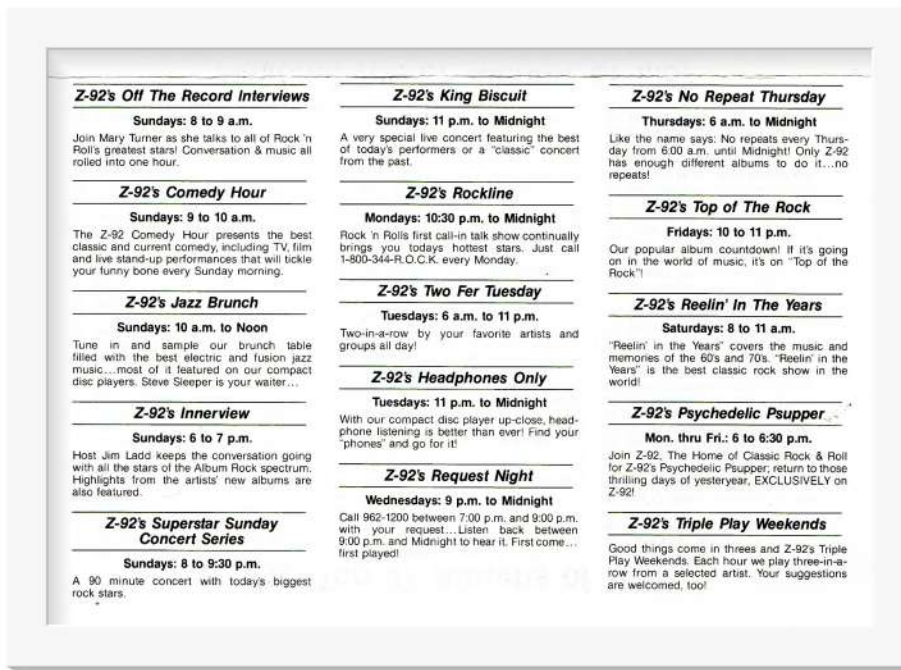
In the summer of 1987, KEZO began a simulcast on its AM outlet on 1490. It was a thinly disguised move to cut expenses at the AM. KEDS 1490 had failed to gain traction as an Oldies station, so the staff was cut and the AM signal began airing its FM counterpart on July 10. At the time, KEZO 92.3 had a respectable 12.3 rating, edging out KQKQ and its 12.0 for second place. KFAB was at the top spot with 19.6.

By fall it became clear with the AM simulcast that the stations were posturing for a sale. Albimar sold its AM and FM properties for 8.3 million in November 1987, a nice profit from its original 3.9 million paid for the pair some four years earlier. It was another harbinger of how radio stations were becoming a commodity among bankers and investors.



1988 KEZO Logo.

The buyer was Narragansett Broadcasting, a Providence, Rhode Island radio and TV group, a subsidiary of a Providence investment capital firm headed by John Franks.



1988 KEZO Program Guide listing its feature programming.

General Manager Jeff Crabtree said little would change at the station. By little, it was Operations Manager Bill Brun and afternoon personality Joe Blood who were out, resigning, according to Crabtree. Brun was replaced by Bruce McGregor as operations manager. McGregor also took over Blood's 3 to 7 p.m. shift.

Changes aside, KEZO was riding high with great talent including the eventual return of Joe Blood and the addition of Rick Setchell and Chuck Yates. Setchell also did some writing, airing a soap opera parody on Wednesdays called "Rock N Roll Hospital," doing all the production and voices himself.

With that, a pinnacle was reached. KEZO became the first station at least since 1970, to dethrone market leader KFAB 1110. It happened in the spring 1988 ratings. Album Rock Z-92 registered a 17 share against KFAB's 16.1.

KEZO staff and management were ecstatic, the personalities even discussing the victory on-air within minutes of the rating's release.

KEZO remained strong in subsequent rating periods although it fell back to second behind KFAB in the next rating period. But FM was the ultimate winner as the decade ended. KQKQ 98.5 took over the top spot by year's end, and KEZO would have more market-topping wins in the coming months.

94.1 KYNN-FM WOW-FM Omaha

Great Empire Broadcasting of Wichita began a successful run as Omaha's Country leader in 1977 with the purchase of KLNG 1490 and flipping it to *Country Kin*, KYNN. Two years later it bought KOWH FM 94.1 and *Country Kin* appeared on FM as well although with separate programming playing a more modern mix of country music.

Great Empire wasn't satisfied with its 1000 watt signal on 1490. Three AM's in Omaha had better signals, WOW 590, KFAB 1110, and KOIL 1290. WOW became available in the early 1980s as Meredith Broadcasting was seeking to get out of radio.

It was an attractive buy. WOW on its lower frequency with just 5000 watts had about the same coverage area as that of KFAB's 50 thousand watts on 1110. Lower frequencies have the better ground wave reach.

Great Empire's purchase of WOW 590 was a complex deal that culminated in September 1983. As Meredith spun off its two stations, WOW 590 and KEZO 92.3, the AM went to Great Empire Broadcasting and the FM to Albimar Broadcasting. With the FCC restrictions of one AM per market per owner, Great Empire's KYNN 1490 was spun off and became part of the deal going to Albimar.

The old WOW 590 staff at the John Galt Building was cut loose, unneeded at Great Empire's Country operation as KYNN was already going strong from 615 North 90th Street. KYNN simply became WOW 590, the historic calls and dial position now in its new home. The old KYNN calls were then taken by Albimar and thus remained on 1490 but now airing from the old WOW 590 studios, still Country though mostly automated.

At the Great Empire studios on North 90th Street, the rustic, country image wooden clapboard call letters were changed from KYNN AM/FM to WOW AM/FM.

Great Empire's 94.1 FM then switched its calls from KYNN FM to WOW FM, marking a return for those call letters on Omaha's FM dial. WOW-FM was last heard on 92.3 in 1971, just before then-owners Meredith Broadcasting flipped the station to KFMX.

The WOW AM and FM programming was separate, the AM side playing a more traditional mix of country such as Marty Robbins, Willie Nelson, George Jones, and Dolly Parton, the FM more contemporary with the likes of Randy Travis, Dwight Yoakum, and Garth Brooks.

Ken Fearnow, who joined Great Empire in 1979, became VP/GM of WOW AM/FM that year and led the stations for the next sixteen years.

The WOW AM and FM operation continued to build. The stations had a street-savvy news department with mobile units and round-the-clock staffing. Both the AM and FM held fairly steady ratings with reasonable fluctuations as the 1990s approached, the FM peaking at a 7.5 in 1987 and the AM hitting a 5.6 in 1988. Combined, the combo was generally well within the market's top five and ruled Omaha's Country music listenership.

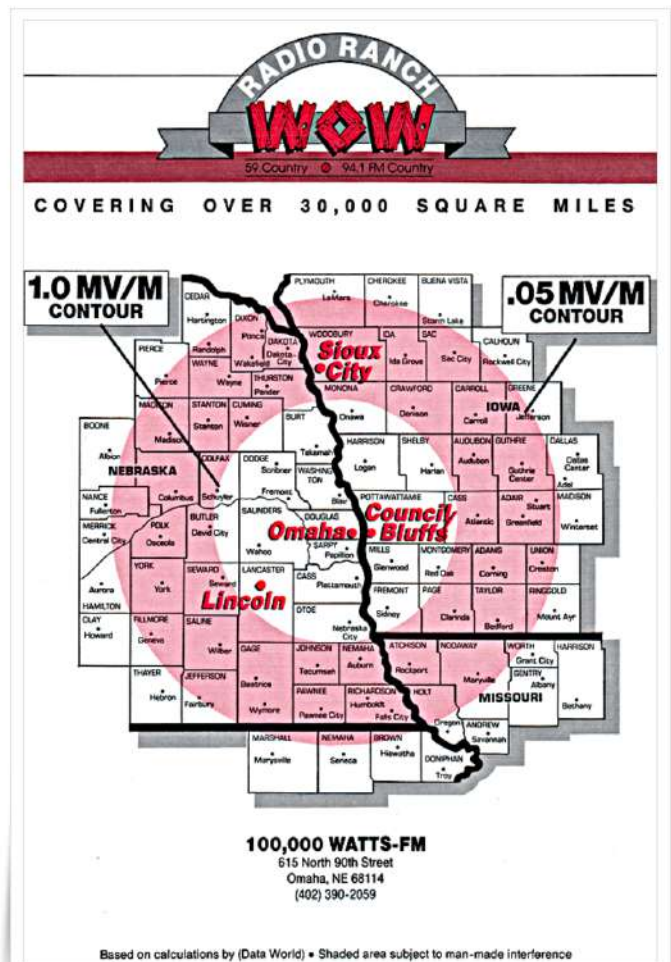


WOW AM/FM 1980's Logo.

The WOW FM signal was still airing from atop the KCRO 660 AM tower at 60th and Hartman Streets. Great Empire now owned the WOW 590 tower just blocks away at 56th and Kansas Streets but kept the antenna on the KCRO tower. Says Manager Ken Fearnow, "We made rent payments to Sam Smulyan for many years who I dreaded negotiating with on lease renewals. He was a tough one."

Both AM towers were in the 450- to 500-foot range but WOW-FM was seeking a much taller tower for its antenna. In November 1983 plans were underway to rent space on a tower near Springfield at the 1543-foot level but no agreement was reached. This was likely a yet-unbuilt tower still in the CP (construction permit) phase. It would be the tall Harry Pappas KPTM Channel 42 tower that signed on in 1986.

In August 1985 WOW-FM applied for a permit to change its transmitter location listing an antenna height of 1255 feet. WOW FM Chief Engineer Paul Sjodin recalls, "I believe that in 1985 they were looking at a site north of Bennington but there was some reason that fell through. I came to Omaha in 1985 so just got in on the tail end of that process."



WOW-FM 94.1 Coverage from its new tower.

Three years later in the summer of 1988 WOW announced plans to begin construction that fall on a 1,191-foot FM tower on North 72nd Street adjacent to the television antenna farm.

Six local FM stations were airing from the TV towers by this time, but WOW FM would have its own tower.

The tower plan was met with opposition from some neighborhood residents saying Omaha's "tower farm" is large enough, and that the three existing towers already pose a threat to nearby property.

The complaint list was long. Chunks of ice during the winters would fall from the towers onto nearby houses, yards, and cars. Also, said opponents, the towers interfere with television and radio reception, sound systems, telephones, and electronic testing equipment in the area. Some residents even said its homes and cars had suffered paint damage when the towers were painted and expressed worry about the possibility of one of the towers collapsing. The structures also cause annoying wind noise.

The complaints were heard at an August 2 meeting of the Omaha City Council. WOW General Manager Ken Fearnow countered by saying the new tower would be farther from the residential area than any of the three present towers.

He noted the site was the only one in Omaha where the FAA would permit tall towers saying, "We've been trying to find a location to build a tower for about the last five or six years, and it's taken us this long to finally arrive at a location that was acceptable to both the FAA and the FCC."

The City Council granted a special-use permit for the new tower. It was built and went into service in 1989. New WOW AM and FM studios on the site would follow in the coming decade.

96.1 KEFM Omaha

The future of KEFM 96.1 was still in limbo as the 1980s began. After being temporarily silenced in 1976 along with KOIL 1290 and the rest of Don Burden's Star Stations, KEFM was trying new formats under the interim ownership of Beneficial Broadcasting.

The automated Beautiful Music had been dropped in favor of Country music in 1978. The Country format struggled in the under-3 shares range until 1980.

On February 21, 1980, *New Country 96* played its last country song at 5 p.m. followed by two hours of stereo thunderstorms. The new *96-One* then debuted with Rod Stewart's "Do Ya Think I'm Sexy." KEFM became 96-1, "The One with the Right Rock"

It was called a "high-brow" hit music format with some gold recurrents in the mix. Recurrents are songs that were recent hits--slow to subside in popularity but noticeably aging, and still too new to be an Oldie. In reality, KEFM's music was unchanged from the old KOIL music playlists, mixing Adult Contemporary and soul with rock.

The format was designed by a committee consisting of KOIL's Steve Brown, Terry Mason, Larry Campbell, and ad agency Bozell & Jacobs. Steve Brown, now creative sales director for KOIL and KEFM, described it as, "a full service, live, contemporary station with live personalities and RKO Network News." The station would air RKO's 90-second lifestyle features as well.

Immediately following KEFM's switch to Top 40, KQKQ 98.5 dropped its Album Oriented Rock for Top 40 in March and the FM battle lines were drawn.

In just weeks, the battle was suddenly ended by Mother Nature. A June summer storm toppled KEFM's stubby tower atop the Rorick Apartments at 604 South 22nd Street just south of downtown. The station was off the air for two days. A temporary 25-foot mast was erected with power limited to nine-thousand watts. With such limited coverage, the Top 40 battle was over.

96/ONE PLAYLIST		3/17/80	
LW	TW	TITLE--ARTIST	LABEL
1	1	ANOTHER BRICK IN THE WALL--PINK FLOYD	CBS
3	2	HOW DO I MAKE YOU?--LINDA RONSTADT	ASYLUM
7	3	RIDE LIKE THE WIND--CHRISTOPHER CROSS	WARNER BROS.
2	4	TOO HOT--KOOL & THE GANG	DELIGHT
8	5	GIVE IT ALL YOU GOT--CHUCK MANGIONE	A & M
12	6	LOST IN LOVE--AIR SUPPLY	ARISTA
6	7	WORKING MY WAY BACK TO YOU--SPINNERS	ATLANTIC
9	8	HIM--RUPERT HOLMES	MCA
4	9	LONGER--DAN FOGELBURG	FULL MOON/EPIC
13	10	THREE TIMES IN LOVE--TOMMY JAMES	MILLINEUM
5	11	REFUGEE--TOM PETTY & HEARTBREAKERS	MCA/BACKSTREET
15	12	I CAN'T TELL YOU WHY--EAGLES	ASYLUM
10	13	CRAZY LITTLE THING CALLED LOVE--QUEEN	ELEKTRA
21	14	CALL ME--BLONDIE	CHRYSALIS
16	15	FIRE LAKE--BOB SEGER	CAPITOL
22	16	EVEN IT UP--HEART	EPIC
20	17	CARS--GARY NUMAN	ATCO
19	18	COME BACK--J. GEILS	EMI
26	19	YOU MAY BE RIGHT--BILLY JOEL	CBS
25	20	THINK ABOUT ME--FLEETWOOD MAC	WARNER BROS.
EX	21	SEXY EYES--DR. HOOK	CAPITOL
EX	22	WITH YOU I'M BORN AGAIN--BILLY PRESTON & SYREETA	MOTOWN
EX	23	PILOT OF THE AIRWAVES--CHARLIE DORE	ISLAND
EX	24	SET ME FREE--UTOPIA	BEARSVILLE
EX	25	ANY WAY YOU WANT IT--JOURNEY	CBS
EX	26	DO RIGHT--PAUL DAVIS	EPIC
EXTRA			
WOMEN--FOREIGNER			ATLANTIC
ADDS			
HOLD ON TO MY LOVE--JIMMY RUFFIN			RSO
FIRE IN THE MORNING--MELISSA MANCHESTER			ARISTA
CARRIE--CLIFF RICHARD			EMI
KEEP THE FIRE--KENNY LOGGINS			CBS
ONLY A LONELY HEART SEES--FELIX CAVALIERE			EPIC
BORROWED TIME--STYX			A & M
DROPS			
DESIRE--ANDY GIBB			RSO
99--TOTO			CBS
ON THE RADIO--DONNA SUMMER			CASABLANCA
SEPTEMBER MORN--NEIL DIAMOND			CBS
BACK ON MY FEET AGAIN--BABYS			CHRYSALIS
I THANK YOU--Z Z TOP			WARNER BROS.

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1980 KEFM "rock" music survey at one month into the new format.

It's said Don Burden kept the insurance money for the fallen tower and Beneficial Broadcasting had to finance a new tower on its own.

Beneficial sought to use the KOIL 1290 middle tower at 60th and Harrison Streets for the FM station. Permission was granted in December. But this change would require a power decrease from KEFM's licensed 100 thousand watts to 60 thousand watts, and the height on the tower would reach only 170 feet.

Rather than spend money that would only decrease the station's value, Beneficial abandoned the move and instead chose to simply take KEFM off the air. In January 1981, GM Larry Campbell announced that due to "financial considerations," KEFM would go dark and remain silent until the new owners could be determined (*OWH* Jan 22, 1981).

It was nearly two years later, concluding more than seven years of petitions, hearings, decisions, appeals, and reversals of decisions, that a winner emerged in November 1982. A local company, Webster-Baker, would take over the 96.1 FM license.

Webster-Baker was owned by John Webster, his father, William, and Joe Baker. The Websters were involved in real estate and investments. Baker's career was in broadcasting, mostly with KMTV. The company was formed in 1976 to acquire the hotly contested licenses of both KEFM and KOIL. The other two major contenders had already merged and gained control of KOIL earlier in the year.

But it would be yet another year before KEFM would return to the air. KEFM had been silent and lacking a tower since 1981 and now had to re-build from the ground up. A construction permit was granted in March 1983 and the KEFM calls, still available, were officially requested.

New radio studios were constructed at 105 South 70th Street in a building owned by John R. Webster Co. The new tower was on the downtown City National Bank Building at 16th and Harney Streets above the Orpheum Theater. It was the same spot where one of Omaha's pioneer FM stations, KQAL, signed on in 1959 and may have even been that FM's old tower.

William Baker was president of Webster-Baker and became station manager involved in sales. John Baker was the assistant station general manager and was involved in operations. Mrs. Baker, who with her degree in journalism had been active in numerous community activities, was promotion director.

KEFM returned to the air on October 21, 1983 and once again was airing a Beautiful Music format despite KESY FM 104.5 already doing the same. The automation and tapes were supplied by SRP, Schulke Radio Productions. Though automation will run the music tapes, Baker said the station would have "live" announcers, except possibly for the midnight to 6 a.m. shift.

The downtown transmitter site for 96.1 proved a problem for some courtrooms in the nearby Douglas County Courthouse and in the City Council chambers, both just a block away (OWH Nov 9 1983). The programming was coming through on the public address systems.

Fortunately, it was Beautiful Music rather than a more distracting format. Though the station wasn't responsible for solving the problem, KEFM's chief engineer, James Leedham, assisted in correcting the courthouse wiring issues.

KEFM ratings languished under a 2 share. On a national level, the Beautiful Music format was in a slow decline. In response, KEFM switched to Soft Rock music in September 1984 (OWH Aug 28, 1984).

Webster denied ratings were behind the change and blamed it on the sale of his program supplier, Schulke Radio Productions, to Bonneville Broadcasting, though the syndicated product underwent very little change.

Ballads and easy-listening songs by mainstream artists took over and the station became *Lite 96*. The air staff was upgraded with Bill Martin coming over from KQKQ and air personality Steve Lundy from KOIL. Gene Piatt of WOW and KFAB fame was named news director.



The format change gained immediate results, increasing ratings to a 4.5 share in the fall of 1984 and a 5.9 the following spring.

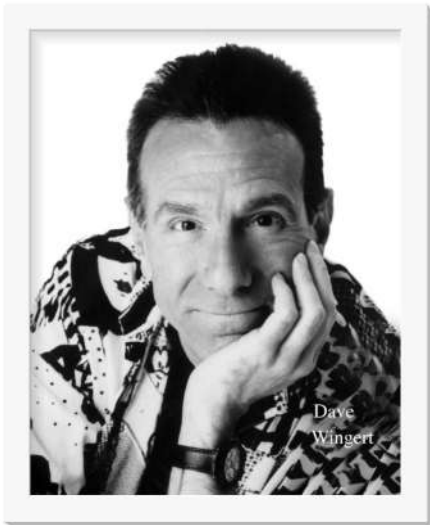
KEFM's signal was upgraded with a major transmitter and antenna move in spring 1986. It was moved to a tower newly constructed by television station KPTM Channel 42. KPTM belonging to Pappas Telecasting of Fresno, California was Omaha's first new television station in 29 years, since the sign on of KETV 7. It was also Omaha's first independent (non-network) TV station, Omaha being one of the last markets of its size to get a fourth TV station.

KPTM's owner, Harry Pappas, chose a tower site far from the TV antenna farm on North 72nd Street. He wanted a location southwest of Omaha that could also serve Lincoln viewers. The tall tower rose from farmland near the communities of Gretna and Springfield. KPTM's became the area's tallest tower at 1836 feet and was constructed big and sturdy in anticipation that FM stations would be renting space for antennas.

KEFM was an immediate tower tenant in April 1986, receiving permission to move to the new site and place its antenna at the 1486-foot level. The small tower on the downtown City Bank Building was kept as a backup. No other FM stations followed KEFM's lead to the Pappas tower.

With an improved signal, KEFM set out to further upgrade the station's air talent by hiring Dave Wingert for the morning show. It marked Wingert's return to Omaha after a short stint on KUDL Kansas City that followed his departure from KEDS 1490. He began on KEFM in October 1986, the fifth Omaha station for Wingert since first arriving in Omaha 15 years earlier.

Chuck Strand was KEFM program director during Wingert's return. In March 1987 assistant PD Dwight Lane took over the programming position and would eventually become station manager. Lane joined KEFM in 1985, having come over from KGOR where he was "Night Train Lane."



Dave Wingert, mornings on KEFM.

One of Lane's first tasks was negotiations with Otis Twelve to take over the morning show, presumably to the chagrin of still-new morning personality Dave Wingert.

Otis had left his successful morning show at KEZO 92.3 a year earlier for a stint in advertising. Missing radio, Otis was interested in a return to broadcasting. During negotiations he called his former KEZO newscaster Sandy Palmer who was doing news at WMET Chicago. Palmer agreed to come on as a co-personality for his return to radio at *Lite 96*.

When Z-92 management got wind of this, they offered the duo mornings at KEZO 92.3. Otis returned to KEZO with his new sidekick and Wingert remained mornings at KEFM for another year.

KEFM's combination of personality and light contemporary recurrents continued to build its ratings. Shares went into the 6 range, with a peak of 8.7 during the summer of 1987.

As competition increased with the move-in of Atlantic, Iowa's KOMJ 103.7 in March 1988, KEFM brought in a consultant. This finally resulted in a change for the morning show.

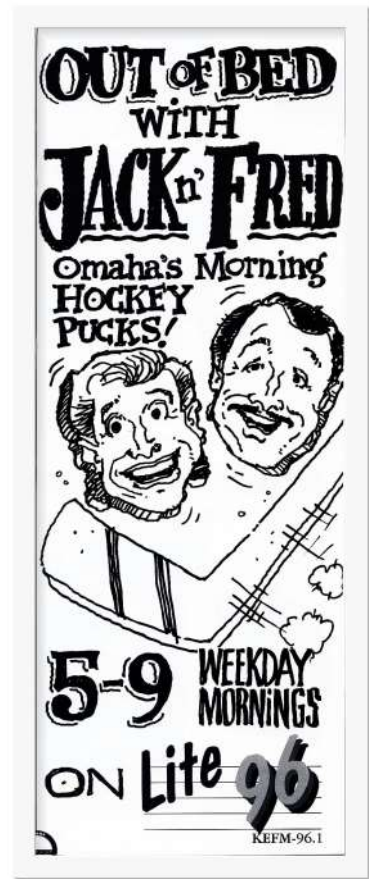
KEFM hired Jack Swanda and Fred Brooks from their successful morning show on KGOR 99.9 in August 1989 to replace Dave Wingert in mornings. Swanda said he and Brooks were approached by KEFM with an attractive offer, adding, "The people at KGOR didn't make any sort of a counteroffer or anything to have us stay." (*OWH* Aug 5, 1989)

Swanda and Brooks aired their last show on KGOR on July 26, 1989 and began on KEFM nearly a month later, on August 21. "Outta Bed with Jack and Fred" aired on KEFM from 5 a.m to 9 a.m.

Wingert said he told KEFM management three months earlier he had begun to look around the country for other options. "The station started going in a different direction the last year, with a consultant, and it's not necessarily reflecting the philosophies that I have about radio," he said. Wingert described the new direction as more music-intensive and mainstream (*OWH* Aug 5, 1989).

Wingert found work in Des Moines that December where he and Melanie Workhoven started an afternoon talk show at WHO 1040. Melanie was the daughter of long-time WOW announcer Merrill Workhoven. The duo remained at WHO until bumped by the station's addition of Rush Limbaugh.

As the 1980s drew to a close, KEFM increased its audience with shares going into the 7 range and occasional forays in the low 8s. After a rough start, KEFM ended the decade in a respectable fourth position in the market.



1988 KEFM morning duo,
Jack Swanda and
Fred Brooks.

98.5 KQKQ Council Bluffs

1980 was a pivotal year for KQKQ 98.5. The management upgraded its signal and flipped from Album Oriented Rock to Top 40, moves that made the station a major force in the market.

KQKQ improved its signal by relocating its transmitter site from the South Omaha Bridge Road to the old KMTV tower near downtown Omaha at 2615 Farnam Street. The move was completed in March 1980. At 510 feet, the overall height gain from the old AM tower in the Missouri River valley was nearly 400 feet.

KQKQ then received permission to go to the maximum allowed FM power of 100 thousand watts in September. Why the FCC permitted this high power move came into question over the next eight years as the downtown transmitter site created interference and blanketing problems.

KQKQ's Progressive Rock format, going by the label *KQ-98*, made gains in the younger listeners demo. But it was predominantly male and sponsors wanted females. Program director Paxton West stubbornly clung to the "boyfriend theory," that while women may have the purchasing power, their boyfriends rule the radio and the women will come around to accept it. The male demographic was already sliced thin as KEZO 92.3 with its *Z-92* album rock also was strong in that group.

Enter a consultant by the name of Bill Cunningham. Brought in to work with Paxton West, Cunningham came from Resultants, a radio consultancy he headed in Hallandale, Florida. The firm boasted in ads that it "ties sales, programming, and promotions together...while at the same time creating promotional awareness and image of the first magnitude." The ad continues, "Have never failed to substantially increase billing by as much as 200-300% in some cases." (*Broadcasting*, Oct 1 1979).

The road to *Sweet 98* was begun. More and more pop tunes were added to the playlist, and one by one, staff members were being replaced by higher-profile personalities.

When KEFM 96.1 flipped from automated Country to live Top 40 in February 1980, Cunningham followed within days by dropping KQKQ's Album Oriented Rock for Top 40, clearly targeting the 12 to 49-year-old contemporary music audience.

Cunningham's credentials included successfully managing WHYI FM Fort Lauderdale and, with the help of Bill Tanner and the legendary Buzz Bennett, flipping it to rock making it a landmark FM Top 40, one of the first in the country.

Another plus for Cunningham was that he was familiar with the Omaha market. He gained experience in radio sales along with his brother Darby at Don Burden's KOIL in the early 1970s. Darby was easygoing, while Bill was energetic and aggressive. The brothers had left Omaha for Southern Florida in the mid-1970s.

In June 1980 Bill Cunningham moved back to Omaha taking over KLNG and KQKQ as the executive VP of Mitchell Broadcasting Company. After ten years with Mitchell Broadcasting, KLNG general manager and DJ Paxton West was out, as was KQKQ General Manager Joe Medakovich.

Cunningham then made it clear in the staff meetings that his goal was to make KQKQ in the 1980s what KOIL was in the 1960s. Morning newsman Dick Warner recalls, "You must understand, this was one bold statement. The KOIL legend was very, very strong around here... the fact that this guy would even dare articulate such a preposterous goal meant if nothing else he had some major guts."



*KQKQ/CLNG
General Manager
Bill Cunningham*

The "KOIL Legend" was authentic, though at this time the station was a shell of its old self, at best an Adult Contemporary music and personality station still trying to retain the teens. It had undergone a forced three-month blackout in 1977 never regaining its status. The old KOIL audience was ripe for the picking, particularly in this age of FM dominance.

Warner was one of two staff survivors from the KQ-98 format. He was there for the format flip, saying, "Officially, Sweet 98 was launched on a hot summer morning in August of 1980 in the northwest corner room of the second floor of that rather interesting brick building at 36th and Broadway in Council Bluffs."



1982 KQKQ "Sweet 98" logo.

Warner was the morning newsman and straight man to morning personality Mark Evans. He would deliver "the news in 98 seconds on Sweet 98." Warner recalls the rest of the lineup as Greg MacArthur middays, Doc Winston afternoon drive, and Jammin' Jay Taylor evenings.

The morning show gained the name "Breakfast Flakes" quite by accident. It was part of a live ad-lib promo by overnight personality Brooklyn Dave. Evans heard it on the way to work and started using it. The name stuck.

Cunningham's high-profile promotions soon appeared. The first was a three-month contest with a 150 thousand-dollar cash giveaway, the biggest portion to be awarded on the conclusion of the spring 1981 ratings sweep.

That conclusion resulted in a massive traffic tie-up at 72nd and Dodge Streets, the proverbial and busy crossroads of the city at the time. In the Crossroads Mall parking lot, cars that displayed a KQKQ bumper sticker were routed to pass by a certain point to be counted one by one. Those going through at certain pre-determined count levels would be prize winners. Top prizes were a car the first day, and \$98-thousand the second day.

This catapulted KQKQ 98.5 from seventh to third in the market, displacing AM Top 40 WOW which had occupied that position just a year earlier.

Another high-jackpot promotion followed that October. A myriad of sponsor-provided prizes totaling 100 thousand dollars went to various, and numerous, winners in a rather complex contest involving a "Bingo-if-cate," a car bumper sticker. When spotted and stopped by the station's "Buick Sentry Roving Riviera," the driver was to correctly answer sponsor-related questions for a random prize. There was also a phase two, the bumper sticker peel-off being a ticket to the "World's Largest Free Bingo Game" which would be announced with up to eight hours notice. The official rules carefully mentioned that the morning show also aired on sister AM station KLNG 1560 in the event "you do not have an FM radio in your automobile..."

If KOIL's Don Burden was the feared tyrant so many made him out to be, Bill Cunningham was even more so. Dick Warner recalls, "Cunningham had his fingers in every aspect of the station... no detail was too small for Bill; he was the ultimate micro manager. Strictly speaking, Mark Evans was the program director, but this was a title only."

Warner says when he and Evans were doing the morning show, "...we had an audience of just one in mind... how will Bill like this? And that Hotline would ring a half dozen times each show with suggestions and criticisms. After the show, we would get on the phone and have a debriefing with Bill."

Warner did a weekend Nostalgia Rock Show for ten years starting in 1980, but it wasn't all his. Says Warner, "The Nostalgia Rock playlist was song-by-song dictated by Bill. I never understood why some songs, like 'Cherish,' didn't make the cut, but I didn't ask. Mr. Cunningham generally wasn't much interested in diverse opinions... his word was the law."

Warner concludes,” Bill had intimidation down to an art form; I don't know that we ever had a conversation, it was mostly him talking and us listening.”

In 1981 Cunningham developed what may have been his most unique promotion--the Supermouth contest. Teens were invited to try out to be DJ for a year. Besides going on the air, the prize included a thousand-dollar wardrobe and the use of a customized Pontiac Firebird.



KQKQ's Hot Scott O'Hanlon.

The first year's turnout was more than expected; over two thousand teens showed up, over half of them female. Six were chosen each day to audition. Contestants had 30 seconds to give personal information and state why they wanted to be Supermouth, then introduce a record. The finals were aired in a half-hour show in February 1982.

Long before *American Idol* arrived with a similar format, the Supermouth contest proved to be such a success that it ran for seven seasons. The most successful winner was "Hot Scott" O Hanlon who eventually became KQKQ's evening jock for much of the 1980s.

The ubiquitous Dave Wingert returned to Omaha following a 67-day stint at KMOX St. Louis and took over KQKQ's morning show in March 1982. Wingert refused to be called a "Breakfast Flake," instead identifying himself as "Dave Wingert and the Breakfast Flakes." Wingert also did some work at KMTV at the time teaming with Joni Baillon on a midday show called "Good Day."

Spring 1983 ratings showed more growth for KQKQ (*OWH* July 26, 1983). KQKQ management was ecstatic with a 17 share. In the teens 12-17 demo the share was 54.9, a teen listenership that KOIL 1290 once enjoyed in its day. Cunningham's ambition to be what KOIL was in the 1960s was realized in just three years.

The morning show was simulcast on KLNG 1560, but the AM signal was of no help. KQKQ's AM sister dropped to a .6.

Dave Wingert left for a more mature contemporary outlet following the spring 1983 ratings release in June, crossing the street to KGOR, a Top 40 station that was less teen-oriented.

An annual KOIL tradition that later moved to WOW was taken over by KQKQ in the summer of 1984. It was the July 4th celebration at Rosenblatt Stadium, an iconic event each year that concluded with the city's largest fireworks display.

KQKQ teamed with Mutual of Omaha, the latter picking up most of the tab for the show, estimated at 90 thousand dollars. The fireworks were put on by Grucci, the company responsible for the fireworks shows at President Reagan's inauguration in 1980, the 1982 Worlds Fair in Knoxville, and the previous year's Brooklyn Bridge Centennial celebration in New York. (The Rosenblatt July 4th tradition returned to WOW in the early 1990s when that station became the market leader)

The *Sweet 98* FM studios were in a dilapidated building at 3600 Broadway in Council Bluffs. Formerly an apartment building next to what was rumored to have once been a brothel, the Council Bluffs building was condemned on several occasions in the early 1980s and razed shortly after the station's move to downtown Omaha in 1987.

KQKQ by 1985 had enough cash to buy showcase studios, another lesson Cunningham learned from Don Burden. In a five-year purchase agreement, Mitchell Broadcasting bought the restored LeDioyt Landmark building at 10th and Farnam Streets in the Old Market. The area had just been declared a local historic district in January. This would be the new home of KQKQ 98.5. It was a giant step up.

The three-story brick building at 1001 Farnam Street was built in 1881. At the age of 100, it went through a million-dollar restoration when Glenn LeDioyt bought it in 1981. Using tax credits, the restoration saved the historic building, the credits continuing for the five years of KQKQ's purchase agreement.

James Conley was the architect for the new space. Doing the interior design were Linda Conley and Mitchell's wife, Mary, who was a VP for Mitchell Broadcasting handling promotion and public relations. Mary Mitchell's background as a retail fashion illustrator was instrumental in keeping the building's historic appeal intact while installing modern studios.

The *Sweet 98* studios were built in a storefront window looking out on to Farnam at the 10th Street corner. In contrast to the building's historic features, the window-front FM studio was high-tech with flashing lights and dancing meters, three announcer consoles, and a spacesuit that hung in a corner that no one admits to having ever worn.

Jeff Larsen, whose air name on overnights was “Woodrow,” recalls the new digs, “Top of the line everything in this new studio...we each got EQ (audio equalizer) cards that you dropped in the board during your shift to customize your mic EQ. Top of the line Denon CD Cart decks as ALL music would now be digital....and we would go up and down on a hydraulic lift to the various levels of audio equipment as people walking or driving by 10th and Farnam streets could see us through the window.

“No bullet proof glass there either much to our chagrin. Originally we were supposed to wear these silver ‘space suits’ while on air....we all pretty much shot that one down day one.”



The new KQKQ window-front studio at 10th and Farnam Streets.

The DJ faced the street while standing before the board on the adjustable hydraulic lift platform. They could talk directly to people on the street through outside speakers and microphones.

The move into the new facilities was in August 1985, exactly five years after *Sweet 98* was born. Sister AM KLNG 1560 by now facing the sales block was left behind at 3600 West Broadway in Council Bluffs.

KQKQ and the new soon-to-be KKAR 1180 AM took up the second floor and part of the first floor of the LeDioyt building. A law office and the LeDioyt Land Company occupied the upper floors. Bare brick walls and the central atrium were the features for KQKQ's reception area, surrounded by sales and programming offices, and a production studio.

The “Breakfast Flakes” talent at this time included Mark Evans, Ryno Ryan, Capt. Tony Wike, and later from 1988 to 1992, Steve Lundy. Mark Evans left in summer 1987 for WKXX Birmingham, Alabama, and was replaced as Operations Manager by Drew Bently. Dick Warner hosted Nostalgia Rock on weekends until 1990.



KQKQ personality lineup promo poster (Courtesy: Jeff Larsen).

his using station merchandise trade-outs for personal use and drug and alcohol abuse. Shortly afterward, John Mitchell set up a requisition system that called for his personal approval on each station trade out.

Bill Cunningham in essence was Sweet 98 according to Dick Warner. So imagine everyone’s surprise in 1986 when learning Bill Cunningham was abruptly gone.

Warner remembers arriving at the station one Sunday morning and seeing a memo from owner John Mitchell stating that “... Bill Cunningham was not allowed on the premises and should he try and gain access to the building call the police.”

“The official announcement was simply that he was no longer associated with Mitchell Broadcasting,” according to Warner.

Internal speculation, according to at least three observers, pointed to mismanagement issues, including

With Bill Cunningham's sudden departure, General Sales Manager John Ginzkey was placed in charge of station manager, sales, and administration, and Mark Evens, station manager of programming.

By fall, John Mitchell felt the management structure was too cumbersome and brought in Ralph Beaudin as general manager to take over most of Ginzkey's and Evans' responsibilities.

Beaudin was an Omaha native who worked in sales at KOIL and KOWH from 1955 to 1957. Beaudin left the market for successful management positions before becoming the GM of WLS Chicago during its formative Top 40 years of 1960 to 1966. From there he became VP of ABC Radio and was the visionary behind the network splitting into four separate factions. Now back in Omaha, he would work out his pre-retirement years with John Mitchell's stations.

One of the first tasks facing Beaudin was fixing the signal problem. Since 1980 KQKQ 98.5's signals emanated from the old downtown KMTV tower at 510 feet running 100 thousand watts. For several years its high-powered signal crept into nearby electronic equipment, from telephones to PA systems, annoying residents and workers primarily within a two-mile radius. Some radios in the area were overpowered and had problems picking up other stations.

KQKQ was operating properly and legally, but it was clear the transmitter would have to be moved to a tower away from the downtown. It wasn't until 1987's FCC Docket 80-90 that management finally got serious about moving the transmitter site. Docket 80-90 required Class C stations to be broadcasting from at least 985 feet or risk being re-classified to a lower grade.

KQKQ management applied to build a new thousand-foot tower elsewhere but ran into FAA regulations overriding their requests as a danger to aircraft. It was finally decided that KQKQ would join the other FMs at the television antenna farm in north Omaha. In January 1988 KQKQ was permitted to move its transmitter and antenna from the old KMTV tower downtown to KMTV's tall tower at 72nd and Crown Point.

In November 1988 KQKQ's main competitor, KGOR 99.9, inexplicably flipped from Top 40 to Oldies. The competition between the two stations had been keen, even with KGOR's relatively conservative management. KQKQ had already responded to the competition by cutting its three-minute stop sets from four per hour to three per hour at the request of consultant Alan Burns.



Late 1980's KQKQ "Sweet 98" logo.

In the following winter rating sweeps *Sweet 98* emerged with a new high, a 17 share. General Manager Ralph Beaudin attributed it to his staff and station promotions but admitted KGOR's change was helpful.

KQKQ ended the decade tops with teens and second only to KEZO in the adult 18 to 49 group. *Sweet 98* was overwhelmingly Omaha's contemporary music leader, just as Bill Cunningham envisioned when he took the reins in 1980.

99.9 KGOR Omaha

KGOR at the start of the decade was playing Top 40 music under the *Rock 100* moniker. Even though automated except for morning drive, the station siphoned off enough listeners from AM Top 40 stations KOIL and WOW to nudge KOIL towards an Adult Contemporary format and WOW to Country.



The KGOR *Rock 100* automation equipment, racks of tape decks and carousels, were co-located with KFAB at 5010 Underwood in the Dundee neighborhood. Its small production studio was shared with the AM side during drive times until a live morning show was added.



KGOR automation system of tape cartridge carousels and open-reel tape players at 5010 Underwood, co-located with KFAB 1110. (Courtesy: Norm Gruenke.)

The morning show was live, run by George Woods starting in 1981. He was replaced by Dave Wingert in June 1983 who had just left KQKQ seeking a more mature contemporary audience. Wingert was so unhappy at KQKQ that he applied for a sales job at KGOR. General Manager Lyell Bremser instead hired him as KGOR's new morning man.

(It happened that way earlier in his career. Wingert was applying for a sales position at KCMO Kansas City in the mid-1970s when Steve Shannon, who had just moved from co-owned WOW Omaha, told him that WOW was looking for a morning personality.

(That was when Wingert replaced Jimmy O' Neill at WOW and made his start in the Omaha market. Wingert, indeed well-qualified for radio sales, found it to be a good foundation for his radio show biz aspirations.)

By this time KGOR's *Rock 100* identifier had been jettisoned in favor of a more adult Top 40 music format, though still in direct competition with KQKQ 98.5. The positioning difference was small. While KQKQ ruled the teen audience, KGOR targeted listeners in their 20s who grew up on rock but mellowed a bit as they matured.

Wingert stayed until May 1986. He was replaced by Jack Swanda who had been anchoring morning news on KGOR since 1982. Fred Brooks took over as morning news anchor and midday personality but quickly became morning co-host with Swanda, forming the *Jack and Fred Show*.

KGOR was alive and well with its contemporary format. It was third in the coveted 25-54-year-old category, and number one with women in that group. Then, management inexplicably flipped to "Classic Gold" on November 21, 1988. Current rock was replaced by hits from the 1960s into the early 1980s. It was an Oldies format in direct competition with KOIL 1290.

KGOR GM Ken Headrick said research showed a great desire for Oldies and that the audience wasn't being served. In reality, KOIL was succeeding nicely with its Oldies format, but it was on AM, and FM was the future. Headrick admitted, "AM is a different breed of cat than FM. Our study was basically FM; that's where the void was."

Even though KOIL was broadcasting in AM stereo, a relatively new technology for AM radio that never took hold, the KGOR announcement was immediately seen by KOIL PD Terry Mason as the death knell for his Oldies format.

Local ad agencies expressed surprise over the KGOR format flip, calling it a gutsy move. Some even expected another FM to change formats to fill the Top 40 position left behind by KGOR.

KGOR lost its morning team in 1989 when Jack Swanda and Fred Brooks accepted an offer from KEFM 96.1, *Lite 96* to replace Dave Wingert (again). Swanda said there was no counteroffer from KGOR. Their last show on KGOR was July 26. (OWH August 5, 1989)



KGOR ended the decade ranked No. 6 in the market.

103.7 KOMJ KXKT Atlantic

Omaha's first "rimshot," or "move-in" station arrived in 1988. It was the brainchild of Bob Dean and his engineer associate Lee Wheeler who works and resides in Kansas City. And, it turned out to be a difficult venture.

Move-ins wanting to become identified with the nearby large market could only move the transmitter midway to the larger market as the community of license had to be kept within the primary signal. Even with the maximum 100-thousand watts power, the target audiences could be too close to the primary contour's edge for optimum reception. Problems could result, especially in the shadowed areas.

Dean came up through the broadcasting ranks. He began as the evening personality at KOIL 1290 in the late 1970s, then went to WHB Kansas City ahead of the KOIL blackout. From air work, he went into sales, and eventually into radio management at KSTR Grand Junction, Colorado. Dean returned to Omaha as manager of KESY AM and FM in 1980.

Dean began seeking a station of his own in his home market where he got his start. He found an opportunity by purchasing a small station in a not-too-distant town and upgrading its signal to cover Omaha. The station would then become a de-facto Omaha station.

Such move-ins were made possible by FCC Docket 80-90 coming into existence in 1987. Docket 80-90 was designed to increase the number of stations on the FM band. It created nearly 700 new lower-power allotments, but to do so it called for Class C stations currently on the air to upgrade to their full criteria or be reclassified to a lower class.

As many stations went through the required upgrades, some outlying stations were found to be viable candidates for reaching a larger, nearby market with the upgrade, provided its tower could be relocated somewhere between the two markets. This would make them "rimshot" stations for the larger market.

Easing the way to make the changes, Docket 80-90 broke down the rules so that changes in class, channel, and community of license were quick applications with no threat of a cross filing.

Dean and Wheeler found that KJAN FM 103.7 in Atlantic, Iowa, about 60 miles east of Omaha, would fill the bill. It was 100 thousand watts but on a short tower belonging to its sister AM station on 1220. It needed to go up to about 1000 feet to keep its Class C license. The Dean and Wheeler idea was to build the tall tower midway to Omaha where the station's primary signal contour would cover both Atlantic and Omaha.

KJAN FM started up in 1966 on top of the sister AM station's tower at 115 feet. When Dean and associates found it, KJAN FM was 100 thousand watts but at only 400 feet.

KJAN FM was simply duplicating the KJAN AM 1220 programming. Even so, the AM/FM combo as recently as 1985 was worth at least 1.1 million dollars. That was the price then paid to Nishna Valley Broadcasting by new owners John Carl, Robert Seldon, Brent Slay, and Robert Bebensee. The group also paid 80 percent of receivables at the closing in March that year.

Dean and Wheeler took note in 1987. To move the signal westward, a tall tower midway to Omaha would be required, and a Nebraska station near Lincoln would have to be moved to another dial position. That short-spacing problem was with KBJB 103.9 in Crete.



Robert Greenlee (1990 photo)

The Dean team began a series of coordinated ideas and negotiations. Wheeler did much of the legal paperwork and design to work out a way to move KJAN FM Atlantic into Omaha. Dean worked on financing, drawing up a business plan to take to banks.

One of Dean's mentors was Bob Greenlee of Boulder, Colorado. Greenlee gained much of his wealth by building up his KBCO AM/FM combo in the Boulder-Denver market that would later sell for over \$27 million in October 1987. Rather than Dean seeking investment bankers, Greenlee offered to fund Dean's venture and become his financial backer.

To avoid a conflict of interest, Dean resigned as vice president and general manager of KESY 1420 and KESY 104.5 in March 1987.

His purchase of all the outstanding stock in KJAN AM and FM cost 2.25 million dollars and was completed by June 30. Dean's deal was to keep only the FM and sell KJAN AM back to the principals for 425 thousand dollars.

Meanwhile, Dean worked with the owners of KBVB 103.9 in Crete, Nebraska (the calls changed from KBJB by this time) to move their station to another frequency. KBVB had just been purchased by Roger Agnew of Star City Broadcasting for 350 thousand dollars in November 1987. It ran only three-thousand watts at 226 feet but was seeking to upgrade to become a Lincoln move-in.

The path for KJAN FM to move westward was cleared by the end of October 1987. With the Dean team doing much of the research and paperwork, Agnew was shown that a move to 104.1 would work with a transmitter site change that would allow primary signal coverage over Lincoln. After applying for the rulemaking, the FCC substituted 104.1 for 103.9 on its FM table, thus allowing KBVB to move to the new frequency.

(KBVB's upgrade to 100 thousand watts Class C with a new transmitter site just SE of Hallam came in May 1988. The calls were changed to KKNB that October and the Crete station became Lincoln's second move-in, the first having been KTGL 102.9, ex- KWBE FM Beatrice, a year earlier.)

Dean had been searching rural western Pottawattamie County for a new tower site for 103.7. Numerous farmers in the area expressed interest. Despite an unsightly tall tower rising on a rural farm field and its sometimes annoying blinking lights at night, the income from leasing the property was too great to ignore. After a series of meetings with local farm-folk, a farm owned by Loren Luth about 11 miles east of Underwood near the small town of Hancock was selected.

KJAN FM was granted permission to change its transmitter site to an 1100-foot tower on Luth's farm in August 1987. The transmitter and tower were ordered and the rural power company was persuaded to construct a 220-volt line up to the site.

The FM antenna was factory-tested for pattern anomalies with a plan to point the best lobe directly at Omaha. A two-degree beam tilt was also incorporated to "look downward" toward Omaha from its higher elevation beyond the edge of Iowa's bluffs.

In August KJAN AM 1220 was filed for transfer back to the Atlantic businessmen, Wireless Communication Corporation, for the agreed-upon 425 thousand dollars. The sale reduced the final net cost for the FM to 1.825 million. The deal closed some months later. In the interim before the closing KJAN AM provided a nice cash flow to assist Dean's new FM venture.

Around the time the 103.7 FM move-in plans were coming to terms, Dean found KOIL 1290 for sale and agreed to buy his old AM station to make his Omaha operation an AM/FM combo. The price for KOIL was 900 thousand dollars, now bringing Dean's total payout at the time to 2.725 million. It was the dream of many a DJ. Bob Dean returned to own Don Burden's legendary station in just 12 years after being its evening personality.

The deal on KJAN AM/FM closed in November 1987. The KOIL deal closed in February 1988. In the weeks leading up to the closings, new studios for both stations were being built in a renovated historic building adjacent to downtown's Old Market district, at 1108 Douglas Street.

The 1891 building was owned and partially occupied by the Alvine Engineering architect firm. The two-story structure on the north side of Leahy Mall had been renovated in 1986. The AM and FM stations would occupy the first floor.

The new station moniker was planned to be *Magic*. The calls KMGK were currently unavailable, belonging to a station in Des Moines, Iowa. The next best choice was KOMJ, sought and granted in March 1988 for "*Omaha's Majic 103.7*."

There was still time before the launch date to wait for the KMGK calls to become available, but the publication deadline for Omaha's new phone books was approaching and Dean believed it important that the stations be listed. Frustratingly, the KMGK set became available just before the KOMJ launch but after Ma Bell went to press with the new books.

The final steps were to fulfill smaller FCC requirements. The FM station's public file was required to be kept in Atlantic. A lawyer's office was found for safe storage and public access.

Community of license listeners were also required toll-free access to the station, so a WATS phone number was set up to the Omaha offices and studio.

To make a move-in station sound like it belongs in the major market, the only mention of Atlantic was in the hourly legal station identifications. The legal ID required the community of license to immediately follow the call letters at or near the top of every hour. Identifying as "KOMJ Atlantic, Iowa" might confuse the Omaha image.

Programmers had found ways to bury the legal ID so that the smaller market mention would be less noticeable. The ID could be carefully inserted into regular DJ patter. More common were pre-produced sweeps involving multiple IDs, sneaking in the legal ID along with an emphasized major market image ID. KOMJ initially inserted its "KOMJ Atlantic" legal ID as part of the weather forecast introduction at:50, allowing a music sweep across the traditional top-of-the hour ID time.

With the new transmitter site now operating, KJAN-FM was ready to launch as new-to-Omaha. An opening teaser campaign was begun by airing a mysterious computer-generated voice that counted down numbers starting at 86 thousand. A low-key legal ID was aired hourly. The monotonous countdown lasting for days piqued curiosity in the market.

The countdown was set so that “zero” would be reached Thursday morning March 31, 1988, in the 7 a.m. hour. ARB rating diaries began on Thursdays making it a key day for stunt programming, and the 7:00 morning hour is a peak listening time. The countdown had to be adjusted once during the overnight hours so that it would hit zero in the targeted hour.

On zero, a pause, then a production piece introduced *Majic 103.7*, followed by the launching of 2000 songs in a row with no DJs. The first 45 minutes of songs were hits and oldies with the word “Magic” in the title or lyrics.



The format was Oldies-based Adult Contemporary, a mix of pop and rock from the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. The most direct competition was *Light 96* KEFM 96.1 where management soon felt threatened enough to bring in a consultant to tighten its hold on the market.

Regular KOMJ programming with live DJs began at the end of the 2000 records sweep the following Wednesday. The Real Don Glaze was moved over from KOIL to do mornings.

The morning newsman was Mike Metz, coming over from KESY. Metz was an easy-going, seasoned broadcaster whose career went as far back as the early 1960s reporting news at Denver’s KIMN. He was well known in the Omaha market from his KLNG 1490 talk show days.

But KOMJ’s new, untested signal proved to be a problem. Though it looked good on paper, the signal was spotty in the metro. It was just on the edge, where it would sound decent once tuned in, but not strong enough to stop a bandscan on some car receivers.

Additionally, penetration problems persisted in downtown office buildings. It later proved disturbing that a disproportionately high number of contest winners came from Carter Lake, Iowa, creating a perception that the signal stopped at the state line.

Also frustrating was finding a call letters misunderstanding, with mail being addressed to KMOJ, perhaps confusion stemming from the well-established KMTV call letters in the market.

Adding to the coverage problems was the cranky new transmitter that frequently overloaded breaker switches that could only be reset at the site, a 35-minute drive from downtown Omaha. Sometimes the transmitter would shut down but the exciter would remain on, allowing programming to still be audible on the studio monitors leaving the DJ unaware that the big signal was off. This was truly frustrating, as even with coverage problems that existed, the low power exciter could still be heard at the studio.

Complicating the signal issue was that the station engineer Dick Dennis was hired for only part time for both KOMJ and KOIL. This resulted in a backlog of studio work, and often he wasn't present and couldn't be located during emergency down times.



*KOMJ's Don Glaze
(Courtesy: Maddy West)*

Despite the signal problems, programming went ahead with cash promotions and DJ stunts, primarily those of morning man Don Glaze. Glaze was a driven personality though at times out of control. Without permission one morning, he barricaded himself in the studio playing only Christmas songs, an old stunt that this time only created strife among the sales staff.

Glaze's other stunts were successful. That spring he sat in a tub of Jell-O, suspended by a crane at the corner of 72nd and Dodge to raise money for Easter Seals. Later, during a summer drought in 1988, Glaze sat atop a billboard at 72nd and Dodge Streets vowing not to come down until Omaha got rain. He began his "drought sit-in" June 22nd, and lived atop his 52-foot perch for nearly a week, descending only for nature breaks, until finally seeing lightning on the horizon on June 28th.

In August, the station went through a selection process searching for a couple who would agree to be married on the air. On September 3rd the winning couple was married in the KOMJ studios on Glaze's morning show during a ceremony officiated by Douglas County Judge Joseph Troia. The couple was then sent to Kansas City for a honeymoon, with KOMJ picking up all expenses.

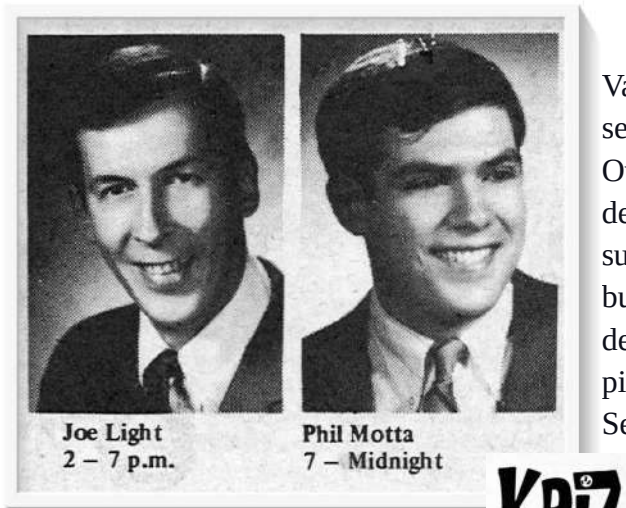
The ratings arrived in October with KOMJ at a disappointing 3.5 share. A consultant was brought in, Cal Casey, from Dallas. Casey was experienced with contemporary music formats. He worked at TM Communications of Dallas consulting and directing its Top 40 and Stereo Rock formats. He also designed a personality Top 40 format for the U.S. Information Agency's *Voice of America* worldwide network just a few years earlier.

KOMJ's format was refined in April 1989, adjusted to include more current hits by reversing its ratio of oldies to current material. KOMJ became more of a hit music station in competition with KQKQ 98.5. The station achieved a 3.9 in the summer of 1989, but couldn't sustain it, dropping to 2.7 that fall. The signal problems took the majority of the blame, with programming changes taking the rest.

Dean was a seasoned broadcaster who went into ownership, likely the last of his kind to do so in Omaha. Banks and corporations were beginning to taking over the broadcasting biz. Though he started on the programming side, Dean now paid attention to the investment value of radio stations as well.

Acting like investors, Bob Dean and Bob Greenlee soon entered an agreement to sell KOMJ and KOIL while entering another agreement to buy a Des Moines station.

By this time the license assignment for KOMJ and KOIL had been switched from Bob Dean to Robert Greenlee for 180 thousand dollars in a deal filed in June 1988. Dean and Greenlee were partners, but Greenlee was President of Valley Broadcasting with a controlling interest of 70 percent according to 1991 FCC filings. Greenlee stayed in Colorado while Dean ran the stations.



As the decade drew to a close, Valley Broadcasting filed in July 1989 to sell KOMJ and KOIL to newly formed Ovation Broadcasting in Phoenix,. The deal was for \$5.575 million. It was a tidy sum over the initial price of the stations, but any profit would be diminished by debts the struggling stations were likely piling up. The FCC approved the deal in September.

Joe Light and Phil Motta, colleagues at KRIZ Phoenix before forming Ovation Broadcasting. (1969 photos, Courtesy: C. J. Brown.)

Ovation Broadcasting was headed by former KRIZ Phoenix DJ Phil Motta. The big surprise was that Joe Light was on board at Ovation, he and Motta having met while both were working at Top 40 KRIZ 1230 in Phoenix. Joe Light was a major air personality at KOIL in the 1960s. Since then he worked at KIQQ Los Angeles for two stints and also spent five years at KCBQ San Diego.

Light was tapped to return to Omaha to manage the stations and may have even been an influence in the company selecting the Omaha operation for purchase.

In the interim waiting for the closing, he and Motta came to Omaha more than once to tour the facilities. Light spent time renewing his acquaintances with Bob Dean and Operations Manager Carl Mann, the three having worked together at KOIL in earlier years.

Despite the seemingly lucrative offer, Dean soon soured on the sale and began setting up subtle roadblocks. In November the deal was canceled and Dean celebrated with the staff. He and Greenlee had decided to buy, not sell.

That same month Valley Broadcasting agreed to buy KDMG in Pella, Iowa for 1.75 million. That station's 100 thousand watts could already cover the Des Moines market from its 745-foot tower but was in the process of upgrading to Class C and had just received approval for constructing a 1043 foot tower.

The purchase was approved by the FCC in February 1990. But this deal also failed to close. KOMJ ended the decade on its own, still struggling with its signal and ratings problems.

A quick postscript regarding Omaha move-ins: KFMQ 101.9 Lincoln became Omaha's second move-in station just months after KOMJ. It had upgraded in July 1988 to a 1200-foot tower near Eagle, Nebraska, placing a good primary signal over Omaha.

With that, the Lincoln management stated intentions "to make some inroads into Omaha." But it remained a Lincoln station making little, if any, effort to identify with Omaha until finally building studios in the market in 1992.

104.5 KESY-FM Omaha

Owners Centennial Communications had just righted its sinking ship on 104.5 FM as the new decade commenced. KESY 104.5 had taken over a Beautiful Music format abandoned by two other stations in 1978 and its ratings rebounded into the high single digits the following year. It may have been a hollow victory as Beautiful Music was a difficult sell and on its way out, but any numbers are good numbers after climbing back from the 1.8 rating the station had before the format switch.

Local live personalities were brought in to assist the automation and its reels of music tapes. The station was still affiliated with CBS.

At 31-thousand watts, KESY FM aired from a small tower atop the DEA Manor Building building at 122 South 39th Street not far from the studios. The offices and studios of the two stations were moved across Dodge Street in the early 1980s from 102 North 48th Street to the old Donald Jack Photo Studios at 4807 Dodge Street. (As a side note, Donald Jack in the 1970s was the professional photographer of choice for Don Burden's KOIL, shooting promo pictures plus the staff portraits that adorned the lobby.)

Lee Barron and his Big Band show departed in April 1980. KESY FM replaced it with a Saturday night show hosted by Gene Piatt. The "Sweet and Swing Sounds of the Big Bands" ran 90 minutes, but enthusiastic audience response soon brought it up to three hours.

Piatt was supplemented by record collector Ed Jones, owner of Jonesy's Diner, who added personal and historical notes of interest to the show. Piatt kept the show for about two years.

But the struggles continued. Sponsor support for background music formats was dwindling and the sister AM station on 1420 was becoming dead weight. In November 1981 the stations filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

Just weeks later Centennial Communications was sued for copyright infringements for playing copyrighted music without paying the required fee. President and CEO Ray Hambric freely admitted the amount was 20 thousand dollars and one of the reasons the company was in Chapter 11.

Centennial hired Attorney Clay Rogers to represent the stations in bankruptcy court. Rogers had a broadcasting background having worked in radio sales at KOIL 1290 during the early 1970s when he was Don Burden's son-in-law.

The stations filed for reorganization. For \$150-thousand consideration the stations were transferred to the Hambrics and other individuals, who presumably assumed debts as well. The reorganization filing was in September 1981 and granted Feb 5th the following year..

General Manager Gary Clouse worked to purchase KOOO 1420 as early as December 1981 but with little success.

By July 1982 the AM and FM were sold together for three million dollars to a newly formed group that included the wife of a former owner of the stations, Sherry Sanders. It was her husband Mack Sanders who had originally sold the stations to the Hambrics of Centennial Broadcasting for \$1.2 million in 1978. Ray Hambric kept 40 percent interest in the new group. The purchase was approved by the bankruptcy court and completed in May 1983.

By this time Bob Dean had returned to Omaha as GM of the stations. Dean gained experience over the years starting out as the evening DJ at Don Burden's KOIL 1290 in the 1970s. He left just before KOIL's FCC-mandated blackout and moved to WHB Kansas City, gaining sales experience while in that market, then later joined the Hambrics at KSTR Grand Junction, Colorado.

Dean's program directors at the time were Eddie Hudson for the AM and Bob Palmer for the FM.

Ratings continued to trend downward. In July 1983 the spring book showed KESY FM at 5.2 down from a 10.1 peak six rating periods earlier.

Lee Barron returned with his Big Band shows in October 1983. Barron was a bandleader for 30 years starting in 1936 touring ballrooms in the region. His 90-minute shows ran Saturday evenings on KESY FM at 5:30 and 10:30, and on KESY AM at 2:30 Saturday afternoons.

The AM station continued to be an albatross around the FM's neck. KOOO 1420 was ninth out of twelve stations in the overall market share. Bob Dean said KOOO frequently lost more than KESY's profit. In the four years he has been at the stations, Dean said KOOO has broken even only one month.

KESY FM was sold again in 1984 to MediaOmaha for \$2.2 million, plus a \$300-thousand non-compete clause. The buyer was Jayne Woods, wife of Frank Woods of Sunrise Broadcasting, and John Biddinger, who headed an investment capital firm in Indianapolis.

The buyer was also required to buy KOOO 1420 for 400 thousand dollars if it wasn't sold by the FM approval date plus 15 days. The sale was granted March 12, and the KOOO 1420 sale followed as per the agreement on April 12, bringing the cost of the two stations to \$2.6 million.

KESY FM freed itself of its AM sister for a while in June, 1984. KOOO 1420 was sold off and became KROM 1420, only to default on its agreement and revert to the original owners nearly 18 months later, on November 22, 1985. Bob Dean and his Operations Manager Bob Palmer were saddled with the AM station once again.

The stations changed hands again in 1986, though still in the domain of Frank Woods. In April, SunGroup Inc., a Nashville-based firm that owns five radio stations in Texas and Alabama, announced it was to acquire KESY AM and FM for \$6.2 million in stock and the assumption of liabilities. Frank A. Woods, president of SunGroup said plans were to continue the Beautiful Music format.

Dana Webb soon became general manager, replacing Bob Dean who left in 1987 to avoid a conflict of interest while working on a move-in station of his own in Iowa.

During these struggles, the signal was improved with a move to the TV Antenna Farm at 72nd and Crown Point. The move was spurred by the Docket 80-90 requirement to raise the antenna height to the minimum required or be downgraded to a lower class.

The old KESY-FM transmitter site atop the apartment building at 39th and Dodge Streets remained in place as a backup facility. It also became the STL relay point connecting the Dodge Street studios to the KMTV tower at Crown Point.

Station engineers recall an ice storm one winter that knocked out power to the apartment building. They spent a couple of days hauling heavy batteries up and down the stairs, recharging them from jumper cables connected to a van to keep the STL relay operating and the station on the air.

Programming during these struggles saw KESY-FM keep average ratings in the 5 to 7 share range. But Beautiful Music was on its way out. KEFM 96.1 had already dropped Beautiful Music for light mainstream pop music in 1984.

KESY hung on as long as it could before gradually going over to Soft Rock with mainstream artists. In 1989 old school artists like Frank Sinatra, Perry Como and Mantovani faded away. Easy vocals by rock, pop, and country artists crept in.



Even with artists like Tommy James & The Shondells, the Bee Gees, and the Eagles, GM Dana Webb kept the music “soft and relaxing,” aimed at the 25 to 54 age group. The format change was done gradually over the course of a year, completed in late 1989 with a more contemporary sound, the station labeling itself as *Soft 104.5*.

106.3 KBWH Blair

Stations in Blair had difficulty taking root. Blair is a small town of about 6400, less than 25 miles north of downtown Omaha. Though historically a rail and farm community, Blair was also becoming a bedroom community for Omahans with many residents commuting daily to the city for their work.

Dana College in Blair already had a 10-watt station at 60 feet operating since 1972. With a two-mile primary, KDCV 91.9 could still be audible in parts of Omaha as far as 15 miles away. But, it was more of a toy for the college than a service to the community.

KBWH signed on just a few weeks before the new decade of 1980. Roy Brown was the impetus behind KBWH, He was the town’s first city administrator in the 1960s. After retiring he helped found KBWH with partners Buck Burke and Kenneth Cameron, the trio forming BCB Incorporated, each principal owning about a third.

KBWH was granted its calls in February 1979. It commenced broadcasting the following December 11th with three thousand watts at 300 feet from a tower in Iowa 3.2 miles west of Modale. The format was Country and Polka music. It was Blair’s station, if only identifiable as such by the strong community connection of Roy Brown, its Manager and co-owner.

Blair was proving itself too small for a station to be truly viable in a community already well-served by Omaha radio. KBWH’s attempts to broaden its goals and become part of the Omaha market fell short as well. Its signal southward was sketchy beyond North Omaha.

In October 1982 Roy Brown announced that KBWH would be sold to a group of Black businessmen. It was no secret that the new owners would change its Country and Polka music format to soul music, and there was no denying that it sought to serve Omaha’s Black community in North Omaha.

The Black community was still smarting from the loss of its Soul station KOWH-FM, just sold in 1979 to new owners that flipped it to Country. Jack Harris, representing the KBWH buyers, called it “pathetic” that there are 40 thousand Blacks in Omaha and no Soul station (OWH Nov 11, 1982). Harris had been PD and Sales Manager of KOWH AM and FM in 1970 when those stations were owned by Black investors that included Bob Gibson, formerly of the St. Louis Cardinals.

News of the sale set off angry calls and mail from listeners directed at Roy Brown. Bob Woodhouse, President of the Blair Chamber of Commerce, said he and about 70 percent of Blair’s residents opposed letting the community lose its only radio station and threatened to protest the sale to the FCC.

But the bluster died down and the sale was closed for 220 thousand dollars in March 1983. The new owners were LDH Communications, made up of Larry Littlejohn, Rodrick Davis, and Jack Harris, each owning one third. Harris became the president, general manager, and chief engineer, with Littlejohn the sales manager.

Though expected, it must still have been a bit of a shock for Blair’s residents when KBWH flipped from Country and Polka to a Rhythm and Blues format. It happened the morning of June 4, 1983, almost immediately upon final FCC approval of the sale.



The new KBWH slogan was *The Miracle Station*. Harris said it was a miracle that the station got on the air after repeatedly being turned down for loans, finally getting a loan from a mysterious New York source he refused to identify.

The soul and dance music played into the late evening hours. By the end of the year, the station was on a 24-hour schedule. The DJs, some old hands from the KOWH days, were all Omahans making the commute to Blair.

The station kept its studios on the second floor of a building on Blair’s main street at 1630 Washington Street but also had opened an Omaha office at 5829 North 60th Street.

Harris said the station would emphasize community news with a bulletin board four times a day and segments of Blair news three times a day, in addition to regular hourly network newscasts. A call-in show called "Express Yourself" with community leaders as guests was set to begin February. 5.

The KBWH transmitter was located east of Blair, across the river in Iowa. GM Jack Harris admitted reception was spotty in parts of the metro because of steep hills in the desired direction. In reality, KBWH's primary coverage could only reach out 15 miles, with the rest of the metro up to 46 miles southward only being in the secondary and fringe contours.

Management immediately sought a taller tower to improve the signal into Omaha. Seeking 499 feet from the present 352 feet, the request was granted in July 1983 and tower construction began in early August. Initially, the permit required reducing power to 1.26 thousand watts for the new height, but apparently was only a temporary environmental measure.

The main studios were moved in May 1984 to the Omaha offices at 5829 North 60th Street near Hartman Avenue while a business office was retained in Blair. By this time KBWH was also being carried on Omaha's Cox Cable channel 9.

Also in May, the station celebrated its first anniversary with a parade in North Omaha and a concert headlined by the Chi-Lites in the City Auditorium Arena. The parade was seen by an estimated eight thousand people, winding from Fontenelle Park to Ames Avenue, 24th Street and to Lake Street.

The concert was less successful. With about one thousand tickets sold, the concert started an hour late. Coupled with lengthy stage setups between the four acts, it lasted late into the night. The headliners, the Chi-Lites, didn't appear on stage until 12:30 a.m. playing for a dwindling, fatigued concert audience.

Omaha ratings for KBWH during the 1980s hovered around a one share at best.

Transmitter damage caused by acid from an upset battery took the station off the air for a period in mid-December 1985. Vandalism was blamed.

A longer outage silenced the station in March 1989. It was blamed on technical issues, though many suspected the real problem was financial. Former GM Jack Harris, now heading a Columbus, Ohio station for the company, admitted KBWH "hasn't been managed very good" (OWH March 31 1989). Part of the management problems hinged on resolving issues with VP Larry Littlejohn who wanted out of the company.

Enter the mystery financier from New York who had provided cash in 1983. It was Joerge Klebe, the sole shareholder of CVC Capital, a Manhattan MESBIC (Minority Enterprise Small Business Investment) that specialized in lending money to minorities buying broadcast properties.

Klebe was a German national who, upon recently receiving American citizenship, could now own and operate American radio stations. He owned WGNV AM/FM in Newburgh, New York, about 70 miles north of Manhattan. Klebe had sent KBWH's owners a notice of default on its financial obligations to his company.

The station finally returned to the air in early April after about a month of silence, but only after Harris flew in from Ohio to make the repairs. He lamely blamed a faulty resistor shorting out the transmitter as the cause of the outage. Harris returned to Ohio the following day.

. On November 22, 1989, Joerge Klebe filed for foreclosure. LDH Communications will go to Klebe's Sunrise Broadcasting Corporation for no financial consideration

Klebe within a year will buy KNCY AM/FM Nebraska City. He would soon use that station's FM for a successful move-in to Omaha, but success with the Blair station will elude him as the 1990s get underway.

THE NON-COMMS

Educational radio on the AM band received no support from the Feds during the dawning years of broadcasting. The government believed commercial radio would be the better driving force in developing the new medium.

Educators were back in during the emergence of FM. The FCC reserved the lowest 20 FM frequencies for non-commercial programming that included Non-Comm Educational (NCE) stations. Thus was born Public Radio.

The non-comm channels were available for all non-profit broadcasters, such as community radio, college radio, and religious broadcasters. License fees were waived. No on-air advertisements were permitted. For NCE's, funding would come from the benefactor school, grants from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and outside cash from on-air fundraisers, and underwriters.

Underwriters are like program sponsors but restricted to those providing goods or services. Name mentions are allowed at the start or end of the program. Rules were later loosened to permit more sponsor specifics in the announcement provided it didn't go so far as prices or quality claims of the product or service.

With no revenue, public radio depends on public funding starting with its benefactor. KIOS had Omaha Public Schools picking up over half of its tab. KVNO at the University of Nebraska got a state subsidy amounting to about 40 percent of its budget. KIWR, though with the biggest signal, was the smallest college and perhaps struggled the most. Its state funding was jeopardized in 1986 when Governor Terry Branstad threatened to cut public radio from the state budget.

Additional money for the stations came from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, itself under fire and facing belt-tightening during the Reagan years. The remaining money came from listener support. On-air fund-raisers, usually twice yearly, were sarcastically called “beg-a-thons” by some listeners because of the lengthy solicitation breaks in programming.

The audiences were small but with an intensely loyal core. Managers of the three NCE stations recognized the lack of listener recognition as being a challenge. KVNO’s Frank Bramhall said, "There are people I still meet who have never even heard the call letters of any of the public radio stations." (*OWH* Feb 2, 1986)

Listenership in 1983 showed KVNO with its three thousand watts as the lowest power of the three NCE stations having about 32 thousand listeners in Omaha.

The stronger stations ironically had fewer listeners. KIOS with 50 thousand watts showed about 23 thousand listeners in Omaha and Lincoln, and KIWR running 100 thousand watts had about 15 thousand listeners.

Public radio was the alternative to mainstream radio, offering unique music genres, some local musical talent, and in-depth news reporting from the public radio networks.

National Public Radio, NPR, was the major network for news-oriented programming. It was created by Congress in 1970 replacing the National Educational Radio Network that had begun in 1961. APR, American Public Radio out of St. Paul, started up in 1983, distributed by Public Radio International.

Classical music and jazz dominated, and in lesser amounts big band and folk music could be found. KVNO split between classical and jazz, airing the former during the daytime and jazz at night. KIOS offered some big band programs with its classical offerings and KIWR was about 90 percent classical music.

As the decade progressed the three NCE stations entered their own microcosm of competition and cooperation. Station managers would meet to avoid programming duplication of the NPR offerings, particularly the more popular morning and afternoon shows “Morning Edition” and “All Things Considered.”

Shared NPR segments were staggered to different times and some programs were divided among the stations. NPR’s satellite delivery of 12 channels made this possible, offering a buffet of popular program segments to take at various times.

An exception to the duplication agreements was the popular “Prairie Home Companion” with Garrison Keillor, a Saturday evening show that KIOS 91.5 was allowed to keep exclusively since it began in the early 1980s. A Sunday repeat was also broadcast but was later discontinued when APR raised its rates for the show.

By 1986 it was noted that Omaha was one of only six markets in the country having three or more stations affiliated with National Public Radio. Los Angeles had four, while the others with three each were New York, Minneapolis-Saint Paul, Cincinnati, and Jackson, Mississippi.

Of note is KGBI 100.7, a non-profit religious broadcaster on a commercial frequency. The station ran no commercials but relied solely on donations. It had no difficulty in raising funds for its annual budget through annual on-air “Share A Thons.” Compared to the educational stations, the intelligentsia donations were dwarfed when the listener base was that of the devout.

89.7 KIWR Council Bluffs

KIWR 89.7 became Omaha-Council Bluffs third public broadcaster in 1981. It was a monumental struggle for its owner, Iowa Western Community College in Council Bluffs.

The initial target date in February was constantly pushed back, reportedly because of technical glitches but mostly because of financial difficulties in obtaining grants. The construction cost was 362 thousand dollars. A Corporation for Public Broadcasting expansion fund for the station was disapproved in September thanks to the Ronald Reagan budget cuts.

But there were indeed technical problems to overcome as well. With the full 100 thousand watts planned at 1013 feet on the WOWT tower at the antenna farm, it was discovered the 89.7 KIWR frequency was too close to the television station’s audio frequency of 87.7 and could cause interference problems. This was abated by using a directional FM antenna beamed eastward.

KIWR finally reached the air on November 23rd with 100 thousand watts from the channel 6 tower, but programming was still suffering limitations. Short on funds, there were no evening programs, the station signing off at 6 p.m. Plans to air NPR programming had to be delayed until the staff was large enough to meet NPR standards.

Over half of KIWR's budget was funded by the State of Iowa, 20 percent from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, some from the college, and the remaining 26 percent from underwriting and public fundraising.

The station did take in a windfall of eight-thousand dollars a year from Iowa Public Television in compensation for being a control point for two of the television system's transmitters in Southwest Iowa. That payment was later raised to eleven-thousand dollars but ended in the early 1990s when the TV network added enough equipment to take over control.

Competition for listener dollars was intense. KIWR held its first on-air fund-raiser in February 1982, beating its goal of ten thousand dollars. KIOS also had its first-ever fund-raiser bringing in 22 thousand dollars and KVNO's on-air fund-raiser was set for April.

Low ratings were common for public radio, but the few listeners could be intensely loyal. Spring 1982 ratings showed public radio at the bottom, with KIOS and KVNO each receiving a three-tenths share, and KIWR a one-tenth.

KIWR 89.7 continued its efforts to get an NPR affiliation. It needed five staffers but initially could afford only four. The broadcast schedule needed to be 18 hours a day, but KIWR signed off early in the evenings.

The hour requirements were met in May 1982 by expanding the broadcast schedule to midnight. PD Sandy Kirkland added "Starlight Concert" and "Nocturne," a pair of syndicated radio shows to fill the schedule.

Also, a satellite downlink facility to pick up NPR was being constructed using state and federal funds. By September 1983 KIWR became the second NPR station in the Omaha market.

About 90 percent of KIWR's local programming was devoted to classical music. Among the other 10 percent, KIWR was the first station to broadcast new-age music with its "Music From the Hearts of Space" program.

A program of German music was added when Charlotte Fritzer Skow came over from KIOS after a ten-year stint on the Omaha Public School's station. Skow's "Musical Bouquet of Germany" continued on KIWR for another eight years. Skow and her family had lived in Germany where she secretly listened to the *Voice of America* on a hidden radio during the Hitler years of WW II.

Another first that might be claimed by KIWR was the purchase and use of CD players in July 1983. Compact Discs were poised to replace vinyl recordings, its digital technology providing clean and clear music reproduction.

Record companies believed the most discerning music listener was the classical music enthusiast, so most of the early CD releases were classical albums. KVNO, KIOS, and KEZO added the players early in the roll out of the new digital disc format.

With Federal funding already tight, Iowa governor Terry Branstad in January 1986 announced a plan to eliminate state funding for public radio stations at four community colleges, including Iowa Western.

Until 1987, the Iowa Legislature appropriated \$100,000 directly to the station. But in 1987, funds for the station were lumped into a single appropriation for the college. The struggle for operating funds would continue until a solution would be found in the 1990s.

90.7 KVNO Omaha

KVNO was the more innovative of the three public radio stations. Though ratings for public radio were relatively minuscule compared to those of commercial stations, KVNO was the non-comm leader by 1983.

In November 1985 KVNO was the first Omaha public radio station to go to a 24-hour schedule. KIOS 91.5 quickly followed three weeks later.

KVNO had a relatively secure financial situation. KVNO's budget was \$222,000. Its state subsidy was \$97,000 while also receiving a \$23,000 yearly grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The remaining \$100 thousand came from listeners and subscribers. The station had just enjoyed two record-breaking fundraisers in a row according to KVNO general manager Frank Bramhall. A two-percent cut in state funding was absorbed with little difficulty.



*KVNO's Storz house studio
(© UNO Criss Library)*

KVNO's home was inside the historic Storz house at 67th and Dodge Streets on the east edge of the UNO campus. The University of Nebraska Foundation bought the house for \$190,000 in 1970. The house, not to be confused with the slightly older Storz Mansion at 3708 Farnam Street, was built in 1909 for Adolph Storz, a member of the Storz beer-brewing family.

But, after 15 years of operation from the 1909 structure, signs of crumbling were starting to appear. It began in the summer of 1987 with a 4,000-pound piece of the ceiling falling. Inspections soon revealed other structural problems. The Board of Regents decided it was time for demolition.

Station employees began moving studio equipment to new quarters in the University's Engineering Building at 60th and Dodge Streets on January 22, 1988. KVNO was broadcasting from the new location just six days later.

KVNO's programming was split between classical and jazz music, with classical programmed during the day and jazz at night.

The spring 1987 ratings showed KVNO the leader among the three public radio stations with a 5 share. KIOS followed with a 4, and KIWR, a 3.



KVNO General Manager Frank Bramhall.

UNO Maverick football and basketball games were picked up in 1988 after KOIL 1290 dropped the teams. The Maverick games had been kicking around on AM since 1983, with KOIL having aired only the 1987 season.

Sports information director Gary Anderson hired Leo Morris from Sioux City to do Mavericks play by play beginning with the University of Nebraska at Omaha football opener on September 3. He was teamed with Torri Pantaleon for local color. UNO Basketball followed in 1989.

In August 1988 KVNO began airing newscasts from WOW 590, an unusual collaboration between public radio and a commercial station. They were five-minute simulcasts at 7 and 8 in the morning, 4 and 5 during afternoon drive, and at 10 p.m. KVNO General Manager Peter Marsh said he knew of no other such arrangement between public and private radio



An ambitious project took flight in 1989 when Jim Payne, operations production coordinator, brought radio theater to KVNO. Payne’s New York theater background combined with funding from CPB helped launch KVNO’s “Radio Technicolor Theater” acting company, beginning with a KVNO-sponsored radio script contest.

32 entries were received, with the 12 winning scripts being a mixture of mysteries, dramas, and comedies. The radio acting company began rehearsals in August. The 30-minute programs were set to air in March 1989 and would be offered to more than 300 NPR affiliates via satellite.

91.5 KIOS Omaha

KIOS was primarily funded by Omaha Public Schools, but a third of its money came from the slashed budget of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. This resulted in the station’s appeal to listeners for cash that had begun the previous decade. The station soon found itself struggling in the public radio arena against lower-powered KVNO.

KIOS had lost some key on-air talent to KVNO. Jazz host Bill Watts moved over in 1977. Studio manager and morning show host Frank Bramhall followed in 1979, later becoming KVNO’s general manager.

On the plus side, a successful jazz program was added in 1982 when Omaha jazz great Preston Love began his *Love Notes* jazz show on KIOS. His show continued on KIOS until his retirement in 1997.

OPS was concerned when KVNO moved ahead of its station in the ratings. Frank Coopersmith was brought in from Michigan in 1983 as the new Operations Manager.

Coopersmith started his radio career in Michigan at age 11 on the syndicated *Lone Ranger* radio program. As the masked man rode away on his horse, Coopersmith was the child asking the signature question, "Who was that masked man?"

Coopersmith's idea was to beef up Big Band music by adding two and a half hours daily. He considered hiring Cathy Fife, recently fired from KOOO 1420, a station that had also aired blocks of Big Band music. But the expansion plan met opposition from listeners and was put on hold. Fife went instead to WOW 590.

KIOS began recording the Omaha Symphony performances at the Orpheum Theater in 1983 for playback on air. It was hosted by program director Bob Coate.

The popular "A Prairie Home Companion" was carried on KIOS which had an exclusive contract with the show's distributor, American Public Radio, since the network's inception in 1983.

Coopersmith was considered abrasive and was fired the next year. He was on the air again by 1990 when he joined KVNO.

Pressure from competing KVNO continued. In December 1985 when the UNO station went to a 24-hour schedule, KIOS followed, going 24 hours a few weeks later that month. Station director Will Perry added a couple of overnight American Public Radio offerings: "Music Through the Night," with Arthur Hoehn on Sundays through Thursdays, and "Jazz After Hours," with Jim Wilke Fridays and Saturdays.

KIOS suffered diminished coverage in May 1986 when a storm damaged its antenna at Benson High School. The station was silent for about five days. It returned to the air with a borrowed antenna running just 14 thousand watts, down from the licensed 50 thousand watts.

Lawsuits, additional fundraising, and FCC paperwork combined to make recovery a slow process. The station ran at that reduced power for two years.

When the new antenna was finally purchased, it was placed lower on the tower to lessen wind sway, the culprit in the original damage. A slightly higher power was authorized to compensate for the reduced height. Soon afterward, the station was full strength at 55 thousand watts by December 1988.

100.7 KGBI Omaha

Religious broadcaster KGBI, owned and operated by the Grace Bible Institute, was a non-commercial station on a commercial frequency. It relied on donations from listeners, and unlike that at public radio, response for religious broadcasting was strong.

The station had no trouble covering its annual budget. There was even enough income to expand the station's outreach with a second station. KROA Doniphan-Grand Island was purchased in 1977 and relayed KGBI programming.

As Contemporary Christian music increased in popularity in the 1980s, KGBI gradually adjusted its format to include more new music and less of the older style of music and hymns it had been airing. The morning show positioned itself against the increasing onslaught of shock jock's borderline content with the liner, "Safe for the whole family." Inspirational teaching programs such as "'Back to the Bible" and "Focus on the Family" were mixed in.

1987's FCC Docket 80-90 forced another expansion for KGBI. The station wasn't operating to the full criteria of its license and needed to raise its tower to at least 980 feet or be downgraded to a lower class of license.

The old 500-foot tower near Louisville served the station well since 1973 but couldn't be heightened because of air traffic at Offutt Air Force Base some 30 miles away. A hill near Springfield just two miles SE of the tall KPTM channel 42 tower was selected for a new 1200-foot tower.

There was initial opposition from aviation interests. Many small aircraft pilots navigate visually by following Interstate 80 that runs close to the KTPM tower and the proposed tower site. The 1500-foot KPTM tower had been involved in a fatal crash just the preceding December when a small airplane on a foggy morning hit the tower's guy wires.



KGBI won the battle and broke ground in November 1989 for the new tower. It was expected to nearly double the station's coverage area. KGBI went on the air from its new tower on June 1, 1990, and to new heights in spreading its word in the following decade.

SIDEBARS

DOCKET 80-90

Docket 80-90, issued in 1986 and becoming effective in 1987, was primarily designed to increase FM stations on the band by easing “short-spacing” requirements, the minimum distance between stations on a given channel and their adjacent channels.

To squeeze more stations onto the FM band the FCC created three new classes of FM stations. To describe it more accurately, the Feds broke the C class down into four separate classes.

The new rankings required current Class C’s that didn’t meet the ultimate criteria of the new class C to either upgrade to a minimum ERP (Effective Radiated Power) of 100 kW and a minimum tower height of 300 meters (985 ft) to remain Class C, or find themselves stuck at a lower class thus devaluing the property.

Those stations had until March 1, 1987, to meet the minimums or be reclassified to a lower class. It spurred the upgrades of several Omaha stations: KQKQ 98.5, KEFM 96.1, KGBI 100.7, WOW-FM 94.1, and KESY 104.5. Already at the proper power and antenna height were KEZO 92.3 and KGOR 99.9, having done so in the previous decade.

The rule grandfathered the existing short spaced stations and reduced minimum mileage separation between new changes. It also limited new licenses to Class A, a maximum ERP of three-thousand watts, HAAT (Height Above Average Terrain) being 328 feet or 100 meters. The rulemaking opened up nearly 700 new channels across the country. The new channels were called "drop-ins."

Some upgraded Class C's in suburban or rural locations also could seek a way to cover a larger nearby market and became "move-ins." To do so, a potential move-in would seek a tower site midway between its community of license which they are legally required to cover in the primary contour and the metropolitan area from which they hope to gain revenue.

In this manner the primary signal contour of the station would ideally cover both markets, though likely both would be on the edge of the contour. As a result, move-ins were soon labeled “rimshot” stations. A downside is that signal strength at the pattern’s edge is weaker compared to a signal originating from within the market, a very important competitive factor.

Moving a transmitter toward a larger market can be met with obstacles as there may be other stations in the direction of the move. Those stations are protected from new interference. However those owners can be persuaded to shift to a different frequency for financial consideration and sometimes assistance in finding a new and perhaps better frequency. When successfully meeting all requirements, the FCC Table of Allotments (the FCC-specified FM allocations) is amended in a rule-making proceeding to accommodate the frequency moves.

The docket also eased “community of license” requirements, meaning a station’s studios can be anywhere within its primary contours regardless of the community of license providing that certain rules are met in continuing to serve that home community. The station's public file must be kept in the community of license, and its listeners were to have toll-free access to the station wherever its offices and studios might be.

As always, the hourly legal station identification must include its community of license immediately following the call letters. For a move-in that wished to develop an image as the larger market's station, clever ways were found to bury the legal ID so that it would be less noticeable. Often it would be announced low-key immediately followed by an emphasized image liner faux-ID directly connecting the calls to the large market.

Other tricks were to bury the legal ID close to the :50 point of the hour rather than the traditional top of the hour. In some extreme scripted cases, one announcer may end a sentence with the call letters and another announcer would take over starting the sentence with the community of license, such as at the start of a weather forecast.

Docket 80-90’s plan resulted in an increase in channel allocations, mostly in smaller and peripheral markets. In the Omaha market, new “drop-ins” appeared on 106.5 that went to Plattsmouth, about 16 miles south of Omaha, and 105.9 for Omaha. Both of the new drop-ins would be lower power class A’s.

Omaha’s first Class C move-in was KJAN FM 103.7 Atlantic, Iowa in 1988 that became KOMJ, and later KXKT. The station had significant signal problems after its move and tried to solve them with an on-channel booster within the Omaha market. After mixed results, the signal issue was eventually resolved by gaining a change for the community of license from Atlantic to much-closer Glenwood, Iowa. This allowed a full-power transmitter inside Omaha for 103.7.

Omaha’s second Class C move-in closely followed KOMJ. It was KFMQ 101.9 Lincoln, but the owners went without exploiting an Omaha identity until four years later.

NEW STATIONS TO THE OMAHA MARKET IN THE 1980s

1981 KIWR 89.7 Council Bluffs (New non-comm station.)

1987 KKAR 1180 Bellevue (New station on a former clear channel.)

1988 KXKT 103.7 Atlantic, IA, (Upgraded move-in with Omaha studios.)

1988 KFMQ 101.9 Lincoln (Upgraded move-in, no Omaha studio until 1992.)

AM STEREO

AM radio was clearly losing audience to FM as the 1970s concluded because of FM's superior audio quality and stereo capabilities. AM radio tried to catch up by implementing a system that would broadcast stereo while remaining compatible with present-day mono receivers.

There emerged no fewer than five such systems vying for FCC approval. They were Magnavox, Kahn-Hazeltine, Motorola C-QUAM, Harris, and Belar.

In 1979 it was WOW, the staid old-line broadcaster that had turned to the younger audience and taking over the Top 40 crown, that went one step further. It would become the first AM station in Omaha to broadcast in stereo.

It was a Federally-approved test of one of the five systems--the Kahn-Hazeltine system. WOW was one of 14 stations to receive such permission and it cost the station nearly 20 thousand dollars in new equipment to set it up.

The Kahn system used the upper and lower sidebands of the station for right and left channels and was the only one of the five to use this method. No AM stereo receivers were yet on the market, but the curious could listen to a rather primitive form of WOW's AM stereo by using two receivers on each side of the room, one tuned to the high side of 590 and the other to the low side.

On AM stereo receivers, the audio range was improved and the stereo separation was good. WOW PD Erik Fox recalls, "I had a unit in my office and my car. I liked it, but it was not as clear as FM."

Test results were forwarded to the FCC. In April 1980, the Magnavox system won approval.

But nobody rushed into AM stereo broadcasting. Almost immediately lawsuits from those behind the losing systems clouded the air. Broadcasters and radio manufacturers hesitated. Listeners showed little interest and continued with the status quo of AM mono and FM stereo.

The FCC relented in 1982, giving the OK to all four remaining systems with the intention of “letting the marketplace decide.” Despite the lost momentum, Omaha radio slowly plunged in. WOW 590 turned its Kahn system back on in August 1982, becoming Omaha’s only AM stereo operation.

Within two years, the “marketplace decision” began to take shape. In March 1984, KFAB 1110 went stereo, and KOIL 1290 followed a few weeks later, each using Motorola’s C-QUAM system.

KFAB’s Lyle Bremser said, “...we just redid our whole system, from microphones right on through to the transmitter. We’re tickled to death just because we know it sounds so much better.”

KFAB’s stereo was regarded by some critical listeners as the best in town. In a pleasant surprise, the automated overnight “Serenade In The Night” turned out to be originating from stereo tapes all along, now finally airing that way.

KOIL’s General Manager Steve Brown said four new signal processors were added in addition to the stereo exciter but at some cost. Said Brown, “During testing, we blew out a \$5,500 audio processor.”

KOIL ramped up promotions for AM stereo. The tag line was, “KOIL has the Cure for Mono,” with pictures of the jocks dressed in hospital scrubs.

KOIL newsman Norm Roberts recalls, “We gave away a Jeep at the Ranch Bowl, I believe New Year’s Day ‘85, equipped with, as Steve Brown called it, a ‘high tech AM stereo’ radio. We also gave away a bunch of Sony portable AM stereo radios around that time, always promoting it on the air ‘high tech stereo!’ It did sound really good, especially on tunes recorded in the ‘70s and ‘80s.”

WOW 590 shut down its Kahn system in December 1983 and made preparations to use the Harris system, regaining stereo status with its new system by mid-year. Steve Conover, WOW’s chief engineer, believed the Harris system was superior because it used a more advanced form of radio receiver than the others. Conover had spent more than a year with Harris as a field service engineer working with AM stereo.

The market got a fourth AM stereo signal in March 1987 when a new station signed on. KKAR 1180 Bellevue, a new sister station to John Mitchell's KQKQ 98.5, began with a Motorola C-QUAM stereo system even though the station's planned format of News/Talk certainly didn't require stereo. However, newsman Norm Roberts who by this time had moved from KOIL to KKAR said, "All the news sounders and intros were in stereo, the rest of content was mono. I believe our station vehicles, the 'K-cars' also had AM stereo radios. I know the Jeep did while I was out doing traffic reports. I don't remember if the spots on carts were stereo or mono, though."

Later, the KKAR stereo pilot light suddenly went out. KKAR engineer Sherill reports, "The transmitter building was not heated, and when the temps were subzero, the AM stereo exciter started going nuts, so I disabled it. That was that for stereo on 1180. Hardly anyone noticed." Publically, Steve Brown said the stereo was shut down making for better reception on the signal's fringes.

During KOIL's move to downtown studios in 1988, the stereo was temporarily shut off. KOIL then continued with AM stereo but it may have later been shut down as the station's fortunes tumbled.

KOIL's transmitter caught fire the day before the station's sale to Mitchell Broadcasting closed in 1993. In the aftermath, Mitchell engineer A. W. Sherill recalls, "The Motorola C-QUAM exciter was still in the building, mounted in the rack, but I don't think it was in use. It was not damaged by the fire but we had no need for it."

KFAB went to News/Talk in 1990 and dropped the stereo pilot around 2001 or 2002 when the Continental transmitter was replaced by a new Harris transmitter.

In 1993, KKAR 1180 dropped News/Talk for Nostalgia from Unistar, changed calls to KOIL, and stereo returned to 1180. Station engineer A. W. Sherill notes, "When 1180 increased to 25 kilowatts, we got a new stereo exciter with the Harris transmitter. That music was a pretty good match for AM and it lasted three or four years. Then the station switched to Sports/Talk and we turned the stereo off again."

Technically, AM stereo worked. Manufacturers devised a chip in AM stereo receivers that would automatically decode whichever of the four systems were tuned in (the Belar system had been ruled out in the early test stages of AM stereo).

But, AM stereo faced an uphill battle. Hesitation in implementing AM stereo during its contentious development killed any momentum. By this time music's migration to FM was nearly complete. There was no compelling reason for listeners to invest in an AM stereo receiver.

In the end, the marketplace did decide, with the Motorola C-QUAM system having the majority of what few AM stereo stations and receivers existed by the late 1980s. It was finally declared as the standard by the FCC in 1993. AM stereo remains low-profile airing on about 80 AM stations scattered around the country as of 2020, but none in the Omaha-Council Bluffs or Lincoln markets.

AIRBORNE TRAFFIC REPORTS

Rush hour traffic reports are an integral part of radio's morning and afternoon rush hour programming. Even in Omaha where the longest average commute time was only 20 minutes, listeners have high expectations of hearing reports on traffic conditions.

Newsrooms and mobile units with police scanners are the main source for information on traffic tie-ups and accidents. The more savvy newsmen also keep up with lists and dates of road construction sites that will cause delays. But, nothing could beat the "eye in the sky."

A traffic reporter in an aircraft could see traffic backups in areas where there was no scanner action. More importantly, taking to the air was a great image-builder, giving a promotional edge to any station with a plane or helicopter.

Though there were short-term traffic reports from the air in the 1930s and 1940s in the major markets of New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, regular airborne traffic reporting didn't begin until 1956 when Gordon McLendon's KLIF Dallas put a craft in the air. Other large and major markets followed. Helicopters were the preferred aircraft of choice, despite the much higher expense and increased risks over fixed-wing aircraft.

In Omaha, it was April 1966 when WOW originated air traffic reports with its *Traffic-Copter*. The helicopter was airborne in cooperation with the Omaha Department of Public Safety and the police department. The reports were provided by two traffic control police officers who covered one hour each at 7:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. With Omaha's relatively easy and short commute times the expensive feature didn't last long.

In 1968 KOIL put a plane in the air to supplement reports from mobile units on the ground. *Operation Air Watch* with traffic reporter Scotty Wright gave listeners a “birds-eye view” of traffic. Wright was a station-owned name used by whoever was doing the reporting. KOIL’s airborne reports were gone before the end of the decade.



1968 KOIL survey promoting air traffic reports.

Traffic reporting relied on listening to police scanners through the 1970s. KOIL deployed scanner-equipped mobile units that had the added credibility of being on the streets, the reporter going to the scene of the more serious accidents or newsworthy events.

In 1979 KLNG 1560 Traffic Reports came from the top of the Woodmen Tower, presumably by a staffer with binoculars and a police scanner, though the vantage point for viewing was quite worthless and simply a gimmick. Later, the station relied on Yellow Cab Drivers who

radioed reports to “Andy the Dispatcher” (*OWH* July 9, 1979).

It wasn’t until the early 1980s that traffic reports from the air truly blossomed, if only for a brief time. The seeds were planted in 1979 when the television news-copter wars broke out.

Omaha’s first television news helicopter took to the air on September 3, 1979. KMTV Channel 3 leased a helicopter complete with pilot and maintenance. Called *SkyKam*, the jet-turbine Hughes 500 chopper was based at Eppley Airfield. The expensive news tool was primarily to boost the station’s image. Channel 3 had been last in the market to incorporate minicams and to add weather radar.

WOWT Channel 6 quickly joined the race with a smaller Hughes 300 helicopter based at the Council Bluffs Airport. Called *Action Aircam 6*, the chopper made its debut September 29 taping aerial shots of the Nebraska-Penn State football game at Lincoln’s Memorial Stadium. Weeks later KETV channel 7 leased a chopper calling it *Air 7* for news reporting.

By October 8, 1979, KFAB 1110 and sister FM KGOR 99.9 were riding along in channel 3's *SkyKam* 'copter giving *Eye in the Sky* traffic reports, but only when *SkyKam* wasn't called out on a story. KFAB and KGOR were at this time the only radio stations aloft during rush hours, but only for the morning commutes.

To help defray the huge expense of operating a helicopter, KMTV would rent it out to ad agencies at 240 dollars an hour. It was also available for promotional events, such as bringing Santa in from the North Pole to Crossroads Mall that November. But ratings remained unchanged. The heavily promoted news helicopter failed to help channel 3 climb out of third place in local news.

KFAB's *Eye in the Sky* agreement soon included covering Saturday Husker home game traffic on I-80, US-34, and US-77 in September 1980 and again in 1981.

KETV's Ray Depa said it cost his station about \$30,000 in 1981 for the use of a helicopter for a guaranteed period of time each month, and some stations were paying six figures a year to keep a chopper on standby (*OWH* November 4, 1984)

The news 'copters lasted until 1982. By February the leases ran out for channels 6 and 7. Only KMTV channel 3 kept a chopper aloft, now based at Millard Airport, though the station remained mired in third place (*OWH* Feb 1, 1982). By year's end, KMTV would let its lease run out and Omaha television's news-copter fad was over. Private choppers would be chartered only when needed from now on.

Not so on radio. KFAB/KGOR continued to provide morning drive *Eye in the Sky* traffic reports by chartering a helicopter after the channel 3 *SkyKam* lease expired. Theirs were the only traffic reports from the sky until 1984.

In July KOIL sent a reporter aloft in a fixed-wing aircraft for morning and evening rush hour reports. By November KFAB/KGOR added evening reports to match the competition. By that time WOW AM and FM had joined in with its own plane and reporter in the air giving *Skyhawk* traffic reports in morning drive only. WOW later added a seat for a KEFM 96.1 reporter. It was a peak in air traffic for radio reporting; two planes and a helicopter flying the skies during morning drive time.

The two fixed-wing aircraft were required to stay above 2500 feet while helicopters weren't so restricted. Commenting on KFAB's switch to a helicopter, Lyle Bremser said, "We tried a fixed-wing plane originally, but we found that you really can't cover traffic very well from above 2,500 feet" (*OWH* Nov 4, 1984)

Tracking air traffic while the station's crafts were aloft was the job of the FAA center in Bellevue. The planes were tracked with transponders. The KFAB helicopter had no transponder but could fly lower while being closely watched on radar.

Adding to the air traffic were two medical helicopters--*SkyMed*, operated by the University of Nebraska Medical Center, and *Life Flight* at St. Joseph Hospital. Both always had top priority whenever airborne. When called out on an emergency run, radio station craft were ordered to clear the way, a disadvantage for stations wanting to cover the event at where the first-responders were going.

When KFAB switched from a helicopter to an airplane in June 1988, WOW and KEFM 96.1 switched from airplanes to using a helicopter for covering morning traffic. By splitting the costs the two stations were able to afford making airborne reports.

The chopper and pilot were supplied by Dyna-Tech Helicopters of Omaha and a reporter from each station was on board. WOW General Manager Ken Fearnow said WOW probably would not have explored the possibility had not KFAB grounded its 'copter. (*OWH* June 11, 1988)

KFAB/KGOR, KEFM, and WOW AM and FM by this time were the only Omaha radio stations covering traffic from the air. KOIL had gone back to mobile units with scanners. Former Douglas County Deputy Sheriff Chris Saklar had been providing ground-based scanner traffic reports for KQKQ since 1981. KKAR put scanners in their mobile units, called "K-Kars," for traffic reports when it came on the air in 1987.

In January 1990, KFAB went to a cheaper method of airborne traffic reporting. After leasing a plane, Andy Paulson took over as both pilot and traffic reporter. He had been piloting for KFAB/KGOR doing fill-in work as a traffic reporter, but now he was solo and free to report for other stations.

On-air as "Commander Andy," Paulson could fly either an airplane or a helicopter, depending on weather conditions. When grounded by weather, reports were made from mobile units on the streets.

Andy Paulson in 1992 added WOWT channel 6 to his reporting roster. KFAB claimed to be unconcerned about the new competition, but cautioned competitors against using its on-air term, *Airborne Traffic*.

In late summer 1994, the Airborne Traffic Network in Kansas City expanded into Omaha joining Commander Andy in the skies during drive times. Flying a Cessna aircraft that seats three, the company contracted with John Mitchell's KQKQ and KKAR, Ken Fearnow's WOW AM and FM, and Dana Webb's KESY AM and FM. The reports were free to the stations with the understanding that Airborne Traffic could sell commercials during its airtime.

While still flying in Omaha, Airborne Traffic Network was purchased by competitor Metro Networks, the largest provider of broadcast traffic reporting services nationwide. It went for \$1.5 million in January 1997.

Metro Traffic, like Shadow Traffic, an earlier competitor that later merged with Metro, relied on road cameras, scanners, and stringers. Metro Networks maintained an Omaha bureau well into the next decade providing traffic coverage and supplemental news for Omaha subscribers that included KFAB and KKAR.

In the early 2000s after corporate ownership took over, Clear Channel stations used the city's video cameras around the city for traffic information. Journal and Waitt relied on syndicated reports from Metro Traffic that, after absorbing Shadow Traffic, by this time was Metro Traffic/Shadow Broadcast Services. This in turn was a subsidiary of New York-based Westwood One, by now the world's largest provider of local traffic information. Metro eventually was taken over by Clear Channel.

CHAPTER TWO – THE NINETIES – THE PATH TO DEREGULATION

Radio was still fun in the 80s and 90s. Of course we were locally owned and that helped. In Omaha even the corporately owned stations had some autonomy and for the most part were having a good run. I saw the change come in around 1996 when the Telecomm Act was passed, allowing more FMs and then that started the consolidation. Clear Channel, and others. Publicly owned stations, bean counters, non broadcast ownership.....all that caused the change that we see now.

--Marty Riemenschneider, 1990s Executive VP/COO of Mitchell Broadcasting , Omaha.

Duopoly certainly lit the fuse. -Gary Stevens, President, Gary Stevens & Co. Inc. Investment Banking and Brokerage (Broadcasting, March 11 1996)

THE RUN-UP TO DEREGULATION

New signals were quickly appearing in the Omaha market and in the rest of the country even before the 1990s got underway, thanks to the final break up of the historical clear channel stations on AM in 1980 and Docket 80-90 that allowed more stations on FM in 1987. It continued with an expansion of the AM band adding nine channels in 1993. And existing ownership regulations were set to loosen even further.

Even before the AM band expansion, the FCC was acknowledging increased competition noting that the radio industry was struggling financially. With a new ruling in 1992 increasing ownership limits to 18 stations on each of the two radio bands plus TV, the commission explained that relaxing ownership limits would allow bigger companies to buy smaller, struggling radio operations and keep those stations on the air.

The new 1992 regulations also permitted duopolies to return, eliminating a 1940s ruling that had been designed to ensure political diversity in individual markets. Now, companies could again own more than one AM and FM station in a single city, the limit being two in each service. Brokers and bankers began to see an increase in business with the buying and selling of radio stations.

In 1994 the ownership limits were upped again, to 20 AM and 20 FM but no limit on TV, but a cap on national audience reach was instituted.

Programmers found positioning even tighter. Niche formats emerged, each focusing on a slimmer piece of the audience pie that in turn meant tighter budgets. As old-schoolers lamented the loss of fun radio, newcomers who would still answer radio's siren call found it to be a serious game called survival of the fittest.

Two classes of air talent developed: High-paid radio personalities surfaced from the DJ pool. The front-liners were given the all-important morning drive slots while the rest of the day's DJs were given cue cards to read between numerous formatted no-talk music sweeps.

At music stations, the newsrooms were the first to go, reduced at best to an Associated Press satellite dish and the *Omaha World-Herald*. Newscasts were becoming limited to mornings and delivered by a newsreader who often was a sidekick for the morning personality. At some stations, "news" was simply a series of "kicker" stories and/or cultural gossip.

Radio had shifted from its old post-network localizing of a basic half-dozen formats to a high-pressure competitive business, meeting its greatest challenge since the advent of television.

As competition intensified, the new challenges were greeted by creative broadcasters. It was risk-taking at its best. With it came new ideas, a few of them disastrous, and some resulting in high-profile personality clashes between stations.

It culminated with the Telecommunications Act of 1996. National ownership caps were eliminated and duopoly rules widened. What immediately followed was a buying frenzy that developed huge ownership groups, some owning hundreds of stations across the country.

But, survival remained a challenge. The ownership groups found themselves over-leveraged after paying what many considered inflated prices for stations during the big swallow-up. The buying placed enormous pressure on the stations themselves to pay off the debt load, and working in radio became less friendly, some even saying "it's not fun anymore."

The advertising model shifted even further. National sponsors that had been migrating to radio networks soon found national syndicated programming, from weekend specials to daily morning shows, for their products. They now had access the station's inventory at pennies on the dollar of what they once paid those stations individually. Radio's overall revenue was decreasing.

The pros and cons of 1996's deregulation rage on. But for now, here's a look at radio's run-up to 1996 from Omaha's viewpoint, and how the landscape changed afterward.

THE MAJOR AM STATIONS

590 WOW KOMJ Omaha

Great Empire Broadcasting was in the right place at the right time. Its group of stations were all Country, a music format that would enjoy a huge renaissance in the early 1990s.

The Country music craze was generated by a combination of patriotic fervor during the Gulf War, a Texan president who liked Country music, and new artists like Randy Travis and Garth Brooks whose music appealed to younger demographics. It became a splinter format, New Country, leaving Traditional Country music to the older folks.

WOW owned both. The New Country dominated the FM playlist, while traditional artists still played on WOW AM 590. Owner Great Empire soon found itself up to its bootstraps in cash from this most American of all popular music.



WOW General Manager Ken Fearnow commented on his bounty in 1992, telling the *OWH*. "Back in the early days, it was a struggle." Fearnow recalled the upward spike when Great Empire Broadcasting of Wichita bought WOW 590 in 1983 (it bought WOW FM in 1978) and the climb remained steady since, "But the last 2 1/2 years have been exceptionally good."



WOW Program Director Scott Parker.
(Courtesy: Maddy West.)

Scott Parker took over as program director in September 1990 replacing Gene Bridges who landed a plum Country programming gig in Los Angeles at KLAC.

WOW 590 stuck with the traditional Country music like Hank Snow, Marty Robbins, and Hank Williams Sr. while the FM focused on the New Country.

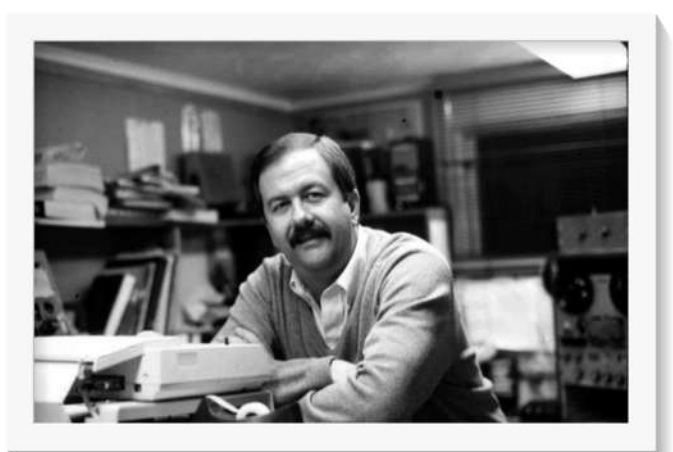
The AM presentation was more conversational and folksy. WOW AM aired news twice an hour where the music-intensive FM offered news only once hourly.

The AM concluded each hour before the newscast with a hymn “Song of Inspiration,” of which there were many by Country artists, a practice taken from the popular TV series *Hee Haw*.

Joe Nittler was named host of WOW's Saturday morning “Cracker Barrel” two-hour call-in talk show in February 1991. He replaced Scott Parker, who continued as the station's program director and the afternoon drive DJ. Nittler came over from a sports program on KKAR where he co-hosted with Mike Kelly of the *OWH*.

George Woods returned as fill-in on “Cracker Barrel” in August 1993 after being fired from a talk show slot on KFAB. He had been a longtime host on “Cracker Barrel” before his move to KFAB in 1989.

Morris James headed up a news department that was constantly covering breaking news with a battery of police scanners and a fleet of well-equipped mobile units. James saw news as vital to the mission of radio. He was well-liked and had good relationships with his news sources.

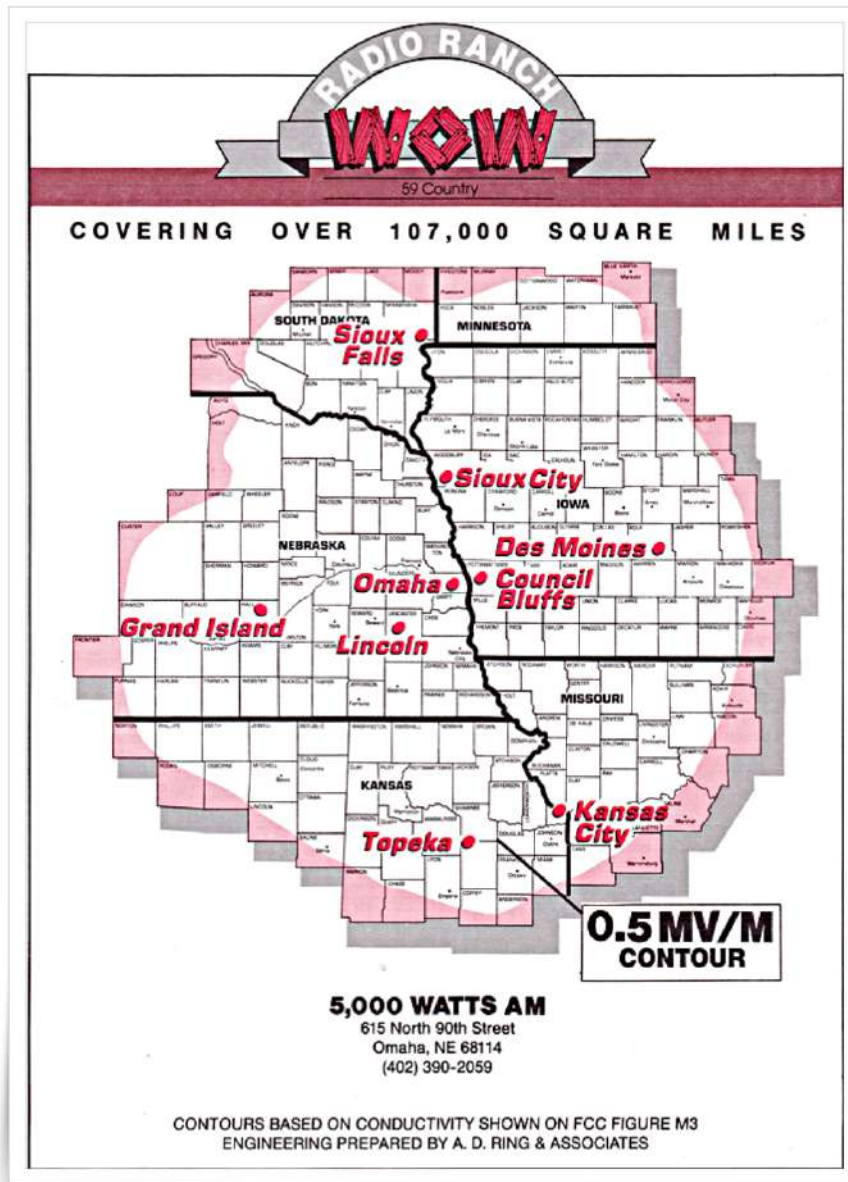


WOW News Director Morris James and WOW Newsperson Bill Jensen (Courtesy: Maddy West).

Newscasts from the WOW newsroom announce booth were delivered twice an hour, the FM taking only the top-of-hour report. Street news was reported live from the scene, be it a fire, accident, or shooting, generally the lead story for the dramatic effect. Government pressers and courtroom verdicts were covered by live reporters. Joe Nittler and Bill Jensen were among the newsroom stalwarts in the 1990s, later adding Tom Stanton.

Stanton recalls the coverage of October 1997's heavy snowfall that badly damaged trees and power lines. After getting the call from Morris James, "I opened my back door and could hear tree limbs all over the neighborhood snapping as the heavy snow was falling.

"As the snow fell early that morning an Omaha man, Marvin Ammons, was shot and killed by an Omaha Police officer during a traffic stop. That would normally be the lead story, but it got pushed to the back burner because of the massive storm. We were a 24/7 news operation so we were scrambling... for several days."



WOW's AM side contribution was about one-third of the WOW AM-FM combined ratings, which reached a whopping 17.2 in spring 1991.

WOW provided the music for the Fourth of July fireworks display at Rosenblatt Stadium in 1992 and 1993. It was the city's largest annual display since the 1970s when KOIL made the holiday event a regular tradition. The fireworks display was choreographed to music, airing on both the AM and FM.

Since 1990 the Country music format was added at 160 stations across the country. Three of those additions were in Omaha.

WOW 590 coverage, its 5-thousand watts equaling that of KFAB's 50-thousand watts on 1110 by virtue of its lower 590 frequency.

KFMQ 101.9 Lincoln entered the Omaha market and brought back Great Empire's former *Country KYNN* call letters in late 1992. It was quickly followed by KXKT 103.7, caught by surprise as it had been busy gearing up to go Country to become *The Kat, KT103*.

Before the end of the year, *Kat's* sister AM, KOIL 1290, gave up its Oldies format and simulcast the FM's Country programming. Suddenly Omaha had five signals broadcasting Country music.

WOW management brushed off the new competitors, citing WOW's heritage of Country combined with its established news department, traffic reports, sponsored concerts, and community events. PD Scott Parker said he still considered the soon-to-be-KYNN a Lincoln station, and wished better luck for KXKT with this format than the last three it tried.

WOW was a money machine allowing it to build a new tower for its FM. The tall FM tower went up in 1989 adjacent to the television antenna farm on North 72nd Street, the fourth "stick" to adorn the Crown Point skyline.

In 1993 Ken Fearnow announced plans to build new AM/FM studios at the tower site. Groundbreaking at 5002 North 72nd Street was in July with January 1994 set as the completion date.

Afternoon drive was beefed up with the addition of Rusty Clark, a Bedford, Iowa native who had been in broadcasting for 28 years. Clark spent 10 years as an afternoon personality at KILT in Houston. He was the official emcee at Gilley's nightclub during the heyday of the "Urban Cowboy" craze. Clark replaced Ed Brady, who returned to full-time sales work.

Ken Brooks was promoted to program director in February 1995 following Scott Parker's sudden death from meningitis. By this time the Country competition was putting a dent in WOW's ratings, mainly on the FM side. Then, KXKT surged ahead in 1996.

George Woods returned to the morning show in July 1997 co-hosting with Shari Stone. The duo replaced Woody Johnson who went to WOAI San Antonio.

Woods was no stranger to WOW. He and Cathie fife did mornings there from 1983 to 1989. Woods left for a talk show slot on KFAB until fired in 1993. He had since done fill-in work on KKAR and WOW's Saturday morning "Cracker Barrel" talk show. Shari Stone came from the midday slot.

But the duo didn't click. Manager Ken Fearnow called it a chemistry imbalance. After only a month, Woods was released from his contract saying that he and Miss Stone had differing ideas on the philosophy of the show, and "eventually the differences became incompatible." PD Ken Brooks moved from his afternoon slot to fill in with Stone until a replacement was found.

The corporate buying spree didn't reach WOW until 1999. It was believed Mike Oatman and Mike Lynch, the aging owners of Great Empire, had held out long enough and were ready to cash out and retire. Along came Milwaukee-based Journal Broadcasting wanting to further build its Omaha radio cluster. Journal Broadcasting at the time was already in the Omaha market with six stations

Journal's planned purchase met opposition from the Mitchell Radio Group. In November 1998 Mitchell fought the sale on the grounds that Journal would control more than 40 percent of Omaha's annual radio advertising revenue where the benchmark for such control was loosely set at 35 percent. Recent estimates put the Journal Group as already having 36 percent of the ad revenue in Omaha

The Journal Group countered by showing several cases in which the Department of Justice approved sales that gave a single company control of over 40 percent of a market's revenue.

(The numbers at the time: Three major groups in Omaha controlled 90 percent of Omaha's ad revenue. Besides the Journal's six stations having 36 percent, Capstar Broadcasting Corporation of Austin with four stations was estimated to have 37 percent, and the Mitchell Group with four stations was estimated at 17 percent.)

After a six-month delay the FCC sided with Journal and the sale was completed in June 1999. Great Empire walked away with 98.5 million for its twelve stations that included WOW AM/FM

Ken Fearnow was out. After overseeing the stations since 1978 Fearnow was moved to a management position at the Journal's Wichita stations. Jim McKernan was the manager for Journal's Omaha cluster and took over the WOW stations.

McKernan said his first job in broadcasting 20 years earlier coincidentally was in sales at WOW. More recently he worked sales at KPTM Fox 42 before joining Journal Broadcasting.

McKernan had big ideas and wasted little time putting them into practice, often in a seemingly hasty fashion that sometimes drew criticism.

He was outspoken with his comments. McKernan made frequent public references to WOW's old image as a "hick image." Though not far from inaccurate by some accounts, the outspoken McKernan only enraged Country fans for being called hicks.

The AM had been simulcasting overnights and morning drive since 1983. Within days the WOW AM/FM simulcast hours were split apart. McKernan then focused on updating the FM programming while cutting the staff on the AM.

A new PD was brought in from a Country station in Madison, Wisconsin. Tim Oaks replaced Trish Mathews, who earlier saw the writing on the wall and was already gone, having made a significant move to Country legend WSM Nashville as music director.

The morning jock, Bobby Quinn known on-air as "The Lone Ranch Hand," was released despite his show ranking third in the market on the combo. His departure was said to be part of McKernan's shifting away from that "hick" image. (*OWH* July 24, 1999)

The news department was kept but news director Phil Rooney was asked to exit (former News Director Morris James had moved back to Great Empire's stations in Springfield, Missouri from where he came in 1982.) Rooney was an experienced radio newsman having worked at KOIL until 1988 then as a reporter for KFAB before joining WOW. He this time left radio altogether to become a media spokesman for the Omaha Housing Authority.

In October McKernan moved longtime popular WOW 94.1 afternoon host Spoonman (Brian Walther) to mornings on WOW 590. Spoonman unknowingly would be only a placeholder for several weeks before being shown the door.

The moves prompted one anonymous WOW employee to tell the *OWH*, "WOW was like a family. It's like a mortuary over here."

Then came the major change, a format flip from Country to Adult Standards and Nostalgia. With it, the WOW call letters after 75 years were unceremoniously discarded from the AM dial.

590 became KOMJ. McKernan said it was to make "a clean break, to be able to re-establish an identity on the AM station."



KOMJ was a set of calls used ten years earlier on 103.7, *Omaha's Magic*. McKernan resurrected them for his new *Magic 590* with the tag line, *Great Songs, Great Stars*. The Nostalgia and Adult Standards format was aimed at the 45-plus crowd.

That mature audience had just been abandoned by KOTD-FM 106.9 Plattsmouth. The station had just flipped to a free-form Pop-Rock format. 106.9 was a relatively new station with an upgraded signal that now covered Omaha, the owners harboring plans for moving studios into the metro.

Although the Nostalgia format remained on KOTD's sister AM on 1020 in Plattsmouth, its signal was dwarfed by that of KOMJ on 590.

With the changeover to KOMJ came more firings. Spoonman was replaced by Chuck Urban on mornings. Other longtime WOW Country jocks getting cut were Rusty Clark, and the Old Prospector, Ed Alexander. With Clark gone, Saturday's popular "Cracker Barrel" call-in show that he hosted passed into history. "Cracker Barrel" had been airing since 1977.

Also gone after a 14-year run was Sunday night's "Country Roots Today," a live show featuring local, regional, and national talent. The show featured bluegrass, folk, and acoustic country with remote broadcasts from local venues, that ranged from auditoriums to restaurants, and with a regular live audience called "Rooters."

The show's creator, producer, and host was Dick Zion, a Dana College graduate and accomplished musician who had toured Europe playing bluegrass music. Outside of NPR offerings, it was likely one of the last live, regularly scheduled entertainment radio shows produced in Omaha.

The new KOMJ format boosted the station that winter to a 5.9 share, almost all of it being 35-plus. It was 8th overall but was the second-highest AM station after KFAB 1110.

The historic WOW calls remained intact on the FM side, *94.1 Country*—at least for now.

590 EPILOGUE

Magic 590 lasted seven years. In April 2005 Journal swapped programming with its 1490 sports station, KOSR 1490. The KOMJ calls followed the Nostalgia format to 1490 while 590 changed calls to KXSP and joined the Fox Sports network. It continued to carry Creighton Sports and picked up Lancers Hockey play by play.

From this point, the station languished in the ratings for years, a pitiful circumstance for such a big and historic signal. Long-time newsmen Bill Jensen was eliminated in 2007, just 18 months before retirement. He remained philosophical, saying, “I think in this business, you always wonder about your job security... what happened is one of the natures of our business.” (OWH June 5, 2007)

KXSP later picked up ESPN Sports in 2015 followed by a major coup in uprooting Husker sports from KFAB beginning in 2015. The deal also included the games to be simulcast on Journal’s KEZO 92.3.

1110 KFAB Omaha

Challenges came fast and heavy in the 1990s and Omaha’s heritage station endured many of them. KFAB would emerge intact though battle-scarred by the end of the decade.

Omaha’s long-time ratings leader KFAB saw its massive numbers diminishing as the 1990s approached. The migration of music programming to the FM band was all but complete, leaving news and talk the dominant format for AM. KFAB’s music and news format, though still quite formidable and viable, was being left behind. It was time to take the leap to a News/Talk format.

The nearest competitor was KKAR, which since the late 1980s made very few inroads against the 50 thousand watt giant, even with the popular Rush Limbaugh Show that KKAR had been carrying since soon after its national debut. Besides KKAR, only WOW 590 offered a call-in show, that being “Cracker Barrel” on Saturday mornings with Joe Nittler.

For KFAB to go all News and Talk would take courage. The station’s music, weather, and hourly news formula had been enormously successful for years and was still doing fairly well. But, there was little choice. KFAB was the market’s heritage station and the one most naturally poised to grasp the News/Talk mantle and take it into the new decade.



The move was as difficult as the decision. Adjustments to the programming began immediately in January 1990. Talk shows were slated and the music was moved out.

Gary Sadlemyer recalls, “The year we made that switch, we didn’t know what we were doing. We didn’t know how to do talk radio. I was our first talk show host.” Sadlemyer further confessed, “... KFAB went through this horrible downslide. I managed to survive it. Now we’re back up there, but it was a climb. It was a tough time.”



KFAB Operations Manager Gary Sadlemyer.

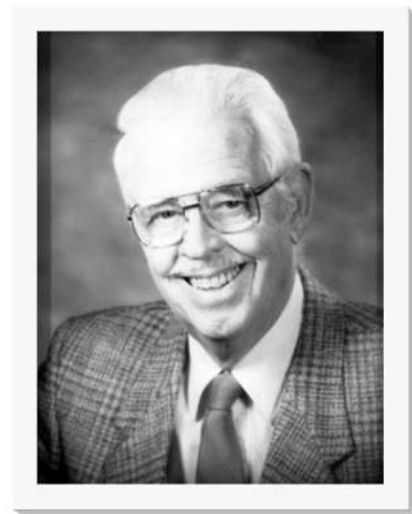
Only one music program remained on KFAB. The early morning half-hour “Songs of Faith” show featuring generic religious music was initially canceled, but according to Manager Bob Sweet, of all the new moves made by KFAB, none provoked as much listener response as this cancellation (*OWH* Feb 24, 1990).

As expected, KFAB lost some audience that migrated to the soft music outlets, primarily to KESY 104.5 and 1420 where management had immediately campaigned for KFAB’s adult music listeners. “It is unfortunate,” Sweet said, “that KFAB seems to have lost some of its longtime listeners age 55 and over.” But, he said, “KFAB has begun to attract more listeners in the 25 to 54 age group, adding that the station's ratings for its morning drive hours have increased and remains the highest-rated in the market” (*OWH* May 12, 1990).

Meanwhile, KFAB’s blowtorch status with its 50-thousand watts continued to dwarf KKAR 1180, the latter having been News/Talk since 1987. Ratings released in May 1991 showed KKAR trailing KFAB in the 12-plus category, 2.8 to 13.4.

The Spring 1992 ratings showed KFAB was in third place overall, tying with KEZO. KFAB management admitted spring numbers were poor, although fall ratings were good thanks to Husker football. Unsatisfied with this status quo, some shake-ups were on the way.

It was signaled by the loss of key personnel on the morning show. Legendary news director Walt Kavanaugh and morning host Don Cole retired in 1991. A search was begun, though the morning show wouldn’t be stabilized until fall 1992.



*Longtime KFAB Newsman
Walt Kavanaugh.*

Kavanaugh's replacement in September was Don Watson whose resume included delivering NBC Radio's hourly news. His credentials also included WJR Detroit and KPRC Houston, both powerhouse news stations.

Besides being named news director, Watson was named program director and the new morning anchorman. Tom Johnson who had served as interim morning news anchorman until Watson's arrival was shifted to afternoon news anchor from 4 to 6 p.m. Kent Pavelka continued as operations manager and returned to Cornhusker basketball coverage (*OWH* Sept 12, 1992).

Don Cole's replacement on the morning show in October 1992 was Jim Brady from WBAP Fort Worth. Brady was a 28-year radio veteran with 20 of those years on morning shows.

After three years as general manager of KFAB including overseeing its conversion from full-service to News/Talk, Bob Sweet resigned in October to take a job at KDON Monterrey, California.

Sweet handed the reins over to Station Manager Paul Aaron who had joined KFAB in May. Aaron had been a fly-in consultant for KFAB, assisting with the Husker football and basketball packages for three years. Sweet and Aaron had worked together at KFBK Sacramento where Aaron claimed credit for hiring an unemployed and yet-unknown Rush Limbaugh. Ironically, Limbaugh was now on competing station KKAR 1180.

Described by some as brash and arrogant, Paul Aaron sought to bolster KFAB's younger 25-54 demographic, first by adding ski reports for the younger crowd, then with recognizable names for the morning show. He immediately hired former ABC TV weatherman John Coleman in December 1992. Coleman had worked at KETV from 1961 to 1965 before going on to become a Chicago weatherman and then a regular on ABC TV's "Good Morning America."

Beginning December 21, Coleman became a morning drive news host and full-time meteorologist for KFAB. Coleman replaced Charlie Grisham, who was in the Air Force and had been called to active duty at Nellis Air Force Base near Las Vegas.

Coleman liked KFAB's commitment to weather coverage, saying, "Research shows that people in Nebraska care very strongly about two things from the media - the Cornhuskers and the weather." With an Illinois background, Coleman called KFAB, "the WGN of Omaha," comparing his station to the longtime heritage leader in Chicago (*OWH* Dec 19, 1992).

Five months later, Coleman resigned. He said he was denied a raise and that his personality on air was being squelched. He claimed that KFAB's management "tightened instead of loosened the format" and forced him to limit his contributions to doing the announcing and weather reports rather than offer personal, informal input as he originally understood.

Meanwhile, the new morning show at KQKQ 98.5 was making gains on the KFAB morning show, though the two had widely different audience demos. Overall in the 12 and older listenership, KQKQ attracted 13 percent compared to 14.6 for KFAB.

KFAB General Manager Paul Aaron said he wasn't worried. Since Arbitron began measuring the Omaha market in 1967, KFAB always has been No. 1 in the morning ratings. Exhibiting what would become a well-known brashness, Aaron further stated, "No radio station has ever beaten KFAB in the morning. And no station ever will." (*OWH* Aug 14, 1993)

Replacing Coleman on the establishment-oriented KFAB was a quite different personality from a very different station. It was Otis Twelve, the morning and somewhat irreverent personality on album-rocker Z-92.

It sounded like a joke when first announced, but KFAB manager Paul Aaron noted that Otis (real name: Doug Wesselmann) is "a very talented, funny but cerebral kind of guy." Otis after 13 years at Z-92 said he was looking for a new challenge, and jokingly added, "perhaps free Husker tickets." (*OWH* June 3, 1993)

KEZO fought Otis's departure. Management sought a temporary restraining order saying Otis had signed a contract in April 1991 that included a no-compete clause. The contract stipulated that Otis could not work for any KEZO competitor within a 100-mile radius of Omaha for two years after leaving the station.

Otis testified that he was pressured into signing in 1991 because another rock radio station, KRRK 93.3 which at that time soon pirated no fewer than nine former Z-92 staffers and management types, was about to start up in Omaha and that KEZO was requiring employees to sign such agreements or be fired.

The judge agreed the no-compete covenant was too broad, restricted ordinary business competition, and deprived Otis of his opportunity to earn a living. Otis went on the air at KFAB in July 1993.

Otis with his great voice, natural delivery, and friendly personality indeed proved to be quite knowledgeable. But his brand of humor was difficult to implement on a News/Talk station with a top-heavy demographic. There were few opportunities for him to play off of serious newsmen and farm reporters. He did like to make fun of Roger Flemmer's mention of "pork bellies" in the market reports. It wasn't long before Otis was in discussions with Classic Rock KKCD 105.9 to do its morning show.

After just a few months on AM radio, Otis left KFAB for *CD-105* in October. There, he rejoined his longtime partner from KEZO, Diver Dan Doomey, who was hired by KKCD just weeks earlier in August.

Roger W. Morgan of KOIL fame was the next big name personality pulled from Paul Aaron's hat. Morgan had been back in Omaha for about three years doing advertising, marketing, and client relations for a law firm and forming his own company, Morgan Communications. He would replace Otis Twelve in late 1993.

Morgan no longer did his "Morganizing" telephone bits that gained him fame at KOIL in the 1960s. Prank calls from stations that didn't identify themselves to the victim up front had been outlawed by the FCC.

Morgan proved more stable, staying with KFAB's morning show until April 1995. From there he was moved to mornings on sister station KGOR 99.9 to replace two syndicated shock jocks who lasted less than six weeks there.

There was one lone stabilizing force throughout the years on the KFAB morning show: Kent Pavelka. For nearly 15 years he, along with Walt Kavanagh and Don Cole, had made up the heart of the KFAB morning team.

However, Don Cole retired in July 1991 and Kavanagh followed at the end of the year. In the most recent two years, Pavelka witnessed four people - Jim Brady, John Coleman, Otis Twelve, and Don Watson - come and go from the KFAB morning show. Tim Powers, who served as interim host after Cole retired, had also left the station.

A yearning for the "old days" showed up in 1995 when an opportunity to bring back much of the classic KFAB crew for a brief appearance arose for April Fools Day. Former KFAB on-air personalities such as Walt Kavanagh, Don Cole, Warren Nielsen, Tom Johnson, and Paul Rehm, along with current broadcasters Kent Pavelka and Roger Flemmer, took turns at the microphone. They even played '60s and '70s music between patter. Gary Sadlemyer, KFAB operations supervisor, said that by midday the station had received about 275 calls from curious listeners.

One other stable ingredient departed KFAB. In 1995 NBC, the station's affiliate for forty years, was replaced by CBS in July. It was a network swap with KOIL 1180, and a return for CBS which had been KFAB's network before NBC came aboard in 1955. KOIL 1180 by this time was music-oriented, not offering enough local news to satisfy CBS.

Ops Manager Gary Sadlemyer indicated NBC was no longer the network it once was, saying the early morning "First Light with Kirk Van" was "the only decent thing they had" (*OWH* July 29, 1995).

Talk shows, nationally syndicated and local, filled the rest of KFAB's schedule. From NBC's *Talknet*, KFAB aired Bruce Williams who gave mostly financial advice. He was replaced on KFAB by psychologist Laura Schlessinger in fall 1994.

Local talent included Tom Becka, replacing afternoon talk show host Jerry Hudson who was named news director. Becka, a Benson High graduate who did nine years as a stand-up comedian based in Atlanta, had been the morning DJ at sister station KGOR 99.9 after Morgan was moved over from KFAB.

Sportscaster Torri Pantaleon who had been sports fill-in in for Kent Pavelka became a reporter for KFAB in 1994, staying with its news department for five years.

Pantaleon was well-known for his work on KETV, and before that was sports director at KKAR 1290 for about five years starting around 1988. He had done play by play for the Omaha Royals as well as hosting a sports show at KKAR. Pantaleon had developed his play by play skills in earlier years as sports director at Cox Cable.

Pantaleon describes KFAB's strong news team as "the best radio news staff this market has ever seen to this point, and the way radio news is going...might be the best ever." This included news director Jerry Hudson, Dennis Friend, Terry Leahy, Walt Gibbs, Lisa Salazar, Dave Ogden, and Stacie Schmidt.

By 1995 KFAB was carrying four of the top 25 national talk-show personalities. They were Dr. Laura Schlessinger, Michael Reagan, Ken Hamblin, and Bob Grant. Locally, Tom Becka was moved from afternoons to a late morning slot (Feb 4, 1995).

KFAB's handling of Husker Sports also went through some changes under Aaron. A new contract came in October 1992 when the Huskers accepted the station's winning bid of \$825,000 a year for a three-year contract beginning in 1993. It would prove to be lucrative as the Huskers football program was closing in on two national titles during those years.

With that, Aaron upped the annual contract commitment required of affiliate stations. He demanded more air time for Husker programming that would be provided by flagship KFAB starting in the fall of 1993.

KFAB asked affiliates for a year-round contract to all of the sports network programs and advertising, meaning the affiliates would have to carry all football and basketball games plus pregame and post-game shows. Also, affiliates were to carry "Husker Huddle," a three-hour show Saturday mornings before football games (*OWH* March 25, 1993).

These requirements met resistance. What got affiliates up in arms the most was the year-round requirement to carry extraneous programming that included morning and afternoon sports reports, a KFAB sports weeknight call-in show for one hour at 7 p.m., road condition reports, and public service announcements for UNL academic and athletic events.

The network of 29 affiliates in Nebraska plus more in Iowa, South Dakota, and other states had very mixed reactions. While some passively agreed, others railed against the KFAB domination of their local air time.

"Nobody has a problem with paying a rights fee," Mark Ahmann, general manager of KTCH in Wayne said. "But we don't want to be carrying a road report and daily sports report and call-in show just to carry Nebraska football." The end result was that nine in-state stations dropped Husker Football.

More changes were in store before the season began. In May, Tom Johnson, who had been with KFAB for 25 years, resigned to take a job as media manager for the Nebraska lottery. Johnson had been replaced the previous season as the color announcer on the basketball network and admitted that influenced his decision. Johnson also was well known among Husker fans for announcing scores on football Saturdays for years.

In July, Jack Payne was fired from the Huskers football broadcast booth. Payne had been part of the Husker announcing staff for all but two seasons since he came to Omaha in 1951 as sports director at WOW 590 and WOWT Channel 6.



*Local sports presenter/personality
Jack Payne.
(Courtesy: Nebraska
Broadcasters Association.)*

Aaron said there was room in the broadcast booth for only four people: Kent Pavelka, color commentator Gary Sadlemyer, producer Chris Walz and spotter Al Mackiewicz.

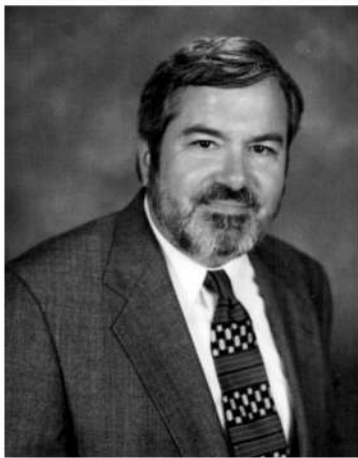
Payne said he could understand the cut being for economical reasons. However, "To me," Payne said, "this business about four men in the booth is the best tap dancing since vaudeville and probably just as hilarious." (*OWH* Aug 6, 1993)

Somewhere along the line, top management overseeing KFAB said, "enough." Paul Aaron left KFAB in July 1994 saying his outside business interests were no longer compatible with those of the station. No details were given, but some stories surfaced indicating there was animosity in the departure. Indeed, some of Aaron's ideas and actions in future months appeared to be vengeance against KFAB.

Aaron was replaced in September by Chuck Jewell whose experience included WHO and KIOA Des Moines and WNAX Yankton.

The morning show was revamped in September 1995 when Charlie Stone was brought in as the new morning host and program director. Stone, not to be confused with the Charlie Stone who worked at Omaha's KOIL 1290 in the 1970s, came from WROK Rockford, Illinois. Stone replaced Roger W. Morgan, who moved to the company's FM station, KGOR, several months earlier.

Tumultuous changes came in 1996. Two nearly simultaneous events affected the station even more than Aaron's regime had. And, Aaron was behind one of them.



*KFAB General Manager
Chuck Jewell.*

*(Courtesy: Nebraska Broadcasters
Association.)*

First came the loss of UNL Cornhusker sports. The Huskers had been riding high in the mid-1990s. The women's volleyball just clinched the national title in December, the Husker men's basketball team was on pace to win the NIT in April, and Husker football won its second consecutive national championship on January 2nd at the Fiesta Bowl. This, as KFAB's three-year contract with Husker sports was coming to an end.

KFAB had paid nearly 869 thousand dollars for this season's broadcast rights. Now the University of Nebraska was seeking a million per season, plus an annual 50 thousand dollar escalation for five years.

Interested parties besides Henry Broadcasting (KFAB) included Mitchell Broadcasting (KKAR) and Great Empire (WOW). Mitchell was still bitter that his offer made in 1992 was rejected when the university opted for KFAB's slightly lower bid to maintain better coverage than KKAR could offer.

Bids came in from Henry Broadcasting, Host Learfield Cornhusker Sports, and a new company formed exclusively for bidding for the rights, Great Plains Media. Notably absent was John Mitchell, saying "the timing wasn't right." (*OWH* January 16, 1996).

Great Plains Media was headed by former KFAB General Manager Paul Aaron and Dale Jensen of Lincoln. Unmentioned until much later was that Norton Warner who owned KLIN Lincoln and John Mitchell were also involved, along with a silent partner, J. Robert Duncan of Duncan Aviation.

The only indication of Mitchell's connection to Great Media may have been a letter he sent UNL Regent Charles Wilson saying "that Great Plains' bid was good for the university." (*OWH* Feb 25, 1996).

The bidding deadline was January 15. The winning bid was from Great Plains Media Inc. for \$8.6 million, \$1.6 million of it for the first year. The upstart bested KFAB and Henry Broadcasting's bid of \$7 million and Host Learfield Cornhusker Sports' \$6.25 million bid.

Aaron and Jensen immediately formed Pinnacle Sports Productions of Elkhorn to run the Nebraska network. The new contract would take effect on August 1.

Just weeks later in March, Aaron announced that Husker sporting events would go to KKAR 1290 and KGDE 101.9, the latter a Lincoln station but with an Omaha translator, K299AK 107.7. KFAB, the flagship station for Husker football since 1926, was out.

Lack of an FM partner, Aaron said, removed KFAB from consideration. Indeed, Chuck Jewell, general manager of KFAB, said his station wanted to keep Nebraska football on AM and would not include sister station KGOR 99.9 in its bid.

"I don't want to destroy the ratings on my FM by putting Nebraska sports on it," Jewell said. "People don't listen to KGOR for sports. They listen to it for 'golden oldies.' Jewell further said, "Putting it on FM is death. People don't listen to FM for sports and news. They listen to FM for music. That's why we have AM stations." (*OWH* Apr 5, 1996)

Aaron's hard feelings for KFAB continued to be evident when longtime Husker announcer Kent Pavelka, who succeeded Lyle Bremser after doing color for him for years, went into negotiations for a new contract.

Aaron publicly ridiculed Pavelka's initial negotiating requests as excessive, while Pavelka claimed Pinnacle showed no serious interest in negotiating with him anyway. Pavelka was then replaced with a perceived unknown from Virginia, Warren Swain. KKAR paid for half of Swain's contract and hired him as sports director.

To be fair, Swain was a Midwesterner and a seasoned sports play by play announcer. Though brought in from Charlottesville where he had been calling University of Virginia games, Swain had previously worked at KHAS Hastings, and for ten years at KMA in Shenandoah. Among other duties at KMA, he called Creighton University basketball games when the Bluejays couldn't find an Omaha station to carry them.

After leaving KMA, Swain spent three years at KUGN in Eugene covering the University of Oregon, two years on KRNT in Des Moines covering Drake, and eleven years on WINA in Charlottesville covering the University of Virginia. He had the right credentials.

Aaron soon discovered that KFAB had exclusive rights the next year to do the post-game talk shows with Husker coach Tom Osborne. Admittedly displeased, Aaron defiantly announced his own locker room show will have the people "who most listeners want to hear from. They want to hear from the players who actually made the play." Aaron stubbornly refused to acknowledge that Tom Osborne was nearly a god to Husker fans.

Kent Pavelka bid Husker fans a farewell following a UNL basketball game on March 29th at Madison Square Garden in New York. "KFAB Radio has been with Nebraska and to many, one and the same since 1926. So I would be remiss were I not to say that this broadcast truly represents an end to an era, an era that we hope you will remember fondly."

The new Husker air team debuted in September 1996. Joining Warren Swain was Adrian Fiala, Terry Connealy, Tommie Frazier (the quarterback who led the Huskers to national titles in 1994 and 1995), Jerry Tagge (the Husker quarterback who played in the 1972 Game of the Century beating Oklahoma), and Gary Java.

There was more vengeance to come. Two months into the season KFAB was booted from the Nebraska University press box that November. It was because Pinnacle was upset over KFAB's airing play summaries during the game. KFAB General Manager Chuck Jewell noted it was the first time in 40 years that a KFAB staff member has not been in the press box.

Pavelka and KFAB briefly returned to airing Husker football when Pavelka was invited by CBS radio to be the sideline reporter for the Huskers' Orange Bowl game on December 31. KFAB would carry the Orange Bowl game from CBS while Warren Swain's coverage would be on the 24-station Pinnacle Sports Productions network that included KKAR 1290 and KGDE 101.9. (The Nebraska Cornhuskers beat Virginia Tech 41 to 21.)

Despite Aaron's efforts, it was an uphill battle for Husker ratings. By 1998 it was shown that Pinnacle's two Omaha stations suffered a 46 percent drop from KFAB's final season in quarter-hour ratings on football Saturdays. The combined KKAR 1290 and KGDE 101.3 audience of 17,500 compared poorly to KFAB's 1995 average metro Omaha audience of 32,200.

Aaron, in a stretch, countered that while KKAR may not cover the metro, some other network stations are filling in those holes. Aaron tried to make the case that some Omaha listeners are drawn to nearby signals that carry the network such as those coming in from Fremont and Shenandoah, and when combined with Omaha's numbers could surpass those of KFAB. Still, KFAB's pre-and post-game shows outdrew the two Mitchell stations combined.

Besides a smaller coverage area offered by the two Omaha signals, there was strong criticism of the new broadcast team. Letters and newspaper columnists criticized Swain's initial broadcasts as sounding like a high school game with no hype or enthusiasm to which Husker fans were accustomed.

As late as 1999, various *OWH* samplings of listener opinion showed numbers running very strongly against the Swain team. Aaron's rather testy response was to say he wouldn't let public sentiment dictate who would be the play by play announcer. "I don't run my company based on public votes," he declared (*OWH* July 1, 1999). Few, if any, business people or programmers would agree with that philosophy.

In 1998 KFAB's website began offering Husker play by play from a downloadable program marketed by Pinnacle. KFAB snatched the webcast up when KKAR passed on first option rights. By this time Pinnacle was feeding the Huskers broadcasts to 60 stations, 24 of them out of state, and now, to the KFAB website. The Huskers, in a fashion, had returned to KFAB.

Paul Aaron offered a bone to Kent Pavelka in 1999 with a veiled job in the Husker football broadcast booth. Aaron wanted Pavelka primarily in pregame, halftime, and postgame shows to offer a perspective based on his observations from the past, but to stay mostly silent during the games. Pavelka declined. The spot was filled by Jim Rose, an NU broadcast crew veteran. (*OWH* Sept 5, 1999)

With the loss of the Huskers, a second major change at KFAB came at the same time. Corporate buyers came calling.

President Bill Clinton's Telecommunications Act of 1996 opened the flood gates to multiple station ownership and the buying sprees began. Just a week after KFAB lost rights to Husker games in March 1996, Henry Broadcasting sold KFAB 1110 and KGOR 99.9 to American Radio Systems of Boston. There's only speculation that there was a connection between the two events.

The sale was actually a merger involving a 64 million dollar stock swap. Henry Broadcasting's debt was assumed, plus cash, making the whole deal worth about \$115 million. Henry owner Charlton Buckley joined American Radio's board as part of the deal.

The deal set up a spinoff of the two Omaha stations in October 1996 as newcomer Triathlon Broadcasting looked to expand its holdings in the market. Triathlon had just purchased KXKT 103.7 and KTNP (ex-KRRK) 93.3 Bennington in April.

KFAB 1110 and KGOR 99.9 were sold to Triathlon for \$39 million in a deal that included the Muzak franchise. The sale was announced in October, but the closing date kept getting pushed back even though Triathlon had been OK'd with AT&T Credit Company for an 80 million dollar line of credit. The deal finally closed on June 1, 1997.

In the interim between the agreement and the closing, Triathlon agreed to buy Pinnacle Sports for five million dollars (*OWH* March 21, 1997). This created speculation that Husker sports may return to KFAB from KKAR and KGDE. But Pinnacle and the Husker Athletic Dept quickly squelched any rumors by announcing that the original contracts will be honored for the remaining four years of the term.

With new ownership came the personnel changes. Even though new owner Norman Feuer of Triathlon Broadcasting told the staff that no one would lose his or her job, three days later KFAB news director and morning co-host Jerry Hudson was fired (*OWH* June 14 1997). Chuck Jewell, the general manager, said "it's a new company ... and we just felt that we needed new leadership..." Longtime Omaha radio newsman Walt Gibbs was also out, forced into retirement.

Hudson was replaced by Carol Schrader, a former news anchor at KETV Ch 7. It was a return to radio for Schrader who began in 1975 as a reporter for KLNG 1490. Schrader joined KETV as a reporter in 1977 and worked her way up to nightly co-anchor until 1996 when she walked off the set in the middle of the 5 p.m. newscast following an argument with station management (*OWH* Oct. 1, 1996).

Programming moves followed. Morning-show host Charlie Stone went to afternoons. Gary Sadlemyer, the afternoon host with Mary O'Keefe, moved to mornings joining Ms. Schrader and Sports Director Kent Pavelka.

Mary O'Keefe, besides doing "Drive Time Omaha" afternoons on KFAB, was busy programming midday jazz shows on KIOS 91.5, plus hosting a weekend show on KVNO 97.7, "Saturday Concert." She also played drums in her husband's band, the Steve Thornburg Quartet.

A weather event in the fall of 1997 tested KFAB's news resolve under its new owners. An unusual winter storm dumped nearly a foot of wet, heavy snow on the region on October 26. Residents woke up to see a freakily different snow-covered landscape: All the trees were much shorter, appearing as if a huge, invisible hand was pushing them down from the top.

Tree damage was massive. Power was out to 130 thousand homes. It was a Sunday morning and all media was lightly staffed, so the news stations got a late start on the story.

KKAR 1290 claimed to be the first with the story at about 4:30 am. Neil Nelkin says he got a call from Mayor Hal Daub who wanted to get information out on the air.

KFAB went full tilt with coverage even though its studios were dark without power. As regular staff hastily arrived that morning, a Shure mixer with a nine-volt battery was pressed into service so they could take calls and feed the transmitter via a phone line. Some copy and bulletins had to be read by flashlight. The backup generator at last took over, but later burned out. Another generator was loaned to the station by a construction company.

Most of KFAB's staff made it into the station that Sunday, including Kent Pavelka, news director Carol Schrader, Gary Sadlemyer, Charlie Stone, McGraw Milhaven, Torri Pantaleon, Dennis Friend, Mary O'Keefe, Mike Shane, and Butch Delaney

KFAB called experts and government officials to fill out on-air coverage. Local callers were aired with their stories. Some Dundee residents dropped off sandwiches and coffee for the staff.

KFAB stayed with the story until regular programming Monday morning. Other Omaha stations offered updates throughout the day, mainly KKAR 1290 and WOW 590 and its FM 94.1. Television recorded the aftermath with some crews out even during the snowfall catching snapping limbs on video.

Within days the city hired an outside crew to clean up the city's broken tree limbs and branches that residents began stacking up curbside, some debris blocking driver's views at intersections. Cleanup took weeks and cost 50 million dollars. Many homeowners without power waited weeks for restoration, the residents staying with friends and relatives or at hotels.

KFAB's fading image as Omaha's go-to station for news was restored, showing it still had the chops to deliver when needed.

The following year the consolidation selling frenzy again hit the KFAB 1110 and KGOR 99.9 duo. Triathlon Broadcasting announced its sale to Capstar, a division of Hicks, Muse, Tate, and Furst, in July 1998 for 190 million, subject to FCC approval.

Among Capstar's holdings were Nebraska stations KZKX Seward, KTGL Beatrice, KKNB Crete, KIBZ Lincoln. After swallowing up Triathlon, Capstar owned 113 AMs and 266 FMs.

This dealing was quite complex. In August 1998 Chancellor Media Corp. of Irving, Texas, had agreed to buy Capstar Broadcasting Corp. of Austin, Texas, just after Capstar had agreed to buy Triathlon Broadcasting Co. This deal also included Omaha's Muzak service and Pinnacle Sports Productions, owners of broadcast rights to University of Nebraska football and other Cornhusker sports.

On the day Capstar closed on Triathlon, Paul Aaron and Dale Jensen exercised an option they had in their deal with Triathlon allowing them to buy back Pinnacle Sports. Aaron would not disclose the price of the re-purchase, but with two years left on Pinnacle's five-year contract with UNL, the cost was estimated at \$2.5 million.

In the end, Chancellor paid \$4.1 billion in stock and assumed debt for Capstar. After the acquisition, Chancellor would own 463 radio stations in 105 U.S. markets, making it the largest radio station owner in the country with a total value of about 17 billion dollars.

During these tumultuous times when staff had to wonder who their bosses were and were going to be, Mike Frazier was hired as KFAB news director replacing Dennis Friend in August 1999. Friend resigned rather than remain as a station news reporter. Frazier had been a reporter for two years on KMTV Ch 3 until resigning in 1997 to open a short-lived Cajun restaurant.

Frazier said he had plans to "shake things up" at KFAB. "It will be more timely, more local, and a lot more live. We're going to be where the TV stations are tuning in to see what's going on."

Tom Becka was fired in June 1999 for contacting a Kansas City talk station. KFAB General Manager Donn Seidholz questioned Becka's loyalty after learning of this in a *World-Herald* story. Two weeks later, Becka left for a new gig at KMBZ Kansas City. Only Sadlemyer and Pavelka remained as names from KFAB's heady, earlier years.

Meanwhile, the fast-moving buying sprees continued. By October 1999 Clear Channel Broadcasting had acquired AM/FM Inc., the latter being an outgrowth of a merger between Capstar and Chancellor Media, each owning stations numbering in the hundreds. KFAB and KGOR, once locally-owned stations, now belonged to yet a fourth company in less than four years.

Thus capped the year that KFAB celebrated 75 years on the air. Signing on in 1924 as a Lincoln station, the facility moved to Omaha in the 1940s and developed into the market's heritage station.

KFAB was the primary station for Husker sports over the years, starting with the first broadcast in 1926. In 1951 the station was the first to go to 24-hour operation.

The format of light music and hourly news with live and local personalities watching the weather, news, and traffic succeeded for years in providing comfortable companionship to its listeners. This gave way to all-talk in 1990. KFAB now entered the new millennium as just one of 830 stations in the Clear Channel group.

1110 EPILOGUE

KFAB regained Husker rights in 2001 but was outbid again for the 2015-20 season by Journal Broadcasting and its Omaha AM and FM stations. Journal's WOW 590 had the signal coverage to match that of KFAB 1110 simply due to its lower frequency characteristics, although night games would suffer from distant station interference in the secondary coverage area.

The strong KEZO FM penetration was a huge plus in the negotiations, a factor that the management at KFAB/KGOR disregarded when they lost the rights the first time around in the 1990s.

While NU football still reigns supreme, the Omaha sports fan has changed. Torri Pantaleon credits technology, particularly the 24-hour sports channels. Omaha, since opening the Qwest/CenturyLink Center, has hosted NCAA basketball regionals as well as Olympic trials in different sports.

Pantaleon further notes, “While having the College World Series since 1950, I never got a sense that Omaha was that much of a baseball town. Then there was the MLB strike and CBS decided to air some of the CWS games. Shortly after, ESPN grabbed the CWS as its own, and now here we are.”

KFAB switched networks again around 2003 dropping CBS for ABC. It later went to Fox News in 2005.

Gary Sadlemyer and the morning show stabilized with the addition of Roger Olson and Kent Pavelka. Tom Becka returned to Omaha for a stint on KKAR 1290.

Paul Aaron sold Pinnacle to Host Communications in 2006, though he kept a role in the new company.

Clear Channel went private in 2009. The company announced that it would move to more centralized programming and lay off 1,500 employees, or approximately 7% of its workforce, on January 20, 2009. The reasoning was bleak economic conditions and debt from its transition to a private company.

Between January and May 2009, Clear Channel eliminated 2,440 positions, including some in Omaha.

Clear Channel rebranded to iHeart Media in 2014.

1290 KOIL KKAR Omaha

KOIL 1290 hit a low point in the 1990s then was sold to Mitchell Broadcasting. After that, the famous call letters began a migration, first to Bellevue on 1180 kHz, then to Plattsmouth on 1020, and back to Omaha on 1290. In the interim, 1290 was KKAR 1290. The station’s high point came for the ‘90s came in 1996 when Mitchell won rights to Husker football for five years.

KOIL’s decade began with fading ratings and staff desertions over just several months. The heritage Top 40-turned-Oldies station was airing a traditional library that included late 1950s rock, but FM competition arrived when KGOR 99.9 flipped from Top 40 to Oldies in 1988. KOIL’s program director Terry Mason resigned afterward leaving for WGTO Orlando in December 1989. His morning partner, Clay Michaels, left in January 1990. It was the eighth departure from KOIL for Michaels since he started there in 1972.

Cathy Fife was brought in for sales and weekend air work in February. Her hiring came just one week after being fired from WOW where she allowed a caller on the "Cracker Barrel" show to read names of alleged figures in Omaha's current scandal involving the Franklin Community Federal Credit Union lawsuit. The identities had been under wraps until then. Fife didn't stay long, leaving for KLIN Lincoln in August.

Don Glaze was unceremoniously moved from KXKT 103.7 to KOIL's morning show in March. Disenchanted, he left within a few weeks for mornings on WOW AM and FM where he remained until 1994.

Bill Mattson took over mornings on KOIL along with newsman Roger Olson. Mattson left in August for a short stint at KCMO Kansas City. He had been with KOIL since 1982. From the original staff, only Olson remained.

With local personalities fleeing, KOIL's management turned to a syndicated programming service. KOIL signed with the Satellite Music Network's Oldies format in December in an attempt to keep the oldies image intact. News Director Roger Olson was the lone local voice doing morning news, weather, and traffic for KOIL, all the while co-hosting on sister FM KXKT. General manager Bob Dean made it clear the majority of his resources would now be devoted to the FM.

For revenue, play-by-play sports was added. Added were some Creighton Bluejays games, the Kansas City Royals, and even some Metro High School games. KOIL later added an affiliation with ESPN.

In late 1992 KOIL gave up Oldies, dropping the Satellite Music Network in favor of simulcasting the Country format that by this time was airing on sister KXKT 103.7.

The market was now saturated with stations riding the Country wave as KOIL became Omaha's fifth Country music outlet. Sports programming on KOIL pre-empted music whenever possible with play-by-play coverage of Creighton, the Kansas City Royals, and the newly added Omaha Racers.

But who was listening? KOIL dropped to an all-time low .3 in the Winter book while Valley Broadcasting began looking for a buyer.

Across the street John Mitchell watched with interest, harboring a plan to switch KKAR 1180 programming over to KOIL's better signal.

Both stations were 5000 watts, but KKAR's signal was beamed north and south from a Council Bluffs site, missing much of Omaha's west side. Even worse, KKAR had to cut power to 1000 watts at night while KOIL could remain at 5000 watts full time with a night pattern that nicely covered the metro.

Mitchell patiently waited for what he called, according to one observer, "the fire sale." It came in early 1993 when Valley Broadcasting agreed to sell its troubled property to Mitchell Broadcasting for 470 thousand dollars. The price was well below the 900 thousand Dean and financier Bob Greenlee paid for the station five years earlier.

Ironically, just two days after the agreement, KOIL's old Gates transmitter at 60th and Harrison did catch fire.

The blaze was at around 7 a.m. on May 19th. KOIL Newsman Roger Olson heard the fire call on the newsroom scanner, ran to alert Dean and watched the color drain from his boss's face. The cause of the fire was determined to be a shorted capacitor stressed from a lightning strike that occurred five days earlier. KOIL was off the air for a month.

Former KOIL engineer Charlie Goodrich was given the charred transmitter for parts. Goodrich, by this time an engineer with Martin Electronics, was familiar with the old Gates transmitter. He babysat it as a teen engineer in 1960 when it was still relatively new.

KOIL returned to the air with a new transmitter on June 23. It was a Harris SX5A solid-state five thousand watt unit. The deal with Mitchell closed on August 4.

With that, Omaha's first duopoly since 1944 was formed. By chance, KOIL was Omaha's only station in a duopoly in the 1940s that included two Lincoln stations, KFOR and KFAB. Duopolies were outlawed and KOIL was spun off in the early part of that decade.

In 1992 duopolies returned. Multiple ownership within a market was again permitted, the number limited according to market size. For Omaha at this time, a single owner could operate up to four stations--two on AM and two on FM.

KOIL 1290 was now a sister station to KKAR 1180 and KQKQ 98.5. KOIL's studios didn't have far to move, joining KQKQ and KKAR at 10th and Farnam Streets just across the downtown park Leahy Mall (also known as Central Park Mall) from 11th and Douglas Streets. The new address was in the historic LeDioyt Landmark Building.

On closing day August 20th, 1993 the move was complete. The call letters were swapped, and 1290 became KKAR and the KOIL calls were moved to the old KKAR frequency of 1180.

The original KKAR newsroom and studios were now feeding 1290. A continuous tape loop on 1180 kHz aired Steve Brown's voice saying, "K-KAR has moved," directing KKAR listeners to tune upward to 1290.



KKAR 1290's Steve Brown in action (Courtesy: Neil Nelkin).

KKAR 1290 News Talk now had a much better signal for its local News/Talk format and its coveted Rush Limbaugh Show. The 5:00 News audio from WOWT Ch 6 was added to the lineup on August 23.

Also added the same day was a local talk show featuring former Omaha Mayor Mike Boyle. Station Manager Steve Brown, already doing the 9 to 11 a.m. talk show, said Boyle's viewpoint in afternoons likely will be more liberal.

Boyle had a rather checkered career in public service. He was Omaha's mayor from 1981 until voters recalled him in 1987. He ran for mayor again in 1989, finishing first in the primary but losing the general election to P.J. Morgan. Boyle finished third in the Democratic primary for governor in 1990.

Boyle's show replaced "The Larry King Show," that had in recent weeks switched to a daytime schedule after pioneering national overnight talk on Mutual since 1978.

King's daytime show fared poorly, garnering negative listener response due to his perceived egotistic style and lack of patience with callers. "We had an overwhelming response from callers who were unhappy with the way he was treating callers," reported KKAR's Steve Brown (*OWH* Sept 4, 1993)..

Contributing to King's poor ratings was that, according to research, his nighttime listeners did not follow him to daytime. KLIN Lincoln dropped his show at the same time as KKAR. King soon left radio for a position on CNN and a newspaper column in *USA Today*.

Boyle's ratings fared no better and he left the station in October 1995. George Woods filled in for a few months, then Chris Baker was hired as the station's new afternoon talk show host. Baker was a former comedian who launched his talk show career at WIOD, a well-known cutting edge talk station in Miami. News Director Gene Taylor of WLS fame retired at the same time that Boyle left.

In December came word that Rush Limbaugh was doubling the fees for his syndicated radio talk show. Limbaugh wanted a cash fee plus free commercial air time. Normally, syndicated radio shows were aired in exchange simply for commercial air time. KKAR's contract was not yet up for renewal, so the issue was moot for the time being.

A bizarre incident in April 1994 put KKAR's morning show into the news. Steve Lundy's co-host, Kristi Prokop, went out for orange juice and a newspaper at around 4 a.m. and failed to return. The police were called, and by 9 a.m. recently-named news director Brian Barks along with KKAR Manager Steve Brown went public with the event. Brown made nervous on-air pleas to listeners to help locate Ms. Prokop or her vehicle.

At around 10:30 that morning came word that she had phoned her husband from Minneapolis, saying she had been abducted at knifepoint and blindfolded. Upon arriving in Minneapolis, the lone abductor let her go unharmed.

Prokop returned to work after about two weeks of recovery from her ordeal. The FBI investigated her story but with scant information or evidence, made no arrests. Doubters were thinking perhaps it was nothing more than a meltdown, but they too had no more to go on than the Feds. Kristi Prokop retired from radio four years later after a career lasting seven years at KKAR.

Tony Wike returned to Mitchell's stations joining Lundy and Prokop on the morning show in May 1994 as producer and co-host. It was a reunion of sorts, as Wike was known in an earlier incarnation as Captain Tony of the "Sweet 98 Breakfast Flakes" with Steve Lundy on KQKQ 98.5.

Some KKAR 1290 quarter-hour ratings in 1996 came very close to those of KFAB 1110. Among the local talk show hosts, KFAB's Tom Becka was leading the pack but KKAR's Steve Brown was close behind.

Among sports talkers, KKAR's Sports Nightly with Gary Java and Jim Rose was just trailing KFAB's McGraw Milhaven and Jeff McKnight.

Chris Baker left afternoons at KKAR in February 1997 to launch a morning show on Mitchell's new station, modern-rock KGDE 101.9 FM, *the Edge*. Known as a bit of a rabble-rouser on KKAR, Baker said he won't be "going after" any of the other morning shows, instead, focusing on a young audience.

Baker worked the phones with the young crowd on KGDE nicely, but his effort was short-lived. He soon was back doing a morning sports on KOIL 1180 by 1998 as well as *Sports Nightly* on KKAR 1290 for the statewide Pinnacle Sports Network.

By this time KKAR entered an agreement with Metro Traffic that would allow Metro to use KKAR's Old Market studio facilities for news reporting. KKAR thus farmed out its ill-fated attempt at being Omaha's news leader leaving KFAB undefeated in that arena. Metro, meanwhile, was building studios of its own near 114th & West Center Road.

More staffing changes came in December 1997. George Woods, recently fired as morning co-host at WOW AM and FM, temporarily took over the 3 to 6 p.m weekday slot while the station sought a permanent replacement for the syndicated Gary Burbank show no longer being distributed.

That same month Jimmie "J.J." Walker joined KKAR. Walker was nationally known for his role on the 1970s CBS sitcom "Good Times." Before TV, he got his start in radio and as a stand up comic, now making his return to radio in 1996.

Walker never settled in Omaha during his year in the market. Instead, he stayed at hotel suites while continuing to do shows and appearances on the road. His reason for leaving KKAR was given as being busy on the stand-up comedy circuit, although "Dyn-o-mite" stopped being funny years earlier.

Chris Baker left *Sports Nightly* when the show was inexplicably moved from KKAR 1180's studios to KLIN Lincoln in June 1998. He was replaced by new hosts that included Jim Rose. Insiders say Baker may have upset a sponsor. The show continued to be carried on KKAR as well as other stations on Pinnacle Sport's statewide network.

Otis Twelve joined KKAR in December 1998 when KKCD declined to renew his contract. He was Jimmie "J.J." Walker's replacement the following month.



Westwood One syndicated host Jim Bohannon in-studio at 10th & Farnam with midday host Otis XII. (Courtesy: Neil Nelkin.)

Despite these reasonably big names, it was Rush Limbaugh who boosted ratings the most for KKAR. Through much of 1998 and 1999 Limbaugh's 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. show was at times number one during his three hours, thanks to a focus on controversies in President Clinton's administration, particularly the Monica Lewinsky scandal.

But in the mid-1990s when KKAR was struggling with its News/Talk format, owner John Mitchell sought something much bigger than well-known talk show figures for his AM station. In June 1995 Mitchell again went after University of Nebraska football.

Still smarting from his 1992 bid being rejected in favor of KFAB's superior signal even though his was the higher bid, Mitchell learned that the University of Nebraska Lincoln (UNL) Board of Regents was considering a three-year extension of Husker rights to KFAB.

Mitchell protested. Mitchell said he met with UNL administrators and made several offers. He said KKAR is willing to pay \$50,000 more than KFAB over each of the next three years or more. Additionally, KKAR would pay 25 percent of gross receipts over \$2.05 million. Those would be the minimum offers. (*OWH* July 11, 1995)

The regents instead of considering the offers withdrew the extension proposal in favor of seeking bids for a new contract.

UNL was seeking to increase revenue to a million per season along with expanded broadcasts of Husker sports nationwide. This included an increase in the number of sports besides football to be aired such as men's and women's basketball and volleyball games.

Mitchell then became part of a new firm formed exclusively for winning Husker Sports broadcasting rights, Great Plains Media. The firm was headed by former KFAB manager Paul Aaron and included Mitchell, KLIN Lincoln owner Norton Warner, Dale Jensen, and J. Robert Duncan of Duncan Aviation. With the exception of Duncan who was a silent partner, the group got together to draw up a bid.

Great Plains Media kept a low profile during the bidding process. Mitchell kept his involvement mum, notably absent as an individual from the overall bidding. When asked, he said the timing was bad. He noted that the awarding of the contract might not come until June which leaves a short time to sell advertising. He also pointed out that terms of the contract had changed from the current contract with KFAB. (*OWH* January 16, 1996).

There were hints that Mitchell might have had the inside track. Mitchell had sent UNL Regent Charles Wilson a letter saying "that Great Plains' bid was good for the University." (*OWH* Feb 25, 1996).

UNL received three bids for Husker rights in January 1996. KFAB offered 7 million dollars and Host Learfield Cornhusker Sports bid 6.25 million dollars. Great Plains Media of Elkhorn handily won the Husker rights with \$8.6 million (*OWH* Feb 2, 1996).

After the win, Great Plains Media formed Pinnacle Broadcasting to handle the Husker broadcasts, headed by Paul Aaron. Though Mitchell's KKAR and Warner's KLIN had the inside track, stations were offered opportunities to bid for rights. KFAB dropped out saying the price was too high. Journal, owners of KEZO 92.3 dropped out as Pinnacle also wanted an AM station and Journal's AM was only 1000 watts on 1490 which was deemed "too weak."

In April, Pinnacle announced Mitchell's KKAR 1290 and sister FM KGDE 101.9 to be the Omaha affiliates on the Cornhusker Sports Network. Neither Aaron nor Mitchell would give financial details of their agreement. (*OWH* April 1, 1996). KLIN 1400 Lincoln would be the originating station.

Mitchell and his KKAR/KDGE management and staff were elated. Mitchell credited his sports staff at KKAR as part of the reason that his stations were selected. The full-power FM signal of KDGE in Lincoln and its younger listeners may also have been a factor.

KFAB's error was omitting sister FM KGOR 99.9 from the deal. GM Chuck Jewell infamously said, "I don't want to destroy the ratings on my FM by putting Nebraska sports on it. People don't listen to KGOR for sports. They listen to it for 'golden oldies'" (*OWH* Apr 5, 1996).

Paul Aaron said this removed KFAB from consideration as the Omaha affiliate on the Pinnacle Sports network. It was also no secret that Aaron had a grudge against KFAB.

KGDE 101.9 was licensed to Lincoln. Mitchell touted the FM factor, noting "It's a very strong 100,000-watt station that covers Lincoln massively." But to adequately cover Omaha on FM, the station depended on its low-power Omaha translator K299AK on 107.7.

KKAR's lesser signal, 5000 watts vs. KFAB's 50,000 watts, was shrugged off by Aaron, saying no one would have difficulty hearing Nebraska broadcasts on more than one station nearly anywhere in the state.

The new contract reflected much of Aaron's earlier demands on affiliates made while he managed KFAB in the 1992-1995 season. Riemenschneider recalls, "Besides the money side of the agreement, the stations offered up a bank of commercial time to be used by Great Plains/Pinnacle on the stations, I don't remember how many spots we offered...it seems like it was around 250 spots a month... In addition, stations would run features on players (Meet the players) and set up the nightly sports show, all of this consuming a significant amount of commercial and programming inventory."



*Marty Riemenschneider,
Executive Vice President
& General Manager
for John Mitchell's Omaha group.*

Riemenschneider adds, "We also had to provide the programming for the nightly sports show and distribute it on our dime." Regarding Aaron, "He was one tough, and I mean TOUGH negotiator. I heard stories about how bad he was to work for when he ran KFAB, but that was from the street talk. I didn't like his tactics, but he was extremely successful with Pinnacle."

Later in the year as the fall football season got underway, the Mitchell stations struggled seeking the dominance that KFAB once enjoyed with Husker broadcasts. Listener complaints about the signal, coupled with complaints about Kent Pavelka's replacement on play-by-play, resulted in satisfactory but not overwhelmingly good ratings for KKAR.



Revenue was also an issue. Per Riemenschneider, "It was one tough contract, and made it virtually impossible to make any money on the product. We lost money almost every year until we finally broke even the last two years. Mitchell's theory was that if we lost \$100,000 on the package, we still couldn't buy that much outside advertising for that same money to get the same ratings results.

What made the contract tough for affiliates was competitive advertising. "They (Pinnacle) even competed with the local affiliates for advertisers. Pinnacle closed so many business categories and made them exclusive to the network so it was hard for stations to go out and sell local/regional advertising that didn't conflict with the network mandates.

“Another element of this contract...was that Pinnacle had the right to veto any advertiser on the station’s broadcast. Because we had stations in Omaha, Fremont, Kearney, and North Platte, we had a strong reach across the state. As such, we tried to get some regional advertisers to go with us. One of our sales reps had worked in Chicago before relocating to Omaha, and she had experience in network sports sales regionally. We had the Ford Dealers Association wrapped up for a nice package, but when Aaron found out about it, he didn’t approve of it, and ultimately took it from us and put it inside the network.”

KKAR ratings on game days were, as expected, higher during its first season as the Omaha flagship station. But the play-by-play coverage numbers were modest compared to those that KFAB enjoyed the season before.



After capturing the Husker contract, KKAR ran a "Big Red Corvette" promotion. (Courtesy: Neil Nelkin.)

By 1998 it was shown that Pinnacle's two Omaha stations suffered a 46 percent drop in quarter-hour ratings on football Saturdays compared to KFAB’s final season. Aaron, in a stretch, countered that while KKAR may not cover the metro, some other network stations are filling in those holes. Meanwhile, KFAB continued to outshine KKAR on its pre-game and post-game shows.

From KKARs vantage point GM Marty Riemenschneider recalls, “KFAB did a great job positioning us as the little guys and held onto their heritage and actually got the ratings the first couple of years, and KKAR didn’t. Fortunately, at some point in time, KKAR did see increased ratings with the Husker package as well as being the affiliate for Rush Limbaugh and we actually beat KFAB 25-54 in a couple of books.”

Pinnacle and Mitchell’s stations held on for the full five years as contracted. The rights returned to KFAB in 2001.

1290 EPILOGUE

Waitt Radio took over running Mitchell’s stations including KKAR 1290 on April 1, 2000. The agreement was a local marketing time brokerage agreement (LMA), which means Mitchell retains ownership of the stations and licenses while Waitt takes over operations and programming. Had KKAR been sold, the Husker contract would have been terminated according to the Pinnacle Sports agreement.

Waitt Radio bought Mitchell's 16 stations a year and a half later for \$36.6 million. John Mitchell gained a listing as a director of Wait Radio as part of the deal, though Norman Waitt, Jr. remained the sole shareholder of Waitt Radio.

KKAR reached no. 2 in the Fall 2000 ARB thanks to Husker football but dropped to 13th in the Spring 2001 ratings. Also hurting the station was the loss of Rush Limbaugh whose show moved to KFAB. Limbaugh's network and KFAB by this time were both owned by Clear Channel Broadcasting.

Otis Twelve left KKAR in 2001 shortly after the 9/11 attacks, later saying it was because, "After 9/11, everything became jingoistic. You were expected to provoke, not inform. That's what made money. It just wasn't for me." (*Omaha Magazine*, Nov/Dec 2014). He was replaced by former WOWT Ch 6 newsman Jim Fagin who had been with KFAB for two years.

After losing Limbaugh, KKAR countered by beefing up its local staff. The station added several defectors from KFAB who had just been downsized in major corporate changes at Clear Channel. It included Kent Pavelka (after 28 years with KFAB), Charlie Stone, Mary O Keefe, and Terry Leahy. The new line-up for KKAR listed Pavelka and Leahy mornings, Steve Brown 9 to noon, Jim Fagin noon to 3, and Charlie and Mary 3 to 6 p.m.

In August 2005 most Clear Channel News/Talk stations made the switch to Fox News. KKAR stayed with CBS but picked up ABC's Paul Harvey that had been airing on KFAB.

In November 2008 the long-form morning news format was replaced by the nationally-syndicated "Imus in the Morning." Outside of local newscasts and weather updates, KKAR's weekday schedule at this point consisted entirely of nationally-syndicated talk shows.

Tough economic times led to job cuts at many radio groups nationwide in 2012. KKAR morning co-hosts Terry Leahy and Brian Barks were ousted. Tom Becka returned to Omaha radio in April hosting afternoons on KKAR via phone lines from Fargo where he was employed at KFGO. Becka later moved back to Omaha to take over the show once again as an Omahan.

The KOIL call letters returned to 1290, its heritage home, in June 2012. With the return, KOIL's 1960 identifier was dusted off and put in place: *The Mighty 12-90*.

The KOIL call sign is the market's second-oldest, right behind KFAB. Its migration path had been to 1180 Bellevue-Omaha in 1993, then to 1020 Plattsmouth-Omaha in 2003, back to 1180 in 2009, and back home in 2012.

THE OTHER AM STATIONS

660 KCRO Omaha

Nebraska by the 1990s had eleven religious stations. Three were in the Omaha market--KGBI 100.7, KLNG 1560 Council Bluffs, and KCRO 660, the 1000-watt daytimer owned by Sam Smulyan's Indianapolis-based RadiOmaha.

KCRO continued as a commercial religious broadcaster with little change through the 1990s. The station broadcast with a daytime-only license at a thousand watts on a frequency that affords very good secondary ground wave coverage beyond Omaha, reaching Sioux City and nearly to Des Moines and Kansas City.

Staffing remained stable during the decade with Paul Rehm continuing as General Manager, and WOW and KFAB veteran Gene Piatt as Operations and Program Director all through the 1990s.

In November 1992 Rehm estimated that 15,000 people tune in to his commercial Christian station each week. That surpassed KLNG 1560, whose General Manager Kevin Warren described as a conservative estimate 6,000 to 7,000 listeners each week.

KCRO programmed music but particularly aired teaching and preaching programs with a lean towards Pentecostal or charismatic preachers.

The KCRO 1995 lineup included "Through the Bible" with Vernon McGee; "Truths that Transform" with the Rev. D. James Kennedy, a Presbyterian pastor in Florida; and "Randall Terry Live," a call-in talk program whose host was the former head of the anti-abortion group Operation Rescue.

A local theology-based program with strong views was "Crisis Point" at 4 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays, an outreach of three ministries in Omaha. After this program began in November 1998, KCRO listenership increased 25 percent.

The growth of talk radio in the 1990s led to more theology-driven talk, both on secular and Christian stations, both types having strong, conservative views. The strong conservative link between secular and nonsecular programming was most apparent in May 1997 when KFAB canceled conservative talk show host Michael Reagan and replaced him locally with Reverend Lee King. Reagan's nationally syndicated show then moved to KCRO.

Reagan, the adopted son of former President Ronald Reagan, had been on KFAB for four years but was in a decline according to KFAB manager Chuck Jewell, saying that during the last couple of years his ratings "have dropped like a rock." KCRO picked up Reagan's evening show in July and reported numerous positive phone calls from listeners. Rehm said Reagan "tackles issues that Rush Limbaugh won't even touch."

Rev. Lee King, however, was suspended and later fired from KFAB in early 1998 for playing a phone message from Mayor Hal Daub that was left in response to a current controversy regarding recent police actions.

660 EPILOGUE

KCRO was sold by RadiOmaha in 2001 to Eternal Broadcasting, owned by Dean Sorenson of Sioux Falls and RW. Chapin, for \$2 million. The station in turn was leased to Waitt Media.

KCRO joined the trend of daytimers applying for nighttime operation in 2002 and received permission for 54 Watts non-directional authority during darkness in January 2003. The station was already authorized for 50 watts from 6 a.m to sunrise and now could operate full time. Initially, the programming schedule was extended only to 11 p.m.

Long-time manager Paul Rehm left in spring 2003 for a religious outlet in Des Moines and was replaced by Alan Usher in June. One of Usher's first moves was to take the station into the overnight hours going 24 hours on June first.

Usher departed abruptly in April 2004 to take over his father-in-law's five G.I. Family Radio stations headquartered in Grand Island. Stories recount that he simply left the KCRO station keys on the desk over one weekend and never returned.

After 25 years at its Dodge Street location, KCRO's studios were moved to 11717 Burt Street in 2004. The transmitter and tower site remained near 60th and Hartman Streets where it stood since the 1940s, before the heyday of Todd Storz' KOWH 660.

Salem Broadcasting bought KCRO for 3.1 million in January 2005. KCRO GM Johnny Andrews took over as Salem's Omaha market manager.

Salem had purchased KGBI *The Bridge* just months earlier. The intent was to focus talk programming on the AM and music on the FM. Besides nonsecular content, the station aired high school football.

Salem Broadcasting of Camarillo, California focused on Christian and family programming and at this point owned 104 stations. It owned a network with which to feed its stations plus about a thousand affiliates. Salem also had a national sales force and was involved in web networking and publishing.

Christian radio competition in Omaha had further increased by this time, coming from Catholic station KVSS 88.9 which signed on in 1999, and the new KMLV FM 88.1 in Ralston, an Omaha suburb. KMLV aired *K-Love*, a contemporary Christian music format originating in Sacramento.

In 2013 KCRO joined the FM crowd with translator K233CO on 94.5. It ran 250 watts at 240 feet from rented tower space in West Omaha near South 132nd and Leavenworth Streets. West Omaha had the primary coverage, with Valley, Gretna, and Bellevue in the secondary. Blair, Ashland, and Plattsmouth were on the fringe.

In early 2016, KCRO 660 and KOMJ 1490 filed competing applications for 99-watt translators on 104.1. The KCRO bid was modified to 106.5, 110 watts, and approved on February 10. It soon aired programming from KCRO's sister station KOTK on 1420 kHz, both owned by Salem Broadcasting.

1180 KKAR KOIL Bellevue

1180's ambitious start as a News/Talk station was hitting the wall in the 1990s but John Mitchell would soon find other uses for its signal in the Omaha market. The News/Talk would be moved to a better signal on 1290 leaving 1180 to air satellite-delivered Nostalgia music, followed by a brief switch to sports, then ending the decade with kids programming from Walt Disney aimed at the under-twelve crowd.

As the decade began KKAR 1180 was still in its hard-fought battle to carve some audience away from its targeted competitor KFAB, and the similarities in programming between the two stations drew closer.

Steve Brown's talk show "Talk of the Town" began in 1989. KFAB added local talk host George Woods opposite Brown in early 1990 when that station switched to an all talk and news format.

But the two stations denied similarities to each other--KFAB called Wood's show topic-oriented, while Brown said his show was guest-oriented.

In the evening, KFAB's Gary Sadlemyer hosted a talk hour opposite KKAR's "Sports Talk." KKAR's sports program had been on since 1987 and featured Jim Kelter, Michael Kelly of the *OWH*, and Gary Java who replaced Joe Nittler in 1990. Kelly left in 1991.

By 1991 the stations sounded like direct competitors, but KFAB still refused to admit it. KFAB General Manager Bob Sweet said, "I acknowledge that they're there, but we're not on the same playing field." Brown, somewhat peeved, responded with, "If he's saying we're out of our league, we were on the damn field first." Indeed, KKAR launched in 1987 as a news station three years before KFAB's switch to all-News/Talk.

But the ratings showed a wide gap between the two. In the winter 1991 book, KFAB had a 13 share while KKAR was just under a 3, though with a spike to about 4.5 during Rush Limbaugh's show. Brown dismissed the difference saying there's more to success than ratings, noting "KKAR seems to be progressing rapidly or prevailing" in advertisers and in the esteem of newsmakers (*OWH* May 25, 1991).

Coincidentally, KFAB's Bob Sweet had worked with Rush Limbaugh for a few years while the two were at KFBK Sacramento. Sweet said Limbaugh does indeed attract young, male radio listeners. "The flip side," he said, "is you cannot build nor support a radio station on three hours of programming a day." Brown responded, "...as far as a radio station needing more than one show, that's what I felt about KFAB for years...Walt Kavanagh and Don Cole are the whole KFAB show. And the numbers prove it. The only place they dominate, big-time, is in the morning." (*OWH* May 25, 1991)

KKAR added a well-known Omaha Top 40 name in 1991 by bringing in Joe Light to anchor afternoons. Light and Brown had known each other for decades ever since Brown first hired Light at Don Burden's KICN Denver in 1959. From there, Joe Light became a major personality on KOIL and its sister stations through the 1960s and much of the 70s.

Light's switch from bad-boy DJ to news anchor proved to be difficult. Radio had changed over the years and Light's old-school DJ personality had no place on news stations like KKAR. Light left KKAR within 90 days when asked to switch to feature stories and sales. It was Joe Light's last appearance in Omaha.

KKAR made some inroads during the Persian Gulf War, thanks to an affiliation with CNN. Ten days into the war while it was still in the air war phase, KKAR reached an agreement with CNN to broadcast the audio portion of its cable CNN Headline News (*OWH* January 25, 1991).

The cable television channel quickly gained a reputation for the best war coverage by virtue of being the only network to have correspondents inside Baghdad describing live descriptions of the initial attack on the city. KKAR became identified as a CNN radio outlet long before CNN started its radio network.

The KKAR morning show changed in 1992. Steve Lundy of KOIL fame became the morning host in April, moving over from KQKQ to make room for G. Rockett Phillips on the FM's "Breakfast Flakes" morning show. Lundy joined news person Kristy Prokop.

Torri Pantaleon and Gary Java (actually spelled Dziewa) hosted "Sports Talk" evenings in the 6 p.m. hour. It went directly against KOIL 1290's "Grandstand" hosted by Bill Mattson. In the spring 1992 ratings KKAR edged out KOIL for the listeners.

Neither sports talk show ranked very high overall. KKAR's general manager, Marty Riemenschneider admitted the market for such programs in Omaha is "not huge." He said, "The reason why sports talk doesn't do as well in this market as it does in a Kansas City or a Chicago is that we don't have a major- league franchise. That, in some way, inhibits the growth." (OWH May 8, 1992)

Left unmentioned was that Nebraska Husker football is the huge sports attraction in the state. Owner John Mitchell was well aware of this, assembling a bid to grab Cornhusker Football broadcast rights from its long-time home of KFAB 1110.

KKAR dueled KFAB through the summer of 1992 for the Husker broadcast rights. The bidding escalated as Husker football was nearing a national championship. KFAB paid 475 thousand in 1983 and it was up to 650 thousand in 1992. Now, the bidding topped 800 thousand, with KFAB bidding 825 thousand and KKAR offering 850 thousand.

In the end, Mitchell had the cash but not the carry. He outbid KFAB and offered a higher percentage of gross receipts but UNL administrators, after several phases of bidding battles, ultimately recommended KFAB.

UNL cited KFAB's willingness to sign a three-year contract as a key reason for its selection. KKAR had insisted on a five-year contract. Still, many believed the decisive factor was KFAB's superior signal coverage.

Marty Riemenschneider of KKAR read from a statement, "It became obvious early in the bidding process that everything possible would be done to allow KFAB to retain the rights." He said KFAB "was allowed to play catch-up each time."

Kim Phelps, assistant vice chancellor at NU countered saying that NU laid out the ground rules to interested stations in late July and followed them to the letter. (OWH Sept 22, 1992).

This bitter loss left John Mitchell seeking other ways to gain more parity with powerhouse KFAB. Needing a better AM signal in the market, Mitchell continued keeping an eye on the fading fortunes of KOIL 1290, knowing that the troubled station across from him on Central Park Mall (a city park also known as Leahy Mall) would likely come up for sale. KOIL's full-time 5000 watts had better coverage than KKAR's north-south pattern on 1180 kHz, especially at night when KKAR had to drop power to 1000 watts. Also, with market duopoly rules relaxed in 1992, he could buy KOIL and keep KKAR.

The opportunity emerged in 1993 when Mitchell's Aegus Inc. negotiated to buy KOIL 1290 from Bob Dean's and Bob Greenlee's Valley Broadcasting. The purchase was finalized for 475 thousand dollars that August.

Mitchell's newest acquisition gave him a second AM station in the market forming Omaha's first duopoly since 1944. The FCC had a year earlier relaxed ownership rules that once again permitted multiple ownership, or duopolies, within a market. The number of stations permitted was dependent upon market size. In Omaha, a company could now own two AMs and two FM's.

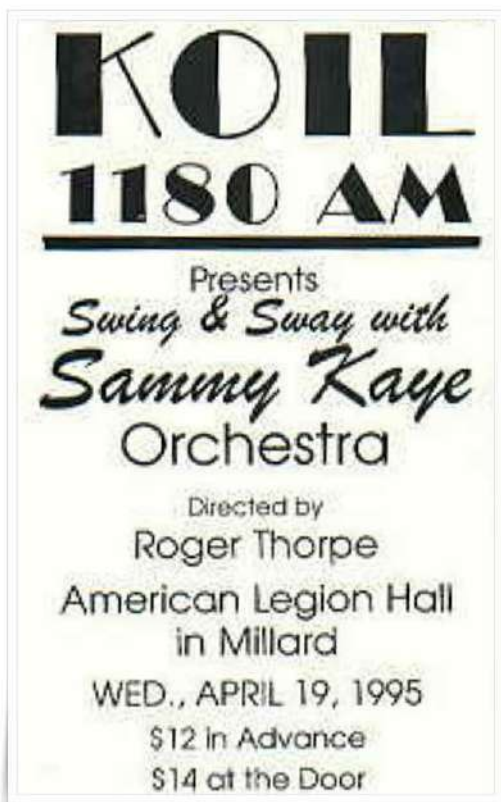
KOIL's studio gear was moved across the Mall to join KKAR and KQKQ at 1001 Farnam Street, on the edge of the Old Market district.

On August 21, 1993, KKAR 1180 began running a tape loop of Steve Brown announcing "KKAR has moved, up the dial to 1290." With the move came the call letters swap. KKAR 1290 was born and 1180 became KOIL. The historic KOIL calls were now licensed to Bellevue, 1180's community of license.

Brown's tape was kept running for days, interrupted only for earlier-contracted sports programming such as football's Kickoff Classic. Operations Manager Neil Nelkin didn't announce the new format for KOIL 1180 until early September. It was then revealed that it would be Nostalgia, traditional middle-of-the-road music from the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, with some 40s, and CBS news on the hour.

The new music format debuted September 9. It was called *Great Songs, Great Memories*, and the AM stereo exciter was switched back on. Featured artists included Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, the Carpenters, Barry Manilow, Barbra Streisand, and Nat King Cole. The music programming was satellite-delivered from Unistar.

(Unistar's brief history goes back to 1981 when it was United Stations, begun by Dick Clark and Nick Verbitsky, CEO at Mutual Radio. They bought the troubled RKO Radio Network in 1985, and two years later merged with Transtar Radio Network, itself founded in 1981 as a pioneer satellite music service. With the merger came the new Unistar name. Unistar merged with the Westwood One Radio Network in 1993.)



In the following weeks, KOIL's Nelkin reported an enthusiastic and sometimes emotional response to the format of non-rock popular music, though a similar Nostalgia format was already running on nearby Plattsmouth stations KOTD 1020 and KOTD FM 106.9.

When the 75-year-old Peony Park at 8100 Cass Street closed on March 31, 1994, KOIL was a natural to commemorate the final night at the park's famed ballroom. The station sponsored an evening of music provided by Tommy Dorsey's Orchestra conducted by Buddy Morrow. Couples who had danced in the ballroom for decades could dance one last time on the sprawling wood floor under chandeliers and the crimson lighting that had drawn crowds for decades.

Finally, a significant power increase for Mitchell's 1180 facilities was approved in 1994.

KOIL 1180 signed off Sunday, September 11 at 10 a.m. to install a new 25,000-watt transmitter and returned to the air much stronger Monday morning.

The increased power was authorized for daytime only. The station still had to drop to one thousand watts at night with a north-south signal pattern, its eastward null in the direction of Rochester, New York to protect WHAM 1180 from interference. WHAM didn't have to reciprocate; it's 50 thousand watts would sometimes be audible underneath KOIL in West Omaha at night.

A network swap with KFAB came in 1995. CBS complained that music-oriented KOIL wasn't airing enough local news. KFAB was unhappy with NBC news which had been airing on the station since 1955 but by now was just a shell of its former self after having been sold to Westwood One in 1987. The network swap between the two stations was completed in July.

The music format on KOIL 1180 played on for about five years. Then on April 1, 1998, the mix of World War II-era music by such artists as Frank Sinatra and Benny Goodman gave way to sports. KOIL PD Neil Nelkin said the Nostalgia listenership was good, but a hard sell to clients seeking younger demos.



The new sports format was in direct competition with KOSR 1490 which launched in 1996 after already having built up its sports coverage.

KOIL 1180 joined the ESPN Radio Network airing the Fabulous Sports Babe and Tony Kornheiser on weekdays. KOSR meanwhile aired Jim Rome and Papa Joe Chevalier, two of the hottest sports talkers in the country at the time.

Locally, the new KOIL 1180 sports format simulcast Steve Lundy's morning show from KKAR, while KOSR was simulcasting Todd and Tyler from Z-92 during the mornings. A month after the format switch some shuffling took place and former Edge morning host and stand-up comic Chris Baker took over mornings on KOIL 1180. Gary Java then took afternoons, moving over from KKAR 1290 (OWH May 4, 1998).

KOIL 1180 by this time was finishing last out of 23 stations. G. T. Phillips was offered mornings on KOIL 1180 in July but declined. Phillips had enjoyed success in the market in the early 1990s as "Rockett in the Morning" on KQKQ 98.5. His fade began with an ill-fated move to KESY 104.5 in 1995 followed by an unsuccessful return to KQKQ. The KOIL opportunity was Rockett's last offer, and he left the market returning to a career in video production as Gary Phillips.

Chris Baker also hosted "Sports Nightly" with his producer Scott Voorheese, the show airing statewide from KKAR 1290 on the Pinnacle Sports Network. "Sports Nightly" was abruptly moved to KLIN Lincoln in June 1998. With the move came new hosts including Jim Rose, leaving Baker in the cold. Insiders indicated Baker may have upset a sponsor.

KOIL 1180 Sports Radio lasted only a year. In September 1999 ESPN was moved to Mitchell's new station on 1620. The replacement programming on 1180 was *Radio Disney*, a satellite-delivered format aimed at the 12 and under crowd, a demographic not even measured by Arbitron.



KOIL became Disney's 44th affiliate since the network went national in 1996. Likely smoothing the way for the programming move was that Disney and ESPN were co-owned, by ABC.

Music, news, and games are the offerings on *Radio Disney*. Music artists ranged from Hanson and the Spice Girls to "Weird Al" Yankovic. Personalities were youthful and bright, working the phones with contests and seeking opinions on what's cool. The image sweepers used the voices of upbeat kids. The format ran 24 hours, even when kids normally should be fast asleep. The target was the under 12-year-olds but also their parents who were usually close by, especially mom.

If phones are any measurement of listenership, the format had a good audience in Omaha. The Disney network maintained an 800 toll-free number for daily contests and requests. The Disney people tracked area codes and issued weekly reports. There were reportedly 4000 calls per week from Omaha by December 1999.

The KOIL call letters were kept during the changeover to Disney, manager Neil Nelkin saying, "We consider old-legacy, heritage call letters to be an important part of the fabric of the history of the community."

The KOIL calls have been part of Omaha since 1925. They would be moved again then returned to 1290 in the coming millennium.

1180 EPILOGUE

Waitt Radio began operating Mitchell Broadcasting's 16 stations under time brokerage and local marketing agreements starting in April 2000. John Mitchell was listed as a director of Waitt Radio but without any ownership in the company. Norman Waitt, Jr. was the sole shareholder.

In January 2002 Waitt purchased Mitchell's stations for \$36.6 million. Besides KOIL *Radio Disney* 1180, the Omaha stations included KKAR 1290, KQKQ 98.5, KOZN *The Zone, Sports 1620*, and Lincoln's KZFX *The Fox*. The sale also included the KZFX Omaha translator K299AK/107.7 and the Fremont stations KHUB 1340 and KFMT 105.5.

The sale brought to 75 the number of stations owned by Waitt, which also owned five TV stations and an outdoor billboard advertising unit. Studios for the Omaha stations were consolidated at 50th and Capitol Streets, the building's opposite side fronting the city's main arterial, Dodge Street.

Under Waitt ownership the calls on 1180 were changed in 2003 to KYDZ *Kids*, and the KOIL calls were moved to 1020 Plattsmouth where it became *KOIL Country*.

1180 Bellevue had been granted a chance to move to 1620 on the newly expanded portion of the AM band, 1600 to 1700 kHz, in 1996. Both frequencies were permitted to remain in use for five years, then a decision was required on which one to keep. KOZN 1620 signed on in 1999 airing sports as *The Zone* while 1180 aired Disney.

In 2006 well after the five years were up, Disney programming was moved from 1180 to the Plattsmouth station on 1020. 1180 went dark in February and distant stations, primarily the former clear channel WHAM Rochester, New York would skip in at night. By this time the stations were under new owners, as Waitt Radio had merged with NRG, New Radio Group of Cedar Rapids, Iowa the previous year.

The now-silent KYDZ became part of a push that would allow stations moving to the expanded portion of the AM band to keep both the new and old frequencies in operation. Waitt was among those petitioning “for rulemaking that would extend the license period in return for certain public interest commitments.”

Some expanded band stations around the country surrendered their old licenses as planned, but KYDZ 1180 was among 25 receiving temporary extensions. KYDZ returned to the air in June, carrying a Spanish-language format, *La Bonita*. It has remained on the air ever since.

In October 2007 KYDZ 1180 switched over to Clear Channel’s *La Preciosa*, a Regional Mexican Oldies network, while maintaining a local morning show.

More shuffling took place in 2008 as *La Preciosa* was moved to the better signal on NRG’s 1020 from Plattsmouth. The KOIL call sign on 1020 was then moved back to 1180 on January 1, 2009. As KOIL 1180 once again, a News/Talk format of syndicated conservative and consumer talk shows along with CNN news was implemented.

In early April 2012 KOIL 1180 was among 17 Upper Midwest radio stations that switched to NBC News Radio as CNN exited the radio business and NBC relaunched its network via Westwood One.

Two months later on June 4, KOIL 1180 dropped News/Talk to become NRG’s secondary outlet for sports, changing calls to KOZT, complementing sister station KOZN 1620.

KOZT 1180 *The Zone 2*, also calling itself *The Duece*, programmed a mix of shows from Fox Sports Radio and Yahoo Sports Radio along with some local play-by-play. The KOIL calls were returned to their famous 1290 position, and the KKAR calls were retired.

1420 KESY-AM KBBX Omaha

Simulcasting and satellite was the rule for 1420 in the new decade. KESY 1420, owned by SunGroup Broadcasting of Nebraska, had been simply airing a mono version of the soft Rock format of its sister, KESY 104.5, since 1985. The 1000-watt station was now full time, though with only 330 watts at night.

The station was authorized the call letters KLAO for one week on June 15, 1990 for reasons unknown. The call letter change never reached the air, but KESY got KLAO junk mail at the 4807 Dodge Street studios for several years afterward.



1420 broke off from the FM simulcast in January 1995 picking up the SMN (Satellite Music Network) Urban Gold format. Now playing Soul-Oldies, the calls were changed to KBBX, for "*BoomBoX*."

Manager Dana Webb said he was looking to fill a void for the African-American audience and chose the Soul Oldies format for its broader appeal, a format with Black personalities and music but with soul hits such as those by Motown artists familiar to a more mainstream audience.

A nightly locally-produced segment ran 10 p.m. to midnight Sundays through Thursdays. "Omaha Live" was hosted by J.D. Black, who was also doing middays on KQKQ. Black later was moved to mornings on KBBX continuing as the station's only local, live personality.

Omaha's Black audience took note, hearing oldies they hadn't heard in years. Numbers showed an audience increase but stalled in the 1 to 2 shares range, still just enough for the small AM to enter the top ten.

The following year the 1000-watt station briefly showed strength in one narrow area, outperforming some of the big guys during morning drive. It was in the 25 to 54 age group in the November 1996 report, beating out *Sweet 98*'s Johnny Danger, KFAB's Charlie Stone, and KKAR's Steve & Kristy.

Sales still were difficult, mostly coming from combo buys that stemmed from the more-successful FM. Webb said that national buys generally go to markets where the African-American potential audience is 13 to 15 percent or better. Omaha's percentage in the 1990 census was 13.1 percent.

As the consolidation craze of the 1990s built up, KESY AM and FM were among the few stand-alones remaining, waiting to be swallowed up by a corporate group. As of 1996, the others were the two WOW stations on 94.1 FM and 590 AM, and KEFM 96.1. The rest of the market was owned by three major players: Triathlon Broadcasting, the Journal Broadcast Group, and the growing John Mitchell regional stations group headquartered in Omaha.

Station owner John Biddinger running OMA Inc. in Nashville was just waiting for the right offer. The Journal group finally stepped up with 5.475 million for KESY 104.5 and KBBX 1420 announcing the agreement on September 10, 1997. The stations would join the Journal's cluster of KOSR 1490, KEZO 92.3, KKCD 105.9, and KOSJ 97.7.

Upon the closing in early 1998 Journal Broadcasting made plans to drop Soul Oldies. The Audience for KBBX was dwindling, particularly with the recent launch of short-lived Urban KNOS 88.9. The format flip came in April when KBBX 1420 gave up its Urban Oldies satellite format to become Omaha's first All-Spanish station. It picked up the Hispanic Satellite Network, the same network as that used by KMMJ Grand Island, Nebraska's first all Spanish station that had just flipped in February.

Until this time Omaha's Latino audience was served only by weekly shows such as the syndicated "Latino USA" Mondays on KIOS, and a Sunday evening three-hour show on KVNO.

The Hispanic music mix was mariachi, tropical-salsa, and Tejano. But, despite Omaha's burgeoning Hispanic population, increasing by 76 percent to 29 thousand in just the past six years, KBBX dropped out of sight in the ratings, failing to show up in the fall 1998 book.

1420 EPILOGUE

Journal Broadcasting on May 10, 2002, moved KBBX's Spanish format to FM on 97.7, the Nebraska City move-in. The KBBX call letters followed the move, and 1420 became KHLP *K-Help* with an all-advice and information format.

KHLP ran hourly CNN news and nationally syndicated talk shows that included a return of Bruce Williams of NBC's *Talknet* fame, along with health expert Dr. Dean Edell and financial guru Dave Ramsey.

In 2005 KHLP was sold to Salem Communications for 900 thousand dollars. The sell-off was part of a federally-mandated ownership cap that required Journal to divest itself of two or possibly three of its radio stations in order to buy KMTV Channel 3.

Salem, a religious broadcaster, changed the calls to KOTK *Omaha Talk*, with a new version of conservative News/Talk. It was the third station in Salem's new Omaha cluster, having already purchased KGBI 100.7 and in the process of buying KCRO 660. All three stations were moved into new combined studios at 117th and Burt Streets.

Spanish programming returned to 1420 in September 2008 as Salem flipped 1420 to a Spanish Christian format called *La Luz (The Light)*. The launch followed a few days of stunting where the station played Spanish-language Christmas music for several days, saying, "We are giving you a gift, a radio station that illuminates the heart of all mankind." It became the third Spanish-language station in the Omaha market, the others being KBBX 97.7 and NRG's KYDZ 1180 Bellevue.

1490 KEZO-AM KOSR Omaha

Omaha's station on 1490 with its lowly kilowatt has a history that stretches back to 1942. Since then the station created several programming "firsts" but always fell short of grabbing the golden ring. As KBON, it spawned the city's first DJ, Sandy Jackson, who went on to success at other Omaha stations. As KLNG it was the city's first News/Talk station but was unable to stand up to powerhouse KFAB 1110. In the 1980s it became the market's first All-Oldies station KEDS, but again was bested by a more powerful KOIL 1290.

By the end of the decade, 1490's owners Narragansett Radio threw in the towel. The station dropped original programming to become KEZO-AM 1490 simulcasting album rock from its sister FM KEZO 92.3. But, one more "first" was on the way.

In 1993, after about three years of airing album rock in mono, Narragansett Radio launched one more effort to make 1490 a station of its own. KEZO AM/FM PD Randy Chambers began moving the station toward sports. It started with the airing of the Omaha Lancers hockey games.

At the same time, a contract was signed with the Omaha Royals to air baseball for the 1994-95 seasons. KKAR had carried the Royals the past five seasons. Frank Adkisson would continue as the play-by-play announcer. It's customary for teams like the Royals to produce their own coverage then contract air time with stations for broadcast.

The Sports format was created and popularized by New York's WFAN in 1987. The format was gaining popularity as more nationally syndicated programming became available.

When ESPN came aboard on KEZO 1490 in 1994, the station's shift to sports became quite obvious. KEZO 1490 became Omaha's first all-sports station.

It was a build-up just before the sale. Narragansett Radio put KEZO 1490 and KEZO 92.3 on the market in late 1994 and quickly found a buyer. Journal Broadcasting, known as WTMJ/Milwaukee Journal at the time, bought the combo for \$9 million.

Journal also bought KKCD 105.9, the two purchases within a week of each other. In entering the market in this fashion, Journal formed Omaha's second duopoly. The deals closed in January 1995.

The sports build-up on 1490 continued under the new owners. Syndicated sports programming ran for almost 24 hours. New ESPN shows included "The Fabulous Sports Babe," (Nancy Donnellan), Pete Rose, and Ron Barr late nights. The station also was covering UNL (University of Nebraska Lincoln) baseball and Iowa Hawkeyes football.

In 1995 select Creighton Bluejays baseball games were added. UNO Maverick Football with Joe Patrick and Jim Kelter was signed for the 1996 season. Later Iowa State football was added. The rest of the air time was filled with simulcast of KEZO 92.3. The album-rock airing between games and sports talk programs was a natural fill-in for the male-dominated sports audience.

Sports 1490's main draw was the Jim Rome Show syndicated via Premiere Radio Networks since 1996. In the previous fall ratings, Rome ranked fourth during middays in the Omaha metro among men ages 25 to 54, the chief demographic for sports radio. Only Rush Limbaugh on KKAR beat Rome in the talk radio arena.



KEZO 1490 sports logo and reference to the popular Jim Rome Show.

Jim Rose made good on a pledge to originate his sports talk show from Omaha on January 12, 1996 if Nebraska won the Fiesta Bowl. His afternoon broadcast originated from the Varsity Sports Cafe at 301 South 11th Street. Rome told his hosts that Omaha ranked as his No. 1 market "based on audience participation and enthusiasm." (OWH Jan 5, 1996)

The move to sports on 1490 was completed in April 1996 when the call letters changed to KOSR, *Omaha Sports Radio*. What was missing was Husker sports. With its lowly 1000-watt signal KOSR would never be a contender for the Husker sports network.

KOSR struggled for semi-respectable numbers. There was a small spike in ratings for a while during ESPN's "Fabulous Sports Babe." But, sports formats aren't known for big ratings. Though the audience is sizable for play-by-play and special sporting events, the audience listens and leaves when it's over. Beyond that, the listenership for sports conversation shows tends to be quite small.

Still sports radio survives as an attractive format for programmers because of its low programming costs and wide profit margins. Radio insiders according to a *World-Herald* story estimated KOSR generated gross revenues of about \$500,000 the previous year, a decent figure for a station that has a relatively weak signal and a niche format.

Sports competition arrived in April 1998 when KOIL 1180 flipped to an all-sports format. KOIL offered two local shows: "Omaha Sportstalk" with Gary Java afternoons, and Chris Baker evenings.

Omaha thus became the smallest market to have two stations offering sports programming. Rick Scott, a Seattle-based sports radio consultant, said the only other cities with more than one sports station are Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Phoenix, San Francisco, and Tampa. Besides KOSR and KOIL, there was some evening sports also being offered on KKAR 1290 and KFAB 1110.

Journal cluster manager Jim McKernan noted that KOSR fared well against local evening sports talk on KKAR and KFAB, saying "There's a lot of boring stuff on the air. If I had any observation of the local sports talk scene, it is very much cliché." (*OWH* May 10, 1998)

The host for KFAB's "*Sports Wrap*," McGraw Milhaven, called the Omaha sports radio market "the worst," adding that there is little interest in topics other than Nebraska football. He adds, "We never got one call on Lancer hockey, the Omaha Royals and (rarely) about Creighton basketball." (*OWH* May 8, 1998)

A simulcast of KEZO FM's highly-rated Todd and Tyler morning show returned November 10, 1997. It seemed natural as both their show and sports radio were strong with male listeners.

1490 EPILOGUE

KOSR 1490 added Fox Sports Radio in August 2000 and changed its moniker to *Fox Sports Radio 1490*. Jim Rome was the highest-rated sports talk show in the market by this time.

In 2005 1490's successful sports run was switched to Journal's better signal on 590, KOMJ. It was a format swap meaning 1490 got the Westwood One Soft Oldies format plus Chuck Urban's local morning show that had been running on 590. The KOMJ *Majic* calls also followed the format to 1490 while 590 was rechristened with new calls, KXSP.

Two years later on January 3, 2007, Journal sold KOMJ 1490 to Cochise Broadcasting for \$500 thousand. The divesture was needed to fall below market caps so that Journal could complete its purchase of KMTV Ch 3. Cochise agreed not to buy any other Omaha station for a year.

Cochise was owned by Jana and Ted Tucker, Sr. of Jackson, Wyoming, who, along with their son, owned 19 stations plus construction permits for new stations in the West.

The Tuckers turned to Omaha's Waitt Radio Networks for programming and asked for a Nostalgia music format. The Waitt Radio Networks offered Country, AC, Rock, and Oldies formats, but had to design a new format for KOMJ.

Waitt Radio, headquartered in Omaha at North 90th and Western Streets, put together the new format calling it *The Lounge*. It keyed on crooners from Bing Crosby and the Rat Pack to Michael Buble.

Still a work in progress, *The Lounge* soon adjusted the format by dropping Crosby-era recordings and settling in on more recent artists and adult-oriented pop titles. The network-delivered format was offered nationwide and picked up by a handful of other stations around the country as well its airing locally on KOMJ 1490.

Ted Tucker was a bit of a mystery. He had no interest in selling air time on the station and refused to add an hourly network newscast. He wanted nothing else than to simply run Waitt's *Lounge* network unattended 24/7.

Waitt Radio Networks and its *Storq* automation system made such an operation easy. The network provided its affiliates with a computer to receive the network's satellite commands. The computer was loaded with the appropriate music library, legal IDs, and pre-recorded liners for airing between songs. Additional DJ voice tracks were delivered in each daypart, and library and liner updates could be sent as needed. The program log was sent hourly so that the computer could assemble and air the proper elements at the right times.

At KOMJ, this computer resided unattended at in the transmitter building at the tower site, simply linked to the network by satellite. There was nothing more. The transmitter was monitored by remote control from elsewhere in the country, and a local engineer was on call for outages and, presumably, for maintenance. The public file was allegedly at one of the Omaha Journal Broadcasting stations.

The station was robot-radio at its extreme. There was no local studio or air staff and no sales staff; not even a manager. There was just a computer with its feed into the transmitter. KOMJ 1490 ran this way for seven years, making the station an oddity in broadcasting.

For a while around 2005, without permission, a sneakily-added legal ID by the Tuckers appeared as they began to simulcast KOMJ on KALN Allen, Nebraska, a new Ted Tucker property he was hoping to develop into a Sioux City move-in.

Sometime after 2010, Tucker stopped paying for the services of Waitt Radio Network. The network link stopped, but the station's computer continued to run programming for months afterward from its built-in music library, image liners, legal ID, and old program logs on the hard drive.

The FCC found this form of robot-radio to be irregular and quite illegal. But it wasn't discovered until February 2014 when an inspector from the FCC came to town and could only locate the tower. KOMJ's offices, studios, and public file were nowhere to be found. Cochise Broadcasting was fined \$7,000 for failing to maintain a fully equipped and staffed main studio.

Tucker sold the station before the end of that year. Walnut Radio agreed to purchase KOMJ for \$450 thousand in October 2014.

Walnut Radio was headed by Steve Seline, formerly Vice Chairman of Waitt Media. His company also owned three other semi-local stations, KBLR-FM *Country 97.3* in Blair, KFMT-FM *Mix 105.5* in Fremont, and its sister station KHUB *1340 News/Talk* in Fremont.

Walnut took ownership of KOMJ on January 2, 2015. The new operations Manager J.J. Morgan (J.J. Davis in earlier years at KQKQ and KOIL) cleaned out the transmitter building while new store-front studios were built in the newly-developed Midlands Crossing area at 35th and Farnam. Until studios were completed, programming aired from Walnut Radio's Blair studios at 1015 South Highway 30.

The flip from *Magic 1490* to *Boomer 1490* was on a Wednesday evening in early January with a launch party held at Gorat's Steakhouse. About 150 guests attended to participate in a countdown as the station went live.

Boomer's format was a combination of Oldies and Adult Contemporary aimed at the baby-boomer audience. Calling it *The Greatest Music Ever Made*, the playlist was a broad mix of '50s and '60s oldies and '70s AC. Artists ranged from Elvis to Michael Buble, The Beatles to Rod Stewart, Barry Manilow to Motown, the Beach Boys to the Carpenters.

The same computer software leftover from the Waitt Radio Network was kept in place to handle programming, automating KOMJ for most of its 24-hour day. The live assist shows were J.J. and Company in the mornings and Patrick Stibbs for two hours in the afternoon. Dave Wingert was later added with a Saturday morning show. Wingert later took over weekday mornings with J.J. on news, later replaced by Neil Nelkin.

KOMJ 1490, unlike other corporate-owned stations in town, was all locally run. J.J.'s untested music library had a broad variety at the start. Adjustments over the following months put the music mix into more of a traditional Oldies position.

KOMJ's air signal was now cleaner with a decent range for a kilowatt but still suffered from skywave interference at night in West Omaha. A stereo stream on the Internet was heavily promoted as an alternative.

In early 2016, KOMJ 1490 and KCRO 660 filed competing applications for a 99-watt translator on 104.1. The bid was granted to KOMJ on February 10 after KCRO modified its application to 106.5.

From the AM tower at 35th and Wright Streets, the 99-watt translator had a poor signal in West Omaha and Millard. In September 2016 the translator was moved to a communications tower on South 132nd Street near Dodge and was authorized a power increase. J.J. noted, "Got upgraded to 250 (as far as we can go with it), and moved the antenna to the Salem tower at Boys Town, same tower as their 94.5. We lost downtown and CB for the most part with the move. Covering 400k in the metro now, versus around 100k with the old 99 watts at Field Club."

In September 2017, J.J. was out. Some programming adjustments were made with the addition of CBS Radio hourly news and voice tracking from Local Radio Networks (LRN) out of Indiana.

LRN was a new operation with similar offerings to that of Waitt Radio's (by this time swallowed up by Westwood One) *Storq* automation and was even run by veterans of *Storq*'s technology, Chris Reeves, Jonathan Steel, and Mark Hatfield. The trio had been with Waitt Radio Network in Omaha when programming KOMJ for Ted Tucker.

1560 KLNG Council Bluffs

After years of format failures, a new owner in 1989 finally set a lasting course for this 1947 station. Bob Wilkins of Spartanburg, South Carolina formed Wilkins Radio Network, Inc. by making KLNG his first station purchase. Wilkins started in Christian radio as a ministry consultant, placing local, regional, and national Christian programs on stations across the United States, KLNG being one of them.

KLNG was the starter station for what would become a large Christian radio network. Wilkins Radio would grow to six markets in ten years and would go on to own and operate eighteen Christian Talk Radio Stations in major markets.

The timing was right. Christian radio continued to gain popularity and by this time even had music formats of its own. At the start of the decade Omaha had three Christian stations, KCRO 660, KGBI 100.7, and from Council Bluffs, KLNG 1560. The two AM stations were daytime only.

From outside the market, KCLV 88.5 from Lincoln was audible with its *K-Love* format originating in San Francisco. In all, Nebraska had 11 religious stations, and more would join the airwaves in the new millennium.

For years Christian stations competed for dollars spent by evangelists and churches, basically airing time blocks of sermons or live services. As the 1990s progressed, more local and theology-based talk programs came into existence.

Musically, hymns were soon confined to Sundays while being replaced the rest of the week by Christian pop songs, Christian Music itself becoming a format of its own.

KLNG didn't subscribe to rating services, but audience estimates according to managers at the Christian stations added up to KLNG being the lowest on the list. In 1992 KGBI's manager Tom Sommerville said his station's cumulative audience had been estimated at more than 50,000. Paul Rehm, general manager of KCRO, estimated that 15,000 people tuned in to his station each week. KLNG General Manager Kevin Warren described as a conservative estimate, 6,000 to 7,000 listeners each week.

KLNG kept a low profile, simply airing music and selling time to religious broadcasters. It appeared to be part of Wilkins' business plan, keeping busy with a focus on buying more stations.

Wilkins' buying spree centered on the Southeast. It included WMOC Chattanooga in 1993, WNEX Macon GA in 1994, WSKY Asheville NC and WFAM Augusta GA in 1996, and WBXR Hazel Green AL in 1997. All the while, KLNG just kept cooking away from its Quonset hut studio and transmitter at the foot of its tower on the South Omaha Bridge Road.

Manager John Helle in 1998 described KLNG as Southern gospel, Christian Country, and a Christian ministries station. Helle said KLNG devotes more than half its air time to music, adding that eighteen months earlier his station began playing more Country Christian music after listeners said they wanted more music, "especially gospel with a Country flavor."

1560 EPILOGUE

KLNG received a power upgrade in October 2001, going from 1000 watts to 10 thousand watts. But, it remained licensed for daytime only operation with the CH (Critical Hours) restriction of dropping power to 2.1 kilowatts to protect WQXR New York City. CH are the hours around local sunset and sunrise that coincide with dark hours in New York City.

THE FM STATIONS

92.3 KEZO Omaha

KEZO enjoyed good ratings entering the 1990s, riding high with Otis Twelve in the morning and a mix of album rock and classic rock the rest of the day. KEZO's brand of rock music had temporarily dethroned market leader KFAB in the late 1980s and would soon do so again.

Otis' sidekick Sandy Palmer was out in April 1990, her contract not renewed. McGregor said it was because "we just hit kind of some creative and philosophical differences with her." Several months later Palmer showed up doing mornings at the new KKVU 105.9 when it launched in August.

Palmer's replacement came a month after her departure. Diver Dan Doomey re-teamed with Otis following a four-year hiatus. He had been Otis' partner on the show from 1980 until 1986 when Otis temporarily left the station to try his hand in advertising. Diver Dan was moved to late nights but left the following year. He then kicked around doing various jobs at KVNO, Cox Cable, and briefly surprising listeners at the new KOMJ 103.7.



Otis and Diver had already proven themselves a good fit for the KEZO 92.3 morning show. Otis Twelve (Doug Wesselmann) and Diver Dan (Jim Celer.) had known each other since 1967 when both were students at Creighton University. Since then, they worked together on radio shows, theater, and stand-up comedy.

The return of the duo was an immediate hit with listeners. KEZO 92.3 posted significant gains in the Arbitron radio ratings survey. In the spring 1990 book, KEZO jumped from 10.2 in the winter's survey to a 14.5 share becoming the most-listened-to station in the Omaha area. By summer, the station again topped Omaha's perennial leader KFAB with a 13.1 share over KFAB's 12.3.

With that kind of success, it's no surprise that the talent at KEZO would be targeted by a new rock station soon to sign on in the market. Matt Markel's KRRK 93.3 Bennington had set its debut for June 1991 and made no secret of its intentions to be a rock music leader.

Matt Markel was a Creighton business graduate who had been a consultant in the hotel business. After tiring of the travel, he settled back in Omaha, bought the Ranch Bowl in 1977, expanded it into a venue that hosted small rock concerts, and now was building a radio station there.

KEZO Program Director Bruce McGregor was the first to be pirated away, leaving KEZO for KRRK in May 1991 to be station manager and program director. What likely clinched the deal is that he was offered part ownership of the new station.

Z-92's Mike Connell was also offered part ownership and joined KRRK as the general sales manager. Then at least seven more former employees crossed the street from KEZO to the new station. An understandably upset General Manager Mike Broussard required his remaining employees, including Otis Twelve, to sign non-compete contracts.

KRRK was licensed to the small community of Bennington and signed on in June 1991 with 3000 watts, well below the 100 thousand watts power level of the big FMs. Studios were built at the Ranch Bowl on 72nd Street on a the hill just south of Pacific Street.

The battle between the two rockers remained low key until late 1991 when Randy Chambers, the new KEZO PD, began flexing his station's clout with the national record companies.

Until KRRK's sign-on, KEZO promoted concerts at Markel's Ranch Bowl. In October, Chambers wrote dozens of letters to record companies requesting they no longer book their artists into the Ranch Bowl. The letter said that KEZO would not "promote or participate with any artist that plays at the Ranch Bowl." Chambers offered a list of alternative venues in which bands could perform in Omaha. (*OWH* Dec 2, 1991)

Markel claims the campaign was the reason a December concert by Kix was canceled at the Ranch Bowl. Atco Records promoter Matt Pollack admitted he canceled the concert because of loyalty to the firmly-entrenched KEZO.

Overall, a few artists canceled due to "bronchitis" or similar reasons while most other record companies and artists simply ignored the KEZO threat.

In the winter 1992 ratings KEZO 92.3 had the book's biggest loss, going from 10.5 to 7.6. But it wasn't KRRK that took the numbers. It was CHR KQKQ 98.5 with a huge bump to 12.7 from 8.6. KRRK stayed flat at 2.7. Another contributing factor may have been the music leader in this rating period--Country WOW 94.1 taking the number one spot from KFAB.

In mid-1993 KEZO again lost Otis. After being identified with Z-92's morning show for most of the past thirteen years, Otis decided to join the establishment and accepted an offer to do mornings on News/Talk station KFAB.

KEZO's Vice President and General Manager Manuel Broussard was not happy. After Otis worked his 30-day notice, KEZO filed suit seeking a temporary restraining order preventing Otis from working in radio within 100 miles of Omaha for two years. Otis had signed a contract in 1991 that contained that restriction as a non-compete clause. The case went to court in July.

Manuel Broussard was the first witness, claiming that the station shelled out over 300 thousand dollars promoting Otis in the market and that his using that developed reputation against Z-92 would be unfair.

When Otis took the stand, the *OWH* account shows Otis's nervousness didn't stop his jibes. When asked to read his 1983 application, his attorney asked, what was Otis seeking back then? Otis, reading from the application, replied, "King. Yeah, King. Emperor was filled. I didn't get the position, by the way."

Otis claimed that his no-compete contract was because of competition from a new rock station, KRRK, and that he had no choice but to sign.

The ruling was in Otis' favor, the judge upholding Nebraska's right to work laws. Otis Twelve was free to work at KFAB. "I wonder what my topic will be," Otis said.

Otis Twelve stayed seven months on KFAB, then segued over to the KKCD 105.9 morning show again joining Diver Dan Doomey who had landed there after being fired at KEZO. The duo settled in and stayed on KKCD for five years.

When Otis left KEZO, mornings were being held down by his former sidekick Diver Dan Doomey and Z's midday man, Rick Setchell. KEZO Program Director Randy Chambers began a talent search to take over mornings.

Chambers found a hard-working duo at WSJW in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Todd Brandt and Mike Tyler, known on-air simply as Todd and Tyler, were hired and moved to Omaha. Diver Dan Doomey was let go with a four-month severance and Setchell returned to middays.

TnT began a long run at Z-92 in August 1993. They clearly had done their homework, frequently making references to local landmarks, events, and sports teams, sounding almost like Omaha natives.

But it was an uphill struggle trying to please the Otis/Doomey fans. The new duo got negative calls and were booed at appearances. That fall KEZO dropped to 6.8, seventh place in the ratings.

Perhaps as a result of the station's downturn, GM Manuel Broussard was moved to Narragansett Radio's WYNK in Baton Rouge, swapping positions there with Taylor Walet who took over at KEZO.

But, change is inevitable and audiences have short memories. The TnT duo hung in there, and by spring 1994 KEZO surged back to second place, right behind KQKQ *Sweet 98*.

Mike Tyler credits much of it to their use of the phones during their morning show. “We always thought that the audience is your best material . . . and we think people can enjoy that they can be part of the show, and we laugh along with them, laugh at them and laugh at ourselves.” (*OWH* Sept 7, 1995)

With that “up” ratings book, management at KEZO in April 1994 confirmed the station along with sister AM KEZO 1490, was up for sale, along with Narragansett’s Baton Rouge properties.

By the end of the year, KEZO found a buyer. WTMJ/Milwaukee Journal was expanding and bought the AM and FM, entering the Omaha market for \$9 million. The Journal also bought KKCD 105.9 at the same time to become Omaha’s second duopoly. The sale was completed in January 1995.

Right after the change of ownership, Todd and Tyler became the top-rated morning show in the major 18 to 54 age groups in Omaha (Winter ARB ratings, January thru March 1995). Much of this was assisted by the increasing competition among Country stations that was fragmenting other listenership in the market. Country leader WOW AM and FM numbers had shrunk leaving room for KEZO to grow.

PD Randy Chambers noted, “Todd and Tyler are on a roll. There’s a great consistency to their show. It’s funny every day. They work hard at it they’ve really made themselves a part of Omaha.” (*OWH* May 20, 1995). The two were signed to a new three-year contract in July.

Todd and Tyler primarily focused on sports, political figures, and popular culture. They weren’t shock jocks like Clear Channel’s Howard Stern, but they did include adult humor.

The morning duo was suspended for two days in March 1996 for an escapade that almost got out of hand. Responding to a news story about a woman robbed of nearly a thousand dollars in cash at 50th and Ames Avenue, the duo sent their sidekick Beastmaster out to the intersection with 100 dollars in small bills taped to his clothing to see what would happen.

PD Randy Chambers called to stop the idea but wound up on the air with them, “just to let people know what we have to sit through in meetings,” according to Todd. Despite Chambers’ call, they went on with the plan. Then came a call from GM Jim McKernan, and he wound up on the air, too.

McKernan ordered the pair off the air and Rick Setchell took over an hour early. McKernan said his concern was liability if Beastmaster had been injured. Others in the business, including Tom Becka on KFAB, called it a publicity stunt.

KRRK 93.3 Bennington was still in the rock music race, though little more than a thorn in Z-92's efforts. Then came a new competitor from Lincoln. KYNN FM 101.9 had earlier entered the country music arena by building a new tower near Eagle, Nebraska that put a good signal into Omaha. But the Lincoln station didn't stay Country for long.

In April 1996, 101.9 flipped to rock becoming KGDE *The Edge*. It was an Alternative Rock format aimed at the listeners of both KRRK and KEZO.

KRRK threw in the towel by June and flipped to an AC format. KGDE kept up the pressure, approaching Todd and Tyler with what the duo called "an attractive proposal." The morning team was already under contract at Z and entertained the offer no further (December 1996).



Todd and Tyler's ratings continued to climb, finally reaching number one in the 12-plus group during the summer 1996 ratings. It was the first time in Z's history it was top-ranked with everyone ages 12 and up. The morning pair joked that it was because they "concentrated on doing a lot of costume changes throughout the show."

A brief radio feud in January 1997 arose when Rockett returned to KQKQ 98.5 after a disastrous eight-month stint at KESY 104.5. He launched an on-air attack at Todd and Tyler when the morning duo made fun of his return.

Rockett invited KETV news anchors Rob McCarney and Julie Cornell to re-enact the Todd and Tyler show from a script Rockett provided from a tape of TnT's mockery. Later, Rockett said he would stand outside the Z studios with a bullhorn after taking over the morning ratings. Rockett's ratings instead were fading and he was gone from KQKQ by May.

On April Fools Day 1997 Todd and Tyler switched places with Roger W. Morgan and Tony Wike at KGOR 99.9. KGOR had an oldies audience and listeners were stunned to hear radio's two bad boys talking about sports, rock music, and Hooters Restaurant. They even took listener calls while KGOR's engineer manned the bleep button, noting that it had to be used a few times.

After a successful run at KEZO, Randy Chambers left in July 1997 for a programming and operations position at WMYU, a recent purchase by Journal Broadcasting in Tennessee. Doug Sorenson was brought in as the new program director. Sorenson's experience included programming at KQRC FM Kansas City and KATT FM Oklahoma City.

In the fall 1997 ratings Todd and Tyler again came in number one in the 12-plus demographics. The day after those ratings were released in January 1998, the duo signed a new five-year contract guaranteeing each more than \$100 thousand per year plus another \$50 thousand in incentive bonuses.

In June, PD Doug Sorenson was named rock radio "Programmer of the Year" at *Radio & Records* magazine's annual convention in Los Angeles. Just a few months after that he died of a heart attack at the age of 43.

In November, KEZO's morning show began a simulcast on sister AM station, KOSR 1490. The logic was that TnT's heavy male listenership was a good match for sports radio KOSR. Also that year, Z-92 dropped its long-time slogan "home of rock 'n' roll" replacing it with "the rock station."

K-Rock 93.3 returned in August 1999 taking aim once again at KEZO. One liner went, "They can't rock this loud--the boss won't let them. But we don't have a boss at 93.3 *K-Rock*."

KEZO General Manager Jim McKernan said he was amused at the jabs. In his reverie, McKernan himself took a jab at an old nemesis. "The last guy who tried that strategy is now broadcasting from a soup spoon in his kitchen," McKernan said. "That would be G. Rockett Phillips." (OWH Aug 14, 1999)

The new station did not affect KEZO. *K-Rock*'s big competitor instead turned out to be KIWR 89.7 Council Bluffs, a non-comm playing Alternative Rock.

92.3 EPILOGUE

Todd and Tyler's morning show went national on a small scale in 2006 syndicating its adult humor, politics, sports, and popular culture for airing on other stations. Omaha ratings suffered as localization was minimized when content was made more generic to fit multiple markets.

Calling it the *Todd and Tyler Radio Empire*, the show's syndication started by airing on other Journal stations in Wichita, Kansas, and Springfield, Missouri. Affiliates later came and went, dropping out either because of low ratings or format flips.

In 2011 Todd and Tyler re-upped signing a long-term contract with Journal Broadcast Group. As of 2015, the duo was on five other stations, most in Nebraska.

In late 2014 new direct competition to KEZO arrived via low-power translator stations belonging to iHeart Media, the former Clear channel. K235CD/94.9 (Omaha) and K272FE/102.3 (Council Bluffs-Omaha) simulcast as *Rock 94-9 and 102-3*.

The translators were programmed with automated rock aimed at a male audience using the identifiers *Man-Up Radio*. With TnT running 10 hours a day including the late shift repeat at 10 p.m. each night, the new stations offered a rock music alternative for nearly half of Z-92's broadcast day.

KEZO began carrying Husker football in 2015 after Journal outbid long-time Husker station KFAB for a five-year contract. The games were also contracted for AM sister station KXSP 590.

94.1 WOW-FM Omaha

Country-formated WOW FM was fifth in the market in the summer 1990 ratings, but a huge country-wave was forming. "New Country" had been percolating for a few years, but putting it over the top was a burst of patriotism prompted by the Persian Gulf War in 1991 and the country's Texan president, George Bush, a big fan of Country music.

By the spring 1991 ratings, WOW FM was the top station in the market. Its 11.9 overall 12+ share put it ahead of KFAB's 11.6 and rock station KEZO's 11.4.

"Back in the early days it was a struggle," said WOW General Manager Ken Fearnow in a 1993 interview. "We saw an upward spike then, and it has been steady since." (*OWH* March 7, 1993)

Great Empire Broadcasting was in the right place at the right time. Country music was enjoying a huge resurgence generated by new artists like Randy Travis and Garth Brooks. New Country was being driven by a newly-discovered young audience, a trend that was leaving older, Traditional Country behind to become a splinter format of its own. Before then, new listeners to country generally were CHR listeners who were outgrowing or tiring of Rock/Dance formats.

New morning man Don Glaze had just joined WOW AM and FM in March 1990 coming over from KOIL 1290 and KXKT 103.7. Glaze replaced George Woods and Cathie Fife who had been doing mornings on WOW AM/FM since 1983.

The AM and FM programming was simulcast on overnights and morning drive. On weekends, AM would break away Saturday mornings at 8 for its "Cracker Barrel" call-in show, and Sundays the simulcast ran until noon.

When programming was separate, the AM side on 590 kept with the traditional music and more folksy air personalities. Manager Ken Fearnow described WOW 94.1 as more "music intensive," appealing to a younger audience.

The newscasts from the shared news department were hourly at the beginning of each hour while the AM side aired a second newscast at :30 each hour. The news department was aggressive, heavy on "street news," supported by several mobile news units. The cars were outfitted with scanners, a two-way, a Marti for broadcasts, and overhead yellow light bridges like those on tow trucks. The cars were sometimes mistaken at night for police cars.

The lone news person staffing the newsroom at night or on weekends also covered breaking street news. This meant grabbing a handful of recent news stories from the "done" basket on the way out the door to an accident, fire, or shooting while watching the clock to deliver scheduled newscasts from inside the mobile unit, always leading with the on-the-spot-story.

In September Program Director Gene Bridges left for a plum gig at Country KLAC in Los Angeles. He was replaced by Scott Parker (Hickenbottom) who had been doing afternoons at WOW since 1988.

With a new morning show and new PD, everything was in place. WOW FM had a 7.2 in 1990 but grew steadily. The figure rose to 9.0 in fall 1990, then 10.8 in the winter. By spring 1991 the numbers reached 11.9 in a tight three-way race for the top spot. KFAB regained the #1 position with Huskers football that fall, but WOW FM still grew to a respectable 12.6.

Combined with a traditional Country format on its AM, the WOW stations held a whopping 17.2 share of the market.

By summer 1992 WOW FM's ratings climbed to 15.4. Country music was so strong that even CHR station KQKQ 98.5 added country-crossover songs. KQKQ in July was playing "Achy Breaky Heart" by Billy Ray Cyrus and "Shameless" by Garth Brooks.

This pleased Program director Scott Parker, knowing Country tunes on KQKQ was a billboard for his stations. Said Parker, "If people want to hear more of that kind of thing, I guess they know where to find it."

Also, that summer WOW AM and FM continued to air the track for the choreographed-to-music fireworks on July 4th at Rosenblatt Stadium, a yearly event once owned by KOIL 1290. The stations went on supporting the Gucci fireworks displays for much of the 1990s.

Stations wanting a slice of the country music pie hastily began appearing before the end of 1992. First, Lincoln's outlet KFMQ on 101.9 flipped to Country in October calling it *Young Country*. Its primary contour from a new transmitter site at Eagle, Nebraska included Omaha towards its NE edge. Soon afterward KFMQ jettisoned its calls and resurrected the old call letters that Great Empire once used in the market for its earlier AM outlet before WOW, KYNN.

Three days after the 101.9 Country debut, KXKT 103.7 flipped from Rock to Country. KXKT had been in the planning stages to go Country but were caught off-guard by 101.9's flip. The staff scrambled to speed up the move and KXKT *KT-103 Country* was on within days. By December KXKT was simulcasting its programming on sister AM KOIL 1290, the fifth Country music signal in Omaha before the year was out.

Despite five Country signals in the market, WOW FM remained strong. The spring 1993 ratings showed WOW FM with a 10.8 share for second place in the market. Combined with its AM station, the pair commanded a 15.4 share.

WOW AM and FM continued to shrug off the competition. By now the company was flush with cash and making plans to build new studios on the site of its tall FM tower in North Omaha. Groundbreaking was in July 1993 with a target completion date of January 1994.

The new studios would be at the foot of the new tower on a site adjacent to the television antenna farm on North 72nd Street.



The new WOW FM studio on North 72nd Street with Ed Alexander, The Old Prospector, at the mic. (Courtesy: Kent Thompson.)

The completed studios were outfitted with new equipment. Both AM and FM studios had new Autogram boards. (The Autogram company was relatively new at the time but having partnered with Collins Radio of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, was making reliable audio consoles.)

WOW personality Kent Thompson describes the layout. “The newsroom was between the two studios, the record library behind the studios along the adjacent hallway next to the PD’s office.”

Thompson adds, “Three production studios. One completely digital, another for dubbing, and a large room with a 24 channel board and reel to reel for recording capabilities. There was also a DAT (Digital Audio Tape) player/recorder in the large production studio.”



WOW personality Kent Thompson.

Music was still mostly on vinyl, not yet on hard drive or tape cartridge. Thompson recalls, “They had a Merantz CD burner in the production dubbing studio. Select cuts from LP's were transferred to CD. They kept a turntable in the studio because there was so much stuff not available on CD yet. I used to host a six-hour oldies request call-in show Saturday nights and much of the material was still on vinyl.”

During and after the move came some staff changes in keeping up with the increased competition. In November 1993, Jay Daniels was inexplicably fired from afternoon drive after nearly four years at WOW FM. Tom Scott took over afternoons the following March. He had been the midday personality on KXKT 103.7

In 1994, WOW lost its morning man when The "Real" Don Glaze pulled an unsanctioned stunt. Glaze had married a Nashville singer and wanted her to co-host on his morning show. He went on strike over the issue. WOW management had considered Glaze’s idea, but his boycott coupled with a threat to quit resulted in PD Scott Parker calling the bluff. In a phone call to Don that August morning, Glaze was told goodbye and good luck.

Glaze and his wife shopped around Omaha for a gig promoting “family value” programming, but finally left never returning to Omaha radio.

In February 1995 Ken Brooks took over as program director following the sudden death of Scott Parker from bacterial meningitis.

By this time ratings for Country stations were leveling off. KYNN 101.9 had already thrown in the towel and switched to a Rock format. The Country race was now a hard-fought battle between WOW FM 94.1 and KXKT 103.7.

WOW FM dropped to a 7.2 in 1994. By 1996 the two Country stations still topped all the FM rock and pop stations in the ratings, but it was KXKT, now under new ownership, pulling ahead for the first time in the 12-plus numbers and WOW FM found itself trailing KXKT's 9.1 with a 6.5.

Morning man Woody Johnson left for WOAI San Antonio in the summer of 1997 and was replaced by George Woods. It was a return for Woods, having co-hosted from 1983 to 1989 with Cathie Fife. This time he was teamed with Shari Stone.

But the morning duo's personalities instantly clashed. Before his 90 days were up, Woods was released from his contract for what Ken Fearnow called "chemistry imbalance." Woods said he and Miss Stone had their own ideas on the philosophy of the show, and "eventually the differences became incompatible."

Ken Brooks temporarily took over the morning show with Ms. Stone while seeking a permanent co-host. Woods went on to do fill-in work at KKAR and later on "Cracker Barrel," WOW AM's Saturday call-in show.

The talent search lasted for months. In the meantime, Brooks and Stone kept the AM/FM combo ratings respectable, having the second-highest-rated morning show in the market.

In June 1998 a replacement was found for the morning duo. The new morning man was Bobby Quinn, "the Lone Ranch Hand." He wore a Lone Ranger mask when pictured on billboards, at appearances, and even wore it on the air "at least for the first couple of weeks," according to the new PD Trish Matthews.



*WOW Music Director, later Program Director, Trish Mathews.
(Courtesy: Maddie West.)*

Former PD Ken Brooks resigned after being offered middays. He had been with WOW for eight years. Brooks briefly left Omaha but returned in July 1999 joining the morning show on Christian station KGBI 100.7 *The Bridge*.

Shari Stone also was out, going to a newly-launched Classic Rock station KZFX 101.9 *The Fox* on middays.

On July 25, 1998, WOW celebrated its 75th anniversary with a daylong country music concert at Westfair Amphitheater near Council Bluffs. Country music fans turned out for a solid bill of country talent that started at 2 p.m. The celebration was just in time, as those proud call letters weren't destined to be around much longer.

Radio consolidation was in full swing by this time and the WOW stations were among the few holdouts not yet swallowed up by a huge radio group. It was rumored that aging Great Empire owners Michael Oats and Mike Lynch were ready to cash in their chips. That's when Journal Broadcasting stepped up with enough clout to buy all 13 stations owned by the Wichita pair.

When the sale was announced in August, opposition to the purchase came from the Mitchell Radio Group, owners of four Omaha stations. John Mitchell filed with the FCC to prevent the sale saying it would give Journal too much control of local advertising revenue.

Mitchell claimed that Journal would control more than 40 percent of Omaha's estimated \$34 million in annual radio advertising income. Recent estimates put the Journal Group, before the WOW acquisition, as having 36 percent ad revenue in Omaha

The Journal Group countered, showing several cases in which the Department of Justice approved sales that gave a single company control of more than 40 percent of a market's revenue.

After a six-month delay, the FCC sided with Journal and the sale was completed in June 1999. Great Empire walked away with 98.5 million for WOW AM and FM plus its eleven other stations. Journal now owned 36 stations in 11 states.

With that, Jim McKernan, who managed Journal's Omaha cluster, took over the WOW stations. A corporate-led blood bath was about to begin.

McKernan had big ideas and wasted no time implementing them, sometimes rather hastily. His outspoken methods gained him some bad press when he made frequent public references to WOW's old image as "hick."

McKernan announced, "The focus will first be on the FM. Right now they're playing too many records out there, so we're going to focus the music and contemporize the sound of the station. We're going to get away from all the hick stuff on the FM," he said, referring to the more traditional country music. "We're going to play Classic Country, just in the way you think of Classic Rock. Artists like Alabama and people like that, which is not hick." (*OWH* June 24, 1999).



1999 *WOW FM* new logo.

The first “hick” image to go was the logo. The WOW call letters for years had been spelled out in wooden planks and were soon changed to a slicker image.

Within days, the simulcasting of WOW FM on the AM side ended. WOW AM had been simulcasting overnights and morning drive since 1983.

Then came personnel changes. As is usually done in dramatic corporate fashion, it was from the top down. Ken Fearnow, after being with the stations since 1978, was moved out, given a management position at the Journal’s Wichita stations KFDI AM and FM.

It wasn’t a popular move with Fearnow. "I've grown some pretty deep roots, and we have a lot of good friends here," Fearnow said. "So from that standpoint, it will be tough to go." (*OWH* Jan 9, 1999)

A new PD was brought in from a Country station in Madison, Wisconsin. Tim Oaks replaced Trish Mathews, who saw the writing on the wall earlier and made her move to legendary WSM Nashville as music director.

McKernan then focused on updating the FM programming while cutting the staff on the AM. The morning jock, Bobby Quinn “The Lone Ranch Hand” was released, despite his show ranking third in the market on the combo. McKernan said Quinn didn't fit WOW's “new image” (*OWH* July 24 1999). Quinn was replaced by Bob James, an Iowan who attended UNL. James had been doing mornings for three years at KFGO-FM Fargo.

In October, McKernan moved longtime popular afternoon host Spoonman from WOW 94.1 to mornings on WOW 590. It would prove to be short-term as Spoonman was shown the door several weeks later.

The moves prompted one anonymous WOW employee to tell the *OWH*, "WOW was like a family. It's like a mortuary over here."

For WOW FM 94.1, country music and even the historic call letters were destined for a short future in the new millennium.

94.1 EPILOGUE

94.1 was changed from WOW FM to KSSO 94.1, *Kiss Country*, on Oct. 10, 2000, the historic call letters lost to history (the WOW AM call letters had been discarded a year earlier). During the changeover, the announcer-free station played only commercials, station announcements, and music.

The music was tightened to an even more modern mix. Instead of country favorites from the 1970s to the present day, the station played mostly New Country. The rotation was heavy on Shania Twain and other modern country artists.

But McKernan's haste caught up with him. Clear Channel's lawyers called, telling him that Clear Channel had trademarked all rights to the *Kiss* radio image.

Journal corporate couldn't have been happy, having already spent big money promoting the change to *Kiss Country*, including the purchase and distribution of now-worthless promotional items like coffee mugs displaying the new logo.

McKernan quickly switched KSSO 94.1 to KMXM 94.1 *Max Country*, debuting on January 2, 2001. KSSO had aired for less than 90 days.

This debacle is what may have hastened McKernan's departure from his VP and GM position of the Omaha cluster. Before the year's end, he announced his departure, saying it was "by mutual agreement."

McKernan landed on his feet with a management position at KMTV Ch 3. Ironically, a few years later Journal bought that station, too, and "General Jim" once again dusted off his resume. After a short stint at Omaha's NRG cluster, he left the market, eventually settling in at Waterloo, Iowa to manage KWVL TV.

Max Country 94.1 had a short run. The format ended after 16-months Friday, May 3, 2002, when Rhythmic Hits took over. It was the format of co-owned "*Channel 97-7*" being moved to become the new "*Channel 94-1*". Country music finally ended on 94.1 after 20 years.

It began with a week of 97.7 and 94.1 simulcasting Rhythmic Hits. KQCH 97.7 then took up Spanish from sister KBBX 1420 as *La Maquina Musical 97.7*, even taking the KBBX call letters. *Channel 94-1* then became *Rhythmic Hits KQCH 94.1*. The move left Clear Channel's KXKT 103.7 as the only major Country station in the market.

Journal's KQCH 94.1 made significant dents in KQKQ's ratings, and by 2004 former leader *Sweet 98.5* flipped from CHR to Modern AC, calling it "*Q98.5, Modern Hit Music*." Thus ended the run of KQKQ's successful two and a half decades as Omaha's leading hit music station.

Ken Fearnow returned to Omaha in 2002 as President of Waitt Radio Networks and grew format affiliations for the company from 48 to 155 stations in two years. In 2004 he replaced Michael Payne as Regional Vice-President of Waitt/NRG radio in Omaha, where he guided the eight-station cluster to a ten-fold bottom line increase. Fearnow left in 2007 joining Cumulus radio in various management positions.

96.1 KEFM Omaha

KEFM 96.1, *Lite 96*, played a mix of carefully researched pop-rock, staying on the non-offensive side. It gained a respectable fourth place in the market at the start of the 1990s trailing only KFAB, KQKQ, and KEZO in the fall 1989 survey period. This was a significant increase over the previous year's rating period.

The night programming featured "Pillow Talk" from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. that specialized in romantic love songs. The show began in 1986 and developed some regular listeners.

"Pillow Talk" host Jeff Larsen describes how it grew. "One day Dwight approached the night guy Matt Effkin and I about doing a love song-dedication show from 10p-2a called Pillowtalk where nightly we would give away a Pillow Talk nightshirt, and MAN! We're they popular! ...so Dwight moved me into evenings and moved the show to start earlier and earlier as it's popularity grew....I let the listeners be the show with their stories of romance, broken hearts, and loves lost."



Jeff Larsen in KEFM 96.1 production room.

Larsen continues, “Eventually, I started adding some prep about love and relationships from articles in magazines like *Cosmopolitan*, *Redbook*, *Women’s Day*, and more....and the popularity exploded well into the ’90s. Twice competitors brought in the syndicated show ‘Delilah’ to try to steal audience, but we owned the female demos and drove her out, at times pulling in 30+ shares!”

The "Pillow Talk" library contained about 200 love songs from the 1960s to the 80s with a few classics from the 50s and some current hits thrown in. Host Jeff Larsen would sprinkle in tips about self-esteem, attractiveness, relationships, and romance, tips he would find in magazines.

The show made for an interesting audience. Larsen recalls, “Quirky calls ...almost every night...strippers at 2 a.m....prison calls less than 7 seconds long so they wouldn't have to insert a coin...women in their bathtubs with echo and dripping water...prank calls making fun of the show. I would mess with those people and have a whole cassette somewhere labeled ‘Pillow Takes,’ all the calls I would HAVE REALLY loved to air!”

Also responsible for the ratings was the newly-added Jack Swanda and Fred Brooks morning show, "Out of Bed With Jack and Fred," airing since 1989. Mary Kay Mueller handled morning traffic reports until 1991, replaced by Kay Kriss.

Swanda and Brooks on-air would appear on WOWT Ch 6’s morning *Daybreak* show after the television station put a camera in the *Lite 96* studios in 1993. This led a year later to a midday TV talk show their own, a summer 30-minute offering in the noon hour.

Each TV show was planned to include a taped segment from outside the studio, such as bits or interviews at a shopping mall. The pair also sought celebrities when possible, invited Funny Bone comics who came to town, and even had a cooking segment. The show ended its premiere run with no plans for a return.

Jack and Fred were signed to a new five-year contract with KEFM in 1995. Overnight DJ Rick Vincent joined the morning show as producer and newsman in June 1997. In September, Jack and Fred suspended their "Tabloid Headlines" feature following the death of Princess Di that was being blamed on paparazzi.

The Jack and Fred morning show was expanded to five hours after spring ratings saw them move up to third in the market, though their off-air relationship was becoming strained.

Sherry Kennedy, who had been with the station since 1986, remained on middays. She left in January 1999 to manage the new Catholic station, KVSS.



1999 KEFM Logo
Courtesy: Jeff Larsen

In 1999, *Lite 96* modified its format changing its identity to *Mix 96*. The softer artists like Barry Manilow and Kenny G were gone in favor of more upbeat artists. Jeff Larsen recalls, "Music was changing with fewer soft rock artists... the 'Lite' moniker was limiting what we could do with the music to compete, so we changed it to MIX and went more Hot AC without abandoning our core artists."

PD Dwight Lane was upped to general manager, and announced: "*Mix 96.1* will continue to play very popular artists, such as Elton John, Rod Stewart, and Billy Joel." He added, "You're also going to be hearing an upbeat mix from the '70s, '80s, and '90s, as we remain an adult-contemporary station." (OWH April 3, 1999)

As a forerunner to the change that year, late night's "Pillow Talk" was ended, finally replaced by the "Delilah" show syndicated out of Seattle. Former host Jeff Larsen was given afternoons.

With solid ratings, it was significant that KEFM 96.1 at the end of the 1990s was the last contemporary stand-alone station in the market, locally-owned rather than part of a group. That would last for only a few years, however.

96.1 EPILOGUE

As Omaha's lone stand-alone commercial station, there were signs pointing to change in the new millennium. Most evident was the loss of sales staffers to group stations where cluster packages were easier to sell.

In 2003 Webster Broadcasting sold out to Clear Channel. KEFM 96.1 was swallowed up for the sum of \$10.5 million. The announcement came in June, the sale closing in October. The agreement included a three-year non-compete clause for John Webster who had operated the station for nearly 20 years. The staff of 33 was expected to be trimmed.

KEFM became Clear Channel's fifth station in the market, the other four being News/Talk KFAB 1110, Hard Rock KQRC 93.3, Oldies KGOR 99.9, and Country KXKT 103.7.

General Manager Dwight Lane was given afternoon drive at the completion of the sale. He left KEFM the following year after nearly 19 years with the station. Lane went to talk radio KLIN Lincoln for a couple of years and later became station manager at KTIC West Point, Nebraska.

KEFM's transmitter site left the KPTM tower near Gretna around this time for a new home at the Crown Point Antenna Farm in far north Omaha.

The end of KEFM's long-running Adult Contemporary format came in September 2005 when 96.1 began playing a form of Classic Rock, changing to KQBW *The Brew*, "Everything Rock...`80s and More."

The format was launched after running Christmas music for a day and a half. The format originated at sister Clear Channel station WQBW 97.3 Milwaukee, a beer-brewing town where "Brew" was born.

As the name implied, *The Brew* would be a wide variety mix. Core music artists included Aerosmith, Bon Jovi, Van Halen, and AC/DC. The mix included some 1970s rock like Boston and Lynyrd Skynyrd, 1980s mainstream rock such as John Cougar Mellencamp, Bryan Adams, and Pat Benatar, and 1990s rock from Stone Temple Pilots and Pearl Jam.

Local personalities on *The Brew* included Steve-O, Crash Davis, Ethan Stone, *Lite* 96 holdover Lucy Chapman, and on mornings, Mookie and Michelle.

The "brew" of Classic rock lasted until August 2012 when the station flipped to Contemporary Hits as KISO 96.1 *Kiss FM*. Clear Channel owned and had been using the "Kiss" image for years, even stopping WOW 94.1 from trying to use it 12 years earlier. This was Clear Channel's first use of the image in the Omaha market.

The format launched with a week of non-stop music, a mix aimed at Journal Broadcasting's *Channel 94-1*, with possible secondary impact on NRG Media's Modern Adult Contemporary KQKQ Q98-5, and Hip-Hop/R&B *Power 106-9*.

Most of the *Kiss FM* personalities were voice-tracked from outside of the Omaha area or syndicated as was the Elvis Duran Morning Show.

Meanwhile, 101.9 FM KOOO flipped formats from classic hits to rock hits and was renamed *The Keg*, effectively filling in the spot left by *The Brew*.

With High Definition radio now available although with little acceptance, *The Brew* continued on KISO-HD2. This lasted until November 2014 when the channel fed a male-oriented rock format called *Man-Up* to a pair of new low power translators in Omaha and Council Bluffs.

98.5 KQKQ Council Bluffs

Top 40 KQKQ 98.5 *Sweet 98* was being challenged by new move-in KXKT 103.7 licensed to Atlantic, Iowa, but had the much better signal and, financially, deeper pockets. GM Bill Cunningham had developed the station into a powerhouse ratings leader during the 1980s.

The decade began with Marty Riemenschneider taking over the position of executive vice president and general manager from the retiring Ralph Baudin. Riemenschneider joined Mitchell in 1986 as general sales manager. By 1992 he would be named Mitchell's first "group head," overseeing all 15 of Mitchell's radio stations across Nebraska.

Top 40 radio was in decline as the 1990s began. What once was the "40 best" of all songs that encompassed Adult Contemporary, teen tunes, Soul, and Country was fragmenting into segments super-serving each genre.

This positioning was necessitated by the increase in stations, particularly all the new FM signals that eventually would nearly double those on AM. New niches emerging most notably were hard rock, dance music, and the new insurgent hip-hop music. Country, Adult Contemporary, and Soul formats were already using the Top 40 model to rank the popularity of tunes on their weekly playlists. But "Top 40" in its original meaning was gone.

The term Top 40 had been discarded by this time, replaced by CHR for Contemporary Hit Radio, a label created by the trade magazine *Radio & Records*. It was the closest remaining description to the old Top 40 as it would still include more than one genre.

Large and medium markets once had two or even three CHR stations, but by the 1990s there often was only one. In Omaha, it was KQKQ 98.5, the survivor after KGOR switched to Oldies in 1988. KXKT 103.7 took a run at *Sweet 98* in 1990 and 1991 but languished near the bottom due to its signal problem.

On a national level, the decline in Top 40 stations was even steeper. Over five years, from 1989 to 1994, the number of CHR stations fell from 951 to 441, a 54 percent decrease. A story in the *New York Times* the previous year referred to Top 40 as a "dinosaur."

Dwight Lane, program director of KEFM 96.1, noted that Top 40 listeners mature and move on to other formats, most frequently Country or Adult Contemporary.

Operations Manager Mark Evans at KXKT had a more telling observation, saying the problem CHR was facing was the lack of new artists. While country music was successfully introducing new and lasting talent, CHR was developing no major new stars to replace the veterans such as Elton John, Billy Joel, and Rod Stewart. Those artists were destined to soon appear in formats for older demographics, such as Classic Rock and oldies, with no one to replace them.

Among CHR stations, KQKQ was unusually strong. The station ranked among the top five CHR stations in the country according to Joel Denver in the *Radio & Records* trade magazine. This possibly was due to Omaha's strong Top 40 heritage, with KOWH 660 developing the format in the 1950s and KOIL 1290 then WOW 590 aggressively keeping it alive until the FM takeover of the late 1970s.

Despite the challenges ahead, KQKQ 98.5 *Sweet 98* entered the new decade as Omaha's number one station having defeated the long-time leader KFAB 1110. KQKQ was on top in the winter 1990 ratings earning a 14.7 while KFAB trailed with a 12.6. The FM takeover was well underway leaving AM to begin its slow struggle to survive.

PD Drew Bentley, who had been at the helm since 1988, limited rap music to artists like M.C. Hammer and D.J. Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince who were more dance-oriented than hardcore. Bentley said, "There's not a lot of rap music that crosses over into the mainstream. We play hits, and hard-core rap tends not to have the mass appeal." (*OWH* July 15, 1990)

Bentley also tried to adjust the image liner for KQKQ, saying, "...we did try to lessen the impact of *Sweet 98* and increase the use of the call letters KQKQ. Thus the phrase *Sweet 98/KQKQ*. We dominated in females...and wanted to lessen the negative perception males had for the term 'Sweet.'"

Sweet 98 was selected to broadcast the music for a spectacular fireworks display celebrating the 100th anniversary of the World Life Insurance Society (*OWH* June 6, 1990). The 16-minute show was set off from the ConAgra riverfront campus adjacent to the station's studios at 10th and Farnam. The fireworks were computer-controlled, set to pre-programmed music aired on KQKQ.

Sweet's competition was from newcomer KXKT 103.7, a move-in station licensed to Atlantic, Iowa, programmed by Brian DeGeuss who worked afternoon drive as McFly.

The two stations bumped heads and made news one Thursday evening in September 1990 by offering cheap gasoline in Council Bluffs. Gasoline prices at the time were skyrocketing.

KXKT offered half-price gasoline at an East Broadway gas station while KQKQ offered free gasoline at a West Broadway station. The traffic jam forced the Council Bluffs police to order an end to the promotions within 30 minutes, the move prompted by cars blocking the emergency entrance to Edmundson Hospital. Omaha police had done the same several weeks earlier when KXKT had a similar promotion in Omaha. Neither station had notified authorities in advance of the promotion.

But a decline for KQKQ was setting in, and it wasn't because of KXKT. Spring 1990 ratings saw *Sweet 98* fall to second place behind KEZO 92.3 where Otis Twelve re-teamed with Diver Dan on the morning show. KQKQ still had a respectable 13.7, but now was behind Z 92's 14.5.

Sweet 98's share of the audience dropped to 11.1 in the summer survey. In the fall 1990 ratings it was third with an 11.5 share trailing KFAB's 14.6 and KEZO's 12.1. The KFAB surge, as always each fall, was a product of Husker Football.

In the spring 1991 ratings country music took over, springboarding WOW FM 94.1 to the top followed by KEZO 92.3. KQKQ remained at number three with a 10.3.

The erosion forced some programming changes. After Keith Edwards took over as PD in 1991, he adjusted the morning show. In May, Tony Wike, known as Cap'n Tony, was let go after six years at the station. In his place as morning news anchor was Carol Scott (Carol Davis) joining Breakfast Flakes Steve Lundy and Ryno.

Scott had been a weather reporter at KMTV 3 off and on between 1974 and 1980. She was the former wife of Chip Davis of Mannheim Steamroller fame and still worked in promotion at his label as well as for KQKQ. Davis stayed a month on the morning show, replaced by Scott Smith from KKRD Wichita.

KXKT, perhaps sensing blood, took on KQKQ once again in a November scavenger hunt promotion. KQKQ ran the "Super Scavenger Hunt" while KXKT promoted the "Kat/Pepsi Super Scavenger Hunt," each station claiming to be the first to come up with the idea.

The two contests had almost identical rules. Early each morning, personalities at the stations would announce a scavenger hunt item to find. At the contest's conclusion, the listener with the most items, determined by drawing in case of a tie, would win a car.

Neither station benefited from the promotion. *The Kat* stayed below a 5 and *Sweet 98's* overall audience share fell to 8.8 in the summer 1991 survey, even trailing KGOR's 9.8 that by this time had switched to an Oldies format.

1992 began with the resignation of program director Keith Edwards in January, replaced by Ken Benson from WRQN Toledo.

It was also the end for the "Breakfast Flakes." Taking *Sweet 98's* morning slot was G. Rockett Phillips (Gary Phillips), crossing the street from KXKT 103.7, almost literally, as *The Kat* was at 11th and Douglas just across Leahy Mall from *Sweet's* 10th and Farnam location.

Ryno was let go. Steve Lundy was moved to Mitchell Broadcasting's newly-established Tenth Street Productions, though back on the air by April anchoring mornings for sister AM station KKAR 1290.

Of all the maneuvering for numbers at KXKT, Rockett was the one element that gained the most attention over at the Mitchell stations. KQKQ's Marty Riemenschneider noted when announcing the move that Rockett "was gaining immensely in strength in the marketplace." He was offered big money to make the move.



*KXKT, then KQKQ morning personality
G. Rockett Phillips.*

Rockett's former boss at KXKT 103.7, Mark Evans, himself a former KQKQ "Breakfast Flake," said Rockett told him he was offered \$100,000 over 18 months to join *Sweet 98*. That figure, Evans said, could make him the highest-paid morning personality in Omaha.

Rockett and Riemenschneider both denied that figure, but Evans says KXKT was given a chance to match the offer and declined. He called it "a desperate move by KQKQ."

Rockett took sidekick and KPTM sportscaster Tom Zenner with him when crossing the street, but newsman Roger Olson chose to stay behind at *The Kat*.

Rockett was in his late 40s, a rather seasoned age for a CHR personality, and had a background in acting. He had appeared on such daytime dramas as "Days of Our Lives," "One Life to Live" and "Guiding Light." Rockett used his given name of Gary Houston Phillips during his television years.

Rockett's main interest was in producing and directing, but he followed his unexpected success as a radio personality from WOHT Jackson Mississippi to KXKT in 1990 and now found himself getting big money at KQKQ.

In his first week on the air at *Sweet 98*, Rockett called a hotel in Minneapolis trying to get through to Buffalo Bills player Jim Kelly who would soon be quarterbacking in the Super Bowl. Then Rockett phoned the White House hoping to hear President Bush's prediction on the Super Bowl.

With the "Breakfast Flakes" gone, the rest of the KQKQ lineup was replaced in February. Veteran nighttime personality Hot Scott (Scott O'Hanlon), Jon Jeffries from afternoons, and Paul Kramer from middays were given pink slips (*OWH* Feb 22, 1992).

Program Director Ken Benson said the changes were hastened by a survey of listeners who said they liked the music but felt other things about the station, including the announcers, were "getting a little old and stale."

O'Hanlon, a KQKQ Super Mouth winner, had worked at Sweet 98 for eight and a half years, the last five as the station's nighttime personality. He said he found it hard to believe he was "out the door" even though his was the top-rated nighttime radio show in Omaha. He wasn't given the chance to say goodbye to his listeners. O'Hanlon went to evenings on KXKT where he shortened his Hot Scott air name to Scott at Mark Evan's request.

Hot Scott was replaced by Rod Zilla (Rod Zillman), while Staci Kelly, an Iowa native who came from WRQN Toledo, took over middays. Dancin' Dave Swan came in from WLXR in La Crosse to do afternoons.. Music director Liz Adams was spared and joined Rockett's morning crew. Overnighter J T (Jay Tweedy) also remained.

The January and February blood bath apparently worked in *Sweet 98*'s favor. The winter 1992 book ending in April showed the station going up to second place behind KFAB, jumping from 8.6 the previous fall to 12.7.

In spring 1992 KQKQ stayed at number two because of the continuing surge in popularity of country music. WOW FM took the top spot with a 13.3, followed by KQKQ's 11.3.

By summer, Country music was so strong that KQKQ's new PD, Tom Gjerdrum, was adding country cross-over hits to the KQ playlist, including Billy Cyrus' "Achy Breaky Heart." WOW increased to 15.4 but KQKQ was just behind KFAB's 11.1 for third place with a 10.6 share.

By fall KXKT had flipped to Country. The move-in was suffering from signal problems, and during its run as a CHR station it struggled, breaking a 5 share only once.

Much of *Sweet 98*'s success was credited to Rockett's morning show. On air, he was described as occasionally controversial and sometimes even vulgar. He relied heavily on phone interaction with his audience and guests.

In November Rockett was suspended for something he allegedly said on the air. Management refused to reveal what it was and an on-air apology was issued. Rockett returned the following Monday. Most radio professionals regarded this simply as a promotion gimmick to get attention and stimulate water-cooler talk, a stunt that has been used in the business for decades.

In January 1993 after one year at KQKQ, Rockett gained the attention of the Secret Service for a remark he made in connection with former Vice President Dan Quayle, "Where are the assassins when you need them?" It resulted in a lengthy interview with Secret Service agents, who also took photographs, fingerprints, a handwriting sample, and worked up a biographical profile. Rockett said the comment was "totally a joke" and it was not meant to be taken seriously.

Alternative music began entering the mainstream in 1993 and KQKQ expanded its Sunday night program, "Dangerous Xposure," to three hours on June 13.

KQKQ 98.5 finished first among all listeners in the spring 1993 rating period. It's 11.8 topped Country-formatted WOW FM's 10.2 and KFAB's 10.0. This was primarily due to the sudden increase in the number of Country music stations, taking away some of WOW's audience.

KQKQ owner John Mitchell credited much of KQ's success to the morning team. *Sweet 98*'s morning show gained on KFAB getting 13 percent of all listeners compared to 14.6 for KFAB. Of course, KQKQ's audience was teen-heavy while KFAB's listeners were most significant in the 55-plus age group. (OWH Aug 14, 1993).

For Halloween 1993 Taylor Dayne headlined "Dead Man's Ball" at the Peony Park Ballroom, an event exclusively for KQKQ ticket winners. Robin S. canceled at the last minute and was replaced by local band the Hopeless Romeos.



As the year drew to a close, KQKQ's newest- yet PD Dan Keiley made some music predictions. "I see us playing more alternative music than rock music in '94," Kieley said. "The alternative pop music mixes with the dance music and the R&B." Kieley added, "We're not playing a lot of the grungy alternative stuff, but those (songs) with the mass, poppy appeal that are doing well."

Keily also noted, "The format we have is not an artist-driven format. It's a song-driven format. We're looking for great songs." His statement accurately describes the problem CHR was experiencing in failing to develop new and lasting

core artists (OWH Dec 21, 1993).

The CHR format, renamed from Top 40 in 1989, appeared to be in trouble by 1994. With so many music genres fragmenting into separate radio formats, the broad-based mass appeal format of CHR was dwindling. It was becoming evident that CHR variety could no longer simultaneously please the rock, soul, and Pop listener. CHR would soon find itself dealing with Dance and Rap genres as well.

Still, KQKQ was among the stronger CHR's in the country, rated in the top five out of the 75 largest markets according to national trade magazine *Radio & Records*.

The station remained atop the ratings for spring 1994 and into the winter 1995 ratings, besting KEZO and KFAB each time. But while still No. 1 in the overall 12+ bracket in the winter 1995 ratings (Jan 5 thru March 29), the station showed some slippage in every demographic segment.

Kieley was well-versed in Alternative Rock, enough to soon add KQKQ's sister station *The Edge* KDGE 101.9 to his duties.

He was made Operations Manager for *The Edge*, overseeing its Alternative format that was launched in February 1995. His former music director at KQKQ, Michael Steele, was brought back from a job in North Carolina to become program director.

But, Dan Keily moved on. After 2½ years at the station, he exited May 19, 1995, for a PD position at KDWB St. Paul, Minnesota. His replacement was KGDE PD Michael Steele, left to deal with Rockett, whose contract was to expire June 30th.

Rockett quickly became uncomfortable with the new boss, saying, "it was pretty clear to me that the philosophy of the radio station with regard to the morning show was changing. They wanted me to play more music."

Rockett continued on the morning show for some weeks past June 30th without a contract, but was in talks with other stations, mostly notably KESY 104.5.

KESY's owner and general manager Dana Webb was looking to shift his Soft Rock station towards Adult Contemporary and believed a strong morning show was the key. In July he announced, "In the last week, I have met with both Rockett and his attorney (Steve Seline) about the potential of his coming to work over here."

On August 31, 1995 "Rockett in the Morning" ended its 2 1/2 year run on *Sweet 98*. He announced he and sidekick Terianne Hannibal would start mornings on KESY 104.5 in September.

KQKQ's manager Marty Riemenschneider said his station offered what it considered to be a "more than a fair contract . . . but Rockett opted not to renew the contract with us." Operations Manager Michael Steele took over mornings while seeking a replacement for Rockett.

No salary figures were revealed, but Webb said Rockett could generate more than what KMTV Ch 3 anchorman Michael Scott was reportedly earning. When contacted by the *OWH*, Scott declined to reveal the specifics of his contract but said that it does not exceed \$200,000.

Rockett counted on his audience moving over to 104.5 with him. "I have the greatest, most active, appreciative, fun-loving audience there is. They've just been really responsive," he said.

Meanwhile, Riemenschneider's talent search was underway, and he was coy when asked about having been seen lunching with KEZO's Todd and Tyler.

In September 1995 KQKQ placed an ad in *Radio & Records* exclaiming, "\$1,000.00 REWARD!!!! IS there a morning show/team that is overachieving in your market? Do you want them out?" The ad went on to say *Sweet 98* is looking for the "best morning show host/team in America and we have major market money to prove it!"

The morning spot was filled in October by Jeff Kelly from WZEE Madison, Wisconsin where his air name was Johnny Danger. His Z-104 "Morning Zoo" was number one in Madison.

But Kelly's contract with WZEE didn't end until July 1996 and his station sought a temporary restraining order while suing Kelly for breach of contract and suing Mitchell Broadcasting for interference with a contract.

KQKQ won. The injunction was lifted, and Danger started mornings in Omaha on November 13. He brought sidekick Cheryl Kaye and Madison-based comic Dave Gray with him, though Gray had not been part of Kelly's Madison show. Dave Gray was on board to the extent he had "Sweet 98" tattooed on his thigh during a show in December.

Danger billed himself as "Johnny Danger and the World's Most Dangerous Audience," a slogan claimed by Rockett and still being used by him at KESY FM.

Rockett announced on the air that he received a cease-and-desist court order from Mitchell Broadcasting that claimed the "Dangerous Audience" service mark was registered nationally to Mitchell. KQKQ Operations Manager Mike Steele (not to be confused with KGDE PD Michael Steele who had just left the market) said "the world's most dangerous audience" was created several years earlier by the station's consultant and former program director Dan Kiely.

Rockett's story was that it was he and Kiely who came up with the phrase and that he registered it with the Secretary of State's Office in Lincoln.

Kiely, contacted at KDWB FM St. Paul by the *OWH* said he alone created it for Omaha. "I'll be honest with you," Kiely said, "I stole it from a morning show in Chicago" (*OWH* Jan 13, 1996). No legal action was ever taken.

Johnny Danger failed to gain traction with the KQKQ audience. In spring 1993 his morning show was fourth, trailing KFAB's Charlie Stone, KXKT's T.J. & Rog, and Todd & Tyler of KEZO. By summer he was seventh, and the downward trend continued into the fall ratings book.

The listeners weren't over at KESY 104.5 either. Rockett's audience did not follow him from KQKQ. He was heard on-air one morning during a contest where the phones were silent, saying, "you don't love me anymore."

In February 1996 Rockett's program director at KESY FM, Jerry Balleta, was let go. Balleta was hired just months earlier and quickly learned that a PD position at KESY was merely secretarial. Dana Webb was the programmer. Webb was driven and decisive and made few mistakes, but his managerial style was almost total control.

Webb said his station eliminated the position of program director so that it could "reallocate the resources to another direction," perhaps meaning to pay for Rockett and his failing show.

Jerry Balleta had been doing middays at KQKQ before being lured to KESY FM and immediately returned to *Sweet 98* for an afternoon position, but stayed only a couple of months.

By May 1996, it was over. Webb says Rockett quit. Rockett said he was fired for poor ratings.

Rockett spent the summer involved in the Omaha Community Playhouse and was part of a business venture called "Future Net" that marketed computers designed to access the Internet through television sets. During this time Rockett received no interesting offers and finally in October opened communications with Mitchell Broadcasting for a reconciliation.

It wasn't until January 1997 that Rockett engineered a return to KQKQ. The contentious team of Mike Steele and G. Rockett Phillips put their best faces on in burying the hatchet, calling their split a "lovers spat." Steele said, "Both Rockett and us have learned that we're better together than apart." Rockett added, "The bottom line: We were incredible business partners, and we have put our differences aside." (*OWH* Jan 3, 1997)

The new contract salary was kept under wraps. Meanwhile, Terianne Hannibal stayed behind at KESY FM. Johnny Danger and his KQKQ morning crew were fired following their January 2nd, 1997 show. Gray, with his *Sweet 98* tattoo, went to KIWR *The River* to do mornings. Cheryl Kaye had departed in October 1996

Rockett returned to the air on 98.5 on January 13, 1997, ready for war. When Todd & Tyler at KEZO 92.3 FM bashed Rockett on their morning show, Rockett fired back.

Rockett taped Todd & Tyler's January 3rd show during which the duo made fun of his return to *Sweet 98*. Then Rockett invited Rob McCartney and Julie Cornell, news anchors on KETV Channel 7, to re-enact the Todd & Tyler show by reading from a script that Rockett provided from the tape, a move that didn't sit well with KETV management.

Jim McKernan, who ran the Journal cluster of stations, may have put the gag order on Todd and Tyler after that as there were no more mentions of Rockett. McKernan in an *OWH* interview denied doing so but only referred to Rockett as Gary. He also quite accurately said, "I don't think the market is the same as it was when he was on the air (at KQKQ) the first time."

Word did come out, however, that Mike Steele had come after Todd and Tyler in his earlier efforts to replace Johnny Danger. Steele said it was the other way around and that they called him. Todd admitted only that he was inquiring "about the state of the industry" and that Steele responded with: "Throw a figure at me."

Rockett added new sidekicks. "That Girl Charlie," joined Rockett along with sportscaster Gary Java, rejoining the show after his KKAR 1290 role was cutback when the station signed Husker sports.

Rockett also hired former PD John Desjardins away from WOW AM/FM to be his producer. Desjardins had a good background for the position. For part of 1995, he produced the syndicated morning show for Mancow Muller of WRCX Chicago, Howard Stern's No. 1 competitor.

Winter 1996-97 ratings showed morning host Rockett significantly raised the Top 40 station's listenership in demographics across the board.

That summer Rockett got into a brief on-air feud with KFAB's Tom Becka after the two played in a local golf tournament. Becka nominated Rockett as "Butt-head of the week" during his show because Rockett signed prize cards at the golf tournament as "Rockett in the Morning." "Are we going to confuse him with some other Rockett?"

Rockett's response, "at least Tom Becka is fatter than me." Becka had the last word, "At least when (Z-92's) Todd & Tyler pick on me, they're funny."

A significant drop in Rockett's morning show appeared in the spring 1997 ratings, indicating the previous book with its increase was merely curiosity; the listeners didn't stay.

By fall, Todd and Tyler went after Rockett again, asking when he was going to appear outside their station with a bullhorn reading off his ratings numbers beating them, a stunt Rockett bragged about doing back in January when returning to the air.

After that, Rockett launched an on-air campaign to raise money for Todd's auto insurance. Todd Brandt of TnT apparently was involved in an accident while uninsured. Brandt made no excuses admitting he was at a low point, saying his finances were "messed up" during a separation with his wife and he was unaware the insurance had lapsed. Rockett announced he raised 300 dollars. But, nobody was laughing.

Rockett's fall promotion in October was the distribution of five thousand one-dollar bills to be dropped from the roof of Oak View Mall, 144th Street and West Center Road. Rockett set it up by complaining on-air, "Sweet 98 management gives me a measly \$5,000 budget for my fall promotion."

Rockett and sidekicks Helmet Head and That Girl Charlie broadcast that morning from the mall. Two other stations showed up as well. Personalities from KTNP 93.3 *The Point* and KIWR 89.7 *The River* appeared, each tossing out fake money along with fliers promoting their shows.

When the fall 1997 ratings came out, it was shown Rockett had lost a significant number of listeners, particularly among women 18 to 34 that traditionally had been his biggest following. This happened despite a heavy promotional billboard and television advertising campaign for his show.

The numbers continued to drop in the winter 1997-98 ratings with Rockett's average quarter-hour ratings in fifth place.

The first signs of Rockett's departure from KQKQ came in May 1998 when he was missing from the air on a Thursday and Friday. Rumors swirled, though official word was that he would return Monday. Monday and Tuesday came and went; still no Rockett. Operations Manager Mike Steele was unavailable and GM Marty Riemenschneider would not comment.

Anonymous sources told the *OWH* some of Rockett's drop-in tapes were gone from the studio along with the "Rockett in the Morning" sign that once hung in Sweet 98's storefront studio at 10th and Farnam Streets in the Old Market.

Word leaked out that the problems began the previous week during a heated argument between Rockett and Ops Manager Mike Steele in a meeting over the morning show. Rumors began to include Howard Stern's nationally syndicated shock-jock show as a replacement for Rockett.

More anonymous reports indicated that Rockett's producer, John Desjardins, and others went to Riemenschneider threatening to leave if Rockett stayed any longer.

By May 23, 1998, Rockett was officially off the morning show and Mike Steele was reassigned as PD of KZFX *The Fox*, the new incarnation for KDGE. Rockett, still on the payroll, laid low.

Producer John Desjardins, newsreader That Girl Charlie, and assistants Helmet Head and Farley would continue on the morning show for an unspecified time. The only thing Riemenschneider would say was: "I'm considering them and other options (for the *Sweet 98* morning show)."

Desjardins and company were given one ratings period to raise *Sweet 98's* morning numbers or they, too, would be out. They gained some time in the Summer ratings rising to 4th place.

Rockett left Mitchell Broadcasting in late July, declining the station's offer to be morning anchor on sports-talk KOIL 1180. With that, G. Rockett Phillips left Omaha in pursuit of his other interests in acting and production. He launched a website with plans for an Internet station in early 1999. Rockett a few years later launched a syndicated music show that ironically ran on 104.5, which by then was KSRZ.

So what went wrong, that Rockett couldn't reclaim successful numbers on KQKQ's morning show? Some speculated that perhaps his attitude noticeably soured when his listeners deserted him during his move to KESY. Or, perhaps he tried too hard upon his return, going beyond his normal personality.

More obvious was that the market changed in the short two years he was gone. Says J.J. Morgan, KQKQ's assistant PD at the time, "What changed? The rise of *Star* 104.5, the increasing popularity of Free Beer and Hot Wings on the morning show at *The River* 98.7, as well as Chris Baker and Scott Voorhees at *The Edge* 101.9. There simply was a group of morning shows that were better than when he left...more options."



KQKQ's J. J. Morgan.

KQKQ began co-sponsoring multi-act concerts with Sweetstock in 1998. The June 27 event at Westfair Amphitheater near Council Bluffs featured the disco group, the Village People as headliners. Other acts included N'Sync, Color Me Badd, and the Tuesdays.

New PD Wayne Coy arrived in mid-August 1998 from WADB FM in Mobile, Alabama. Coy also took over the morning show, Max and Wayne. Their show rose to fifth in the market in the winter 1999 ratings, giving KQKQ its highest share of listeners in two years, ranking number three overall.

Spring 1999 ratings saw KQKQ rebound to number two, right behind Country KXKT *The Kat*. It was its best rating period since 1995. "Sweet 98 hasn't been this high since Rockett left the first time," General Manager Marty Riemenschneider said.

Sweetstock II was held May 29, 1999 featuring 16 acts headlined by N'Sync. Twenty-thousand concert-goers attended, the largest crowd ever for the venue, despite that N'Sync had already played for a sold-out crowd of eight-thousand just weeks earlier at the Civic Auditorium. Other acts included Blessid Union of Souls, Coolio, and Omaha's Mulberry Lane, a female foursome of sisters just hitting the big time.

Less than two weeks before Sweetsock II, KQKQ's most formidable competition appeared. It was a rhythmic pop and dance music format that debuted nearly adjacent on the dial at 97.7. The station was the former KOSJ *Smooth Jazz*, a move-in signal licensed to Nebraska City and recently purchased by Journal Broadcasting.

With new call letters, KQCH, 97.7 on May 21 began playing dance artists such as TLC, Busta Rhymes, Janet Jackson, rapper MC Eiht, Mariah Carey, Will Smith and Ricky Martin. The new station, even with a less than optimal signal, created a buzz by playing almost non-stop the same music as KQKQ but with more hip-hop music mixed in.

KQCH came right at KQKQ. At the latter's Sweetstock II concert, KQCH 97.7 set up a stand with banners on the road leading to Westfair passing out bumper stickers. This led to a confrontation between KQKQ PD Wayne Coy and KQCH PD Erik Johnson. There were two versions of how ugly things became, but there were no arrests.

Almost immediately, KQCH rose among teens to second place, right behind KQKQ. Soon, KQKQ was overtaken by KQCH never to regain dominance in the market. KQCH was second only to Country KXKT in 2000 while KQKQ was seventh.

98.5 EPILOGUE

Waitt Radio took over stations owned by the Mitchell Group in a Local Marketing Agreement (LMA) in April 2000. An LMA means John Mitchell retained ownership of the stations and licenses while Waitt took over operations including programming.

Sweetstock III in 2000 headlined by Christina Aguilera drew more fans than ever although primarily with teen girls. 21-thousand showed up on a warm day that turned rainy and chilly by 8 p.m. With 18 acts performing throughout the day, it was after midnight before Aguilera took the stage.

In 2001 Sweetstock IV was headlined by rapper Shaggy. It was emceed by MTV DJ Brian McFayden, an Omaha native.

Sweetstock V in July 2002 had fewer than 10-thousand attend, the concerts headlined by rapper Nelly. It was the last Sweetstock, KQKQ organizers blaming the rising costs of big-name entertainers as the reason.

By this time Waitt bought all 16 Mitchell stations outright for \$36.6 million. John Mitchell was given a position as director at Waitt Radio but held no ownership of any portion of the company; Waitt's sole shareholder was Norman Waitt, Jr. The sale closed January 28, 2002.

G. Rockett Phillips made a brief "return" to Omaha with his syndicated "Rockett's Retro Friday Night" show, ironically picked up by 104.5 in March 2002. By this time the former KESY was under different ownership with the calls KSRZ *The Star*.

KQKQ ended two and a half decades as a hit music station with a robotic automated countdown at 3 p.m. March 11, 2004. DJs thanked their fans. While Green Day's "Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)" played in the background, a *Sweet 98* personality said a new era in Omaha radio would start in 24 hours.

The countdown reached zero launching a new format the following day. It was a Modern Adult Contemporary format, calling itself *Q98.5, Modern Hit Music*.

The first song on the new "Q" was "How You Remind Me" by Nickelback. With the format change came the removal of hip hop, rap, teen pop, and dance songs from the old playlist. The new approach put less emphasis on personality and more on music news and concerts. KQKQ's departure from CHR left Omaha without a mainstream CHR station.

Sister station KCTY FM 106.9 licensed to Plattsmouth stunted its format flip to rock at the same time. Its changes came just days after Waitt Omaha general manager Michael Payne was asked to step aside. He was replaced by Ken Fearnow who returned to Omaha after having left his successful reign at WOW AM/FM during those stations' heady Country years.

Waitt Radio merged with a Cedar Rapids, Iowa media company in 2005. The result was a renaming to NRG (New Radio Group) Media, headed by President/CEO Mary Quass, who began her career in radio sales in Cedar Rapids at KHAK 1360 in the early 1980s.

In October 2018, Pat & JT were replaced by Matt Tompkins and Nikki Oswald. Pat Safford and Jill 'JT' Hull had been hosting the morning show for sixteen years. Replacing them were Matt Tompkins and Nikki Oswald's "Matt & Nikki Have A Show".

99.9 KGOR Omaha

KGOR's 1988 flip to Oldies from CHR slowly paid off. It had respectable ratings by the mid-1990s though its morning show was often outpaced by the other stations' major personalities--Rockett at KQKQ, Todd and Tyler at KEZO, and the steady KFAB morning crew.

Also, country music was enjoying a huge resurgence putting WOW FM near or at the top. But the wide variety of favorite music in an Oldies format proved to be good for long-term listening in middays and afternoons, particularly in office environments.

Initially, KGOR's overall ratings dropped sharply in the months following the move to Oldies. By 1990 ratings slowly began to rise, then jumped with a nice increase in the summer of 1991, going from spring's 5.9 to 9.8 for fourth in the market. KGOR's share was higher than former rival KQKQ's 8.8 figure when both stations were CHR. Much of KGOR's strength was typically in the older audience group, topping listenership in the 25 to 49 group.

The morning show was hosted by Kevin Cooper with Scott Larsen. Cooper's show was upbeat and music intensive. An April 1992 morning bit of his invited listeners to take inventory of their refrigerators to highlight the spring-cleaning season. The person with a food item displaying the oldest expiration date was the winner of the contest. The ultimate winning listener brought in a container of maple syrup that expired in August 1980.

Ratings slipped in subsequent books dropping to 6th place in winter 1992 with a 6.5 and a 5.4 the following summer. But a boost was foreseen for 1993 as KOIL dropped Oldies at the beginning of the year.

Comedian Tom Becka joined the morning show by 1993. Becka grew up in Omaha graduating from Benson High before going on the comedy circuit. His resume included opening for Jerry Seinfeld, working with Paula Poundstone and Sam Kinison, and appearing on the Nashville Network.

Becka noted that radio work differs sharply from stand-up comedy. "In radio, you tell a joke once and it's gone. You can't use it again. In comedy, you tell a joke, people laugh and you go on to the next town where people haven't heard it before." (*OWH* August 21, 1993)

Changes came in 1994. KGOR adjusted its identifier to *70s Gold*. Becka was switched to Talk Radio on sister AM station KFAB 1110 in October taking the 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. spot. Kevin Cooper left KGOR a few months later in February 1995 for mornings on KESY 104.5.

A month after Cooper's departure, KGOR filled the morning slot with the syndicated Mark and Brian Show, delivered via satellite from KLOS Los Angeles. Nationally syndicated shows have generic content with no localization. A national toll-free number to access Mark and Brian resulted in a few calls from Omahans being aired.

Other localization came from inserts from KMTV's meteorologist Carey Coleman, "Commander Andy" Paulson with traffic reports, and in-studio newsman Terry Jones. KFAB/KGOR general manager Chuck Jewell said, "So we have everything that we've always had, but what we have is a little better talent" (*OWH* March 4, 1995). Jewell's assessment of talent was quickly put to the test.

The choice of Mark and Brian was a surprising move for such conservative management as that at KFAB/KGOR. Mark and Brian were shock jocks, and indeed the Omaha audience was shocked. Mark and Brian were definitely adult-oriented, their humor and bits pushing the envelope of what would be called decency and family values. Listeners called the station, the *Omaha World-Herald*, and even the Federal Communications Commission to complain about the show.

Jewell continued to defend his morning show choice. In comparing Mark and Brian's humor to those of other Omaha morning DJs, he cited in particular one of Rockett's bits on KQKQ. Jewell said, "If that's vulgar then we're vulgar."

On April 6, after five and a half weeks on the air, Mark and Brian were gone. Along with the change came a return to the Oldies format, dropping the *70s Gold* monicker.

Manager Chuck Jewell downplayed the Mark and Brian decision, saying he was pleased with the show, but, "When we officially told them that we were going to oldies, they officially resigned us."

Restoring order to the morning show, Jewell called upon a well-known name, Roger W. Morgan. After "Morganizing" people on his KOIL morning show in the 1960s, a prankster phone tactic since outlawed by the FCC, Morgan had moved to the West Coast in 1972 and worked at various radio stations. He returned to Omaha in 1991 to work as a marketing consultant for a law firm. Morgan most recently was hosting KFAB's morning show since 1993. He was switched over to sister station KGOR on April 25 for mornings following the Mark and Brian fiasco.

With the change came a significant increase in KGOR listenership, ranking number one in summer 1995 numbers among the 12 and older demos.

Ratings dropped but remained respectable after that brief pinnacle. The following summer saw KGOR third behind Country KXKT 103.7 *The Kat* and Rock KEZO 92.3 Z-92. KGOR moved up to second place in the spring 1997 ratings after KEZO and KKCD 105.3 tied for first with Rock and Classic Rock respectively.

Tony Wike, one of the KQKQ “Breakfast Flakes” until Rockett’s arrival there, joined Morgan’s morning show in 1997. Theresa Cassady, the “Kids Club” girl on KPTM channel 42, briefly joined the morning show as well.

On April Fools Day 1997 Todd and Tyler switched places with Roger W. Morgan and Tony Wike at KGOR 99.9. KGOR’s Oldies audience woke up to radio’s two bad boys talking about sports, rock music, and Hooters Restaurant. They even took listener calls while KGOR’s engineer Joe Siragusa nervously manned the bleep button, noting that it had to be used a few times.

During the hours following morning drive, music ruled the ratings and KGOR’s familiar variety of oldies did well. In the October 1997 ratings, middays with Kevin Cane scored in second place behind longtime popular Z-92 jock Rick Setchell. In third place was John Glenn at *The Kat*. Afternoons put KGOR’s Chuck Denver at the top followed by Bill Mattson at *The Kat* and Allison Steele at Z-92. Denver left for Classic Rock *The Fox* KZFX 101.9 in July 1998 after eight years with KGOR.

Drew Bentley who had programmed KQKQ 98.5 until leaving in 1991 took over as KGOR PD in July 1998. His arrival came during a KGOR-sponsored Westfair Amphitheater day-long oldies show featuring Mitch Ryder, Lou Christie, Gary Lewis & the Playboys, the Turtles, and the Grass Roots.

By this time, the stations had been swallowed up in the corporate takeovers that followed the Telecomm Act of 1996. In March of that year, KFAB and KGOR were purchased from Henry Broadcasting Company of San Francisco by American Radio Systems in Boston.

The deal involved a \$64 million stock swap, and included a cash payment and assumption of Henry Broadcasting's existing debt, placing the value of the agreement at about \$115 million.

The deal set up the spinoff of the two stations in October when Triathlon Broadcasting expanded in the market. Triathlon agreed to buy KGOR 99.9 and sister station KFAB 1110 for \$39 million in October 1996. The deal included the Muzak franchises for Omaha and Lincoln.

This deal would team the two stations with *The Kat* (KXKT 103.7 FM) and *The Point* (KTNP 93.3 FM, ex-KRRK as of September), both of which Triathlon just bought in April for \$10.8 million. Chuck Jewell would be replaced by Donn Seidholz, general manager of *The Kat* and *The Point*.

After several closing dates were set back, the deal at last closed in June 1997. Plans were made to move KXKT and KTNP from the 88th and F Streets studios into the KFAB/KGOR home at 50th and Underwood Streets.

Roger W. Morgan's contract was not renewed in March 1999 after five years of hosting the morning show. He announced plans to produce a weekly Sunday Oldies show of his own out of the KGOR studios with hopes to syndicate nationally.

The reason for Morgan's ouster was likely because the corporate buying-binge was still raging on. Triathlon was preparing to get swallowed up by an even bigger company, Capstar, an Austin, Texas corporation. When the deal was announced, KGOR and KFAB were among the 32 radio stations owned by Triathlon Broadcasting to go to Capstar.

Included in the deal was Pinnacle Sports Productions, the firm that broadcasts University of Nebraska football and other Husker sports. Triathlon had purchased Pinnacle Sports for \$5 million in March 1997. The deal, estimated at \$200 million, closed in May 1999, helping Capstar reach a total of about 300 stations.

The fast-moving buying sprees *still* weren't over. By October, Clear Channel Broadcasting had acquired Capstar's stations that by this time were owned by AM/FM Inc., the outgrowth of a merger between Capstar and Chancellor Media, each having owned stations numbering in the hundreds. KGOR and KFAB now found themselves in a company that owned 830 radio stations.

Thus the millennium closed, with just three major companies owning nearly all radio stations in the Omaha market, and more major deals on the way.

99.9 EPILOGUE

KGOR picked up the John Tesh syndicated “Intelligence For Your Life” show in 2003 and ran it as the evening show for over ten years. Various tips for bettering one’s life was the feature, delivered by musician, former *Entertainment Tonight* (syndicated TV) anchor, and born-again Christian John Tesh. It was distributed as voice track inserts to fit various formats. Its main competitor was “Delilah,” a syndicated show out of Seattle.

KGOR jumped aboard the All-Christmas format fad in 2006 playing holiday songs around the clock beginning at Thanksgiving, then returning to its Oldies format, newly-named *Superhits*, on December 26. The All-Christmas craze grew on a national scale each year, though KGOR chose not to repeat it in subsequent years.

In 2007 Clear Channel made nationwide cuts to its pricey talent. Two long-time professionals at KGOR, Liz Adams and program director Drew Bently, were let go.

Dave Wingert took over mornings on KGOR in 2007. He was fired in October 2010 for an expletive that went on the air. He returned to the Omaha airwaves on KOOO *The Big O* 101.9 in early 2012.

KGOR followed the trend of Oldies stations updating music libraries to shift forward into early 1980s hits with fewer songs from the 1950s and 60s. Formats that did so splitting off from Oldies were soon called Classic Hits.

103.7 KOMJ KXKT Atlantic, Glenwood IOWA

Omaha’s new move-in station was KOMJ 103.7, licensed to Atlantic, Iowa some 60 miles east into Iowa. The former KJAN-FM was upgraded to the maximum 100 thousand watts power with a new tower positioned to cover both markets within its primary coverage.

KOMJ was still struggling for a foothold in the Omaha market as it entered the 1990s. Its major problem was its signal, close to being on the fringe of its primary contour, its transmitter located about 30 miles out in western Pottawattomie County, midway to Atlantic.

The station was airing a broad-based Adult Rock format and with assistance from consultant Cal Casey out of Dallas was preparing to adjust to a straight-ahead CHR format to take on KQKQ 98.5.

The music adjustment came in March 1990, and in a dramatic fashion. GM Bob Dean liked the idea of “blowing up” the station and starting all over again. The plan was to leave the station off the air for a couple of days, then return, launching with new call letters.

The “blow up” was to be played out in a programming stunt. PD Brian DeGues (on-air name McFly) and Jefferson Action Jackson had the honors that afternoon, saying “103.7 KOMJ was dead.” The two discussed blowing up the station until finally concluding with an explosion sound effect followed by the transmitter being turned off. It stayed that way for days.

103.7 returned to the air at 6 a.m. the following Monday, March 12, playing a loop of songs with mentions of cats, such as “Year of the Cat,” “Honky Cat,” and “Cat Scratch Fever.”

It was the teaser for the new calls and a new image--KXKT, *Omaha's Kat*. The station's new logo was a cartoon figure of a grinning cat wearing sunglasses. At noon on Wednesday, March 14, 1990, the new format was launched.



PD Brian DeGeus said the new contemporary hit music station will have two slightly different personalities. During the day, DeGeus said, KXKT is going to be "very office tolerable," while at night "we're going to yank out some high-energy crunch." He also promised the station to be promotionally active and more community-oriented (*OWH* March 17, 1990).

The personality line up began with the “Married in the Morning” show, the husband and wife team of Jim and Melissa Sharpe. Like many couples, the two actually did get testy with each other on the air at times.

Melissa recalls her first day. “The first morning we were to go on the air, a storm dumped several inches of snow the night before. I'd never lived where it snowed before, and Jim hadn't in a long time. So instead of chancing taking our two-year-old son to his early morning babysitter before the show like we had planned, we brought him with us. It was our introduction to the listeners! Here we are. A married couple. And here's our baby in the studio!”

PD Brian DeGeuss handled middays keeping his monicker, McFly. Jefferson “Action” Jackson continued on afternoons and Bobby Chase (John Bell), a former KQKQ Supermouth finalist, was on nights.

It remained an uphill battle for the station. The interim silent period blew off what audience the station had and any new audience was very slow to show up. GM Bob Dean soon admitted it was a mistake to silence the station before the format flip.

KXKT program director Brian DeGeus had acknowledged that KQKQ *Sweet 98* was his station's main competitor. Indeed, a small inroad eventually appeared. *Sweet 98*'s share of the audience dropped from 13.7 in the spring of 1990 to 11.1 in the summer survey. But, it was KEZO 92.3 that did the damage to *Sweet*. KXKT rose only a half share with a 4.9 in the Arbitron survey compared its 4.4 in the spring.

With that, the promotions heated up. Gas prices were on the rise that summer and in August *The Kat* promoted it would soon announce a half-price gas opportunity at an Omaha location. When the location was finally announced (on a Thursday of course, the first day for Arbitron diary keepers) a traffic jam resulted.

KXKT repeated the stunt in early September at a Council Bluffs location. This time KQKQ 98.5 responded with free gas at a nearby location. Both sites were soon closed down by police due to the traffic problems, but the stunts were successful in creating listener buzz and in getting some ink in the *OWH*.

A Westinghouse exec passing through town heard KXKT's "Married in the Morning" show and recommended the Sharpes for one of his company's stations without even meeting the couple. The Sharpes were pirated away to Dallas before the end of the year. They were replaced on morning drive by G. Rockett Phillips, an actor, director, and producer who almost accidentally found himself in radio.

Gary Phillips, by now in his late 40s, became a radio personality rather late in his career. He had worked as a professional actor in soap operas such as "The Guiding Light," "One Life to Live" and "Days of Our Lives." He also had appeared on such prime-time shows as "Hill Street Blues," "Taxi" and "Knight Rider," and had directed TV commercials.

Morning newsman Roger Olson who had been with KXKT since its beginnings as KOMJ noted, "I was more than 14 years younger....So there was not necessarily a lot of common ground between us. Though I think at times he would have preferred to have someone more creative than the 'news guy' he got stuck with, we both made efforts to adjust to each other and ultimately worked well together."

Rockett's morning show contributed to the best book ever for *The Kat*. In summer 1991 KXKT achieved a 5.1 share in the overall 12-plus category while KQKQ 98.5, accustomed to being in the 10's and 11's, fell to an 8.8 going from third to fifth in the market.

The head-to-head promotions with KQKQ continued. Each conducted a scavenger hunt contest in November 1991. The "Kat-Pepsi Super Scavenger Hunt" was matched by the "KQKQ Super Scavenger Hunt." Each station laid claim for coming up with the idea. The rules were almost identical. The items to be sought were announced each morning, and the prize was a car.

By now, *Sweet 98* was paying real attention. KQKQ came after *The Kat*'s morning personality, "Rocket in the Morning," with big money, thanks to the deep pockets of owner John Mitchell.

Mark Evans, operations manager for KXKT said that Rockett told him he was offered \$100,000 over 18 months to join *Sweet 98*. That figure, Evans said, could make him the highest-paid morning personality in Omaha.

Rockett crossed the street in January 1992 to join the ranks of *Sweet 98*. Going with Rockett was his sports sidekick Tom Zenner who was the KPTM channel 42 sportscaster doing part-time radio work.

Newsman Roger Olson declined an offer to be part of the team and remained loyal to Bob Dean and *The Kat*, saying, "It turned out to be the right call for me considering I lasted another 29 years (in the business)."

With Rockett gone, *The Kat* struggled on, soon flipping from CHR to Alternative Rock. Afternoon DJ Action Jackson describes it, saying, "We just didn't have the signal to be a major player as a CHR, so they decided to do a niche format. Alternative. With no budget to promote, that didn't go well either."

Jeff Jackson had switched from afternoons to mornings co-hosting with T.J., the latter being John Bell who had been doing evenings as Bobby Chase.

The winter 1992 ratings at the start of the year had KXKT down to 3.3 while KQKQ rebounded to 12.7, one of its best books in years, not far behind the ratings leader KFAB with its 13.1.

Meanwhile, KXKT's Bob Dean had been wrestling with the station's signal problem. The KXKT tower was over 30 miles east of the city near the Iowa town of Hancock, a long way for a rimshot signal into Omaha.

As early as 1989 Dean had been seeking to place an on-frequency booster transmitter in Omaha to fill in the main transmitter's weak areas. Booster transmitters were not widely used and generally were placed inside a station's coverage contour where the signal needed the most help, such as a shadowed area behind a mountain or in a valley.

For KXKT, the problem was a signal weakened by distance, the signal needing help in penetrating Omaha's downtown buildings and covering shadows in the slow rolling hills of westward-sprawling Omaha.

The downside of a booster is that its signal clashes noisily with the main transmitter's signal in the interference zones wherever the signals are roughly of equal strength. Some boosters historically have been tried and turned off after determining the booster created too much interference with the main signal.

The Kat finally got its in-town booster in 1992. Running 17 thousand watts at 944 feet directional from the channel 3 tower at the North 72nd Street antenna farm, it was licensed as KXKT-1.

There were rumors that sometimes the main transmitter was "accidentally" left off the air with KXKT-1 running solo. Action Jackson, the afternoon talent recalls, "*The Kat* got approval for the 'booster' transmitter at 72nd. I know that was expensive and it definitely made things tight. It didn't get the results they were hoping for due to the interference it caused with the main transmitter in Iowa. In fact, there were several stretches of time when we just turned Iowa off! Way illegal, but we sounded fantastic in Omaha!"

However, the main transmitter did have its share of down time that was legitimate. The antenna bays at the Hancock main site were reduced from eight to six as part of the booster license. This meant the Hancock transmitter was pushed rather hard to make up the difference and suffered occasional failures or overloads, leaving the Omaha booster to be the sole signal for KXKT. From downtown it was a half-hour drive to the Hancock site to reset the transmitter.

Meanwhile, the programming switch to Alternative Rock proved disastrous. In spring 1992 *The Kat* was down to a 2.7 ratings share, even trailing Bennington's new low-power Album-Rock station KRRK. In summer it was down to a 2.1, and in the fall came the worst book ever for the station, a 1.2.

That was enough for manager and part-owner Bob Dean to throw in the towel. It was decided to go Country, a format that had been considered a few years earlier but rejected as it was already entrenched at WOW. Since then, Country had become hugely popular and now invited competition.

WOW AM and FM was in on the ground floor of country well before its new-found popularity. The combo was now riding high, raking in over 20 percent of Omaha's radio advertising revenue.

As preparations for the format flip were being made, *The Kat* was blindsided by KFKX 101.9, a rimshot station licensed to Lincoln. KFKX did a sudden flip from Rock to Young Country, opening a studio in Omaha and changing call letters to those of an earlier Omaha Country station, KYNN.

In a frantic rush *The Kat* made its flip to Country just two days later. On Tuesday October 6, 1992 at midnight, KXKT went continuous Country as *KT-103*.

"TJ (John Bell) and Rog" (Roger Olson) was the morning show. The duo worked hard to make an impact, still hamstrung by the station's signal problems.

AM drive personality Jeff Jackson had left before the flip for a gig in Kansas City. He noted with irony that his KC station soon flipped to Country as well. This time Jackson, a Rock jock at heart, adjusted and stayed with Country where he went on to become a well-known Country personality for years to come.

In spring 1994 PD Mark Evans left for a Country station in Sacramento, replaced by long-time *Kat* employee Tom Goodwin. Starting out as a copywriter and overnight personality back in the KOMJ days, Goodwin, who commuted each day from Fremont, proved to be a competent and successful Country PD.

Meanwhile, the signal problem persisted. The booster proved less than satisfactory in helping KXKT's signal in Omaha. A better solution emerged in October 1994. Bob Dean saw an opening for moving the station's community of license from Atlantic to Glenwood, Iowa, close enough to allow an Omaha tower to be used for the main transmitter.

A new FM was coming to Atlantic, which meant KXKT would no longer be required to stay there. The Feds frowned on allowing a station to leave its community of license unless there was service to replace it. Dean applied for permission to move KXKT to Glenwood.

The new FM radio service coming to Atlantic paving the way for the move was KSOM 98.5 licensed to Audubon, a nearby Iowa community less than 25 miles north of Atlantic. It signed on in August 1995 with 100 thousand watts at 528 feet programming Country and farm reports with a two-man news staff. The KSOM studios were in Atlantic at 413 Chestnut Street.

(Owners Meredith Communications added a second FM station to its Chestnut Street studios in July 2000, this one licensed to Atlantic. It was KSWI 95.7 running 20 thousand watts at 358 feet, picking up the old "South West Iowa" calls once used by 1560 in Council Bluffs. The two stations shared a tower out to the east of town off Iowa 83 near Wiota, Iowa.)

Approval for the license move to Glenwood came nearly a year later, a month after KSOM signed on, in September 1995. By this time country music popularity had leveled out. KYNN 101.9 gave up the format in February leaving the arena to WOW AM/FM and KXKT.

With KYNN gone, KXKT experienced a gain in the ratings to 8.0 while long-time market leader WOW FM held steady at 8.5. Manager Bob Dean credited the morning show "T.J. and Rog" with the station's increase in listeners.

The FCC authorization to move the community of license from Atlantic to Glenwood, Iowa was set to take effect on September 8, 1995 (Federal Register, July 28, 1995). Glenwood, a bedroom community just 18 air miles SSW of downtown Omaha, was close enough to allow the KXKT transmitter to be relocated to Omaha, thus permanently solving the signal problem.

Getting out while the getting was good, majority owner Bob Greenlee sold KXKT in December 1995. The station's improved ratings in the market plus the promised Glenwood upgrade valued the sale at \$8.125 million. Dean, after years of relentless struggle, succeeded in achieving a respectable exit from the radio business, though some serious lawsuits that developed during the course of his business were yet to be settled.

The buyer was Triathlon Broadcasting of San Diego. Station ownership rules had been loosening and KXKT now found itself part of a group that had earlier purchased KTGL 92.9 Beatrice/Lincoln and KZKX 96.9 Seward/Lincoln. Along with the KXKT buy, the company was buying KRRK 93.3 Bennington/Omaha from Matt Markel, owner of the Ranch Bowl.

The sale to Triathlon closed in April 1996. The transmitter move to the Omaha antenna farm was completed in time for the spring ratings, the antenna on the WOWT channel 6 tower at about the 880 foot level. 103.7, now licensed to Glenwood, Iowa had finally achieved its goal of becoming "an Omaha station."

With that, KXKT in the spring quarter-hour rankings finally went to number one. The transmitter move with its improved signal was enough to vault KXKT past KQKQ 98.5 *Sweet 98*. The former Country leader, WOW, was sixth.

Construction of new KXKT studios to be co-located with newly acquired sister station KRRK was underway at 88th and F Streets. The old transmitter site at Hancock in western Pottawattamie County was no longer needed. That led to a dispute with Loren Luth, the landowner who had been leasing the land for the tower.

Luth's contract specified no property may be moved from the Hancock site. Only after Triathlon threatened to abandon the equipment and the tower did the farmer relent. The estimated cost of tower removal would have been in the thousands. The tower remained with Luth who eventually was given its complete ownership. It remains on his property, rented for use by various services as of 2020.



In July 1996 KXKT went back to calling itself *The Kat*. The logo was a cartoon cat in a cowboy hat. Ratings continued to be strong, always in the top tier of stations.

KXKT then went through more ownership changes during the dizzying consolidation blur of the late 1990s. Triathlon Broadcasting was sold to Capstar in 1998 which in turn merged with Chancellor Media Corporation just weeks later. That merger resulted in the formation of AM/FM Inc. which was itself was swallowed up the following year by Clear Channel Broadcasting, known better in later years as iHeart Radio.

103.7 EPILOGUE

KXKT continued as a dominant Omaha station with its Country format only losing its top spot for a brief period to the surprising surge of CHR/Dance KQCH 97.7 in 2000.

WOW FM 94.1, long since displaced as the market's leading Country station, went through format adjustments under Journal Broadcasting ownership before finally giving up country music in 2002. When 94.1 was flipped to Rhythmic Hits, KXKT 103.7 became the market's sole country music station.

Long-time morning newsmen and personality Roger Olson was switched from KXKT to sister station KFAB as a producer in 2001, remaining in that position for another 19 years.

The KXKT transmitter was moved from the WOWT channel 6 tower to the KETV channel 7 tower sometime after KETV's new tower went up. Its old tower had collapsed in 2003.

2007 was a year of adjustment as many talented and high-priced talents were cut loose on a national scale. The November 2007 cuts at Clear Channel included KXKT PD Tom Goodwin, exiting just one week after accepting the CMA Medium Market Station of the Year award in Nashville.

Named interim PD was morning co-host and music director Craig Allen who had accompanied Goodwin to Nashville. Goodwin's replacement came in January 2008. KQCH PD/midday personality Erik "EJ" Johnson was named KXKT PD and took the afternoon shift, replacing long time Omaha personality Bill Mattson, another victim of the cuts.



KXKT's owners, Clear Channel, maintained dominance in the country arena with an assist from its station on 93.3 licensed to Bennington. In 2004, 93.3 flipped from rock KRQC to Classic Country *US93.3 KHUS*. The move was to complement sister station KXKT's Modern Country.

KHUS adjusted to a New Country format as *The Twister* KTWI 93.3 in November 2007. But in 2012, KTWI 93.3 reverted to a Classic Country format becoming *The Wolf*. It stunted with country-heavy Christmas music before debuting the new format on January 2. Just weeks later the calls were changed to KFFF. The former *Twister* New Country format continued on the HD2 channel of KXKT.

104.5 KESY-FM KSRZ

For years a Beautiful Music station, KESY 104.5 morphed into a soft Adult Contemporary format in 1989.

As the new decade opened, KESY manager Dana Webb saw an opportunity to further his format's penetration when KFAB dropped music in favor of a News/Talk format. He began a promotional push directed at disenchanting KFAB listeners, particularly those in the 35-64 age group.

The effort paid off. KESY FM gained a sizable increase from its 8 share in fall 1989 to 11.4 in the winter 1990 book. It was the best book ever for the station, now ranking third in the market. Even the AM side benefited, though in minuscule proportions. KESY 1420 simulcasting the FM gained from a .1 to a full 1.0.



*KESY General Manager
Dana Webb.*

GM Dana Webb in crediting his promotion said, "That was the brass ring, and we wanted to grab it." Webb adds, "Let's face it, we're the only adult music station in town" (*OWH* May 12, 1990).

KFAB's manager Bob Sweet conceded that his station lost listeners to KESY FM with hopes they would at least return whenever seeking news and information.

The ratings held true in the spring 1990 survey as well, staying relatively flat with an 11.0. The summer book was even better, gaining to a 12.2, doubling the station's 6 share from two summers before. The station remained third behind KFAB 1110 and KEZO 92.3.

Competition arrived in September 1989 when KKVU 105.9 signed on with a hybrid light jazz and soft AC format. Webb put on his game face pointing out that his 104.5 dial position was directly between the two stations that were busily promoting the most: KKCD 105.9 and KXKT 103.7, making his station easy to discover. He pulled his advertising budget and declared, "I'm going to get found without spending any money" (*OWH* Sept 22, 1990).

In late 1991 Webb reached an agreement with a relatively new television station just three blocks away. He negotiated with with KPTM Channel 42's PD Brad Gonzalez and station manager Jim McKernan to have the Fox 42 news team anchor drive times on KESY FM. It was a win-win for the stations as the Fox 42 "9:00 News" had launched just months earlier and was seeking cross-promotion.

But it was a bit of a grind for the news folk. Ending their shifts at 10 p.m. at the earliest, an early morning arrival at the AM station created a demanding split shift. TV weathermen commonly do forecasts on radio stations, often pre-taped, but using a whole news team live was unusual.

Now bolstering the KESY morning show was KPTM's news co-anchor Heather Hruby, meteorologist Ron Gerard, and sportscaster Tom Zenner. KPTM 42's other co-anchor, Kent Grisham, came in afternoons to deliver news.



Tom Zenner's schedule was the most grueling. After a live sportscast on KESY he would tape two more, then charge down Dodge Street to 10th and Farnam for KQKQ 98.5 where he handled sports for "Rockett in The Morning."

KKVU *The View* dropped its jazz format in May 1992 flipping to Classic Rock. Again, Webb seized an opportunity and on June first began playing soft jazz in the evenings. Calling it *Night Breeze*, the show ran 8 p.m. to Midnight featuring instrumental artists like Earl Klugh, David Sanborn and Kenny G, and vocalists such as Anita Baker and Sade.

Dana Webb began pursuing station ownership with three partners in November 1992. His group sought to buy KESY AM and FM from SunGroup Inc., an Indianapolis-based corporation where Webb was serving as a vice president. SunGroup had filed for Chapter 11 reorganization in May of the previous year. The new company would operate as BCR Corporation.

Out of SunGroup's roster of 11 stations, KESY was one of two that were operating in the black. The remaining nine were the reason for the chain's reorganization. The deal was expected to close around February 1993.

Webb said changes at the station wouldn't be noticeable. Except perhaps to the staff. Operations Manager Scott Henderson was let go as part of the plan. Henderson, formerly with WOW and KOMJ 103.7, soon rejoined WOW for a brief period before leaving the market for Michigan.

Also dropped was the KPTM news team except for meteorologist Ron Gerard who continued coming in mornings to deliver weather forecasts.

Airborne traffic reports were added a year later in about September 1994 from Airborne Traffic Network, a Kansas City company expanding into Omaha. The company also was contracted to provide reports for Great Empire's WOW AM and FM, along with John Mitchell's KQKQ and KKAR.

The only other airborne traffic reports in the market were from "Commander Andy" Paulson airing on Henry Broadcasting's KFAB and KGOR, plus WOWT channel 6.

Kevin Cooper took over the morning show from Bill Young in February 1995, coming over from mornings at KGOR. He promised to bring “some of my personality, and some of my listeners” to KESY, and to provide “some quick tidbits of information with the music format we have, and some lighter topics.”

Cooper’s morning show was in doubt six months later as rumors emerged in August that KQKQ’s G. Rockett Phillips was in negotiations with KESY FM.

Rockett had been with KQKQ since 1992, pirated away from KXKT 103.7 where he first entered the market. His show on KQKQ was a success though criticized as vulgar at times. His move to Soft Rock from a CHR station seemed out of place.



With his negotiating attorney Steve Seline, Rockett was enticed by a rumored 100 thousand dollar one-year contract plus his own production company that he would name “Bite Me Productions.” Rockett signed with KESY FM to begin in September.

By this time Manager Dana Webb had shifted KESY’s music to a slightly more uptempo contemporary stance, with songs by Chicago and Paul McCartney showing up on the playlist. With Rockett’s start the station identifier was changed to Y-104 that same month. Webb clearly was going for a younger and more active audience.

Also in Rockett’s agreement was more creative control. He said his contract "guarantees me freedom to do what I want on the show without breaking any FCC laws or regulations, and it also gives me the opportunities to go out and sell advertising for my show." His show would run less than four hours, from 5:30 to 9 a.m. (*OWH* August 31, 1995). Rockett’s sidekick, Terianne Hannibal, also came over from KQKQ though she signed a separate contract.

Rockett counted on his listeners whom he referred to on-air the "world's most dangerous audience" to move over to KESY with him, saying he wouldn’t have signed a contract had he thought otherwise. "They've just been really responsive," he said.

Cooper was moved to afternoons and Rockett’s morning show launched in mid-September 1995 on 104.5. The business phones were busy that morning with complaints from long time listeners.

Y-104 General Manager Dana Webb said the station raised its commercial air rates by 60 percent since Rockett began his morning show. Rates also went up 25 percent during the rest of the day, he said.

The following January a public dispute broke out over Rockett's on-air use of the term, "the world's most dangerous audience." KQKQ claimed proprietary rights with Mitchell Broadcasting serving a cease-and-desist order. No further actions were taken and the issue quietly died.

As it turns out, "The world's most dangerous audience" did not follow Rockett to Y-104. In Rockett's two rating periods since starting at 104.5, the first showed an increase of about two share points for the targeted audience but the in second it dropped back down to where it had been before. Rockett even voiced frustration on the air at the lack of response to some of his call-in bits, heard to say, "you don't love me anymore."

In February 1996, signs of belt-tightening cropped up as PD Jerry Balletta was ousted and Terianne Hannibal was given his 9 a.m. to Noon midday show in addition to her morning show duties. Webb said, "We just decided to eliminate that position and reallocate the resources to another direction."

Balletta found he was simply a figurehead anyway. He learned that all programming decisions were under Webb's control making his own job simply a detail position.

Balletta promptly returned to KQKQ middays where he had worked earlier. He seemed relieved, saying it's "good to be back in a stable environment." Balletta left KQKQ after a brief period, moving to mornings at KFRX Lincoln.

A revamping of Rockett's morning show followed in March. Two new sidekicks were added: Laura Morgan and Amazon Dawn, who reportedly was 6 foot 8 inches. A third personality working the street was added, Todd the Road Goat, also called Helmet Head. Hannibal continued on news and features but in a more limited role.

By May it was clear that Dana Webb had miscalculated. After a successful run at the start of the decade, his move to contemporize the station and add the city's top DJ was a failure. The Rockett had fizzled and Phillips was removed from 104.5.

Webb announced that Rockett took a couple of days off then decided not to return to Y-104. Rockett, expressing shock and disappointment, said he was fired. He said Webb told him that station officials had decided to "sever their ties with me" due to poor ratings.

In addition, the dearth of music on the morning show came into play as it did for Rockett at KQKQ. Webb was wanting a “listen at work” image for middays, and Rockett’s morning show didn’t provide a suitable lead-in.

Kevin Cooper was moved back to mornings teaming up with the left-behind Terianne Hannibal. Afternoons were filled by Correy Webb, Dana’s 19-year-old son, who had already gained on-air experience at Country KYNN 101.9 and part time on his dad’s station before that. Noon to three was filled by Kent Grisham, former news anchor for KPTM Channel 42.

Rockett sued KESY FM for damages, filing on June 27. His claim included \$161,000 that a court petition said is due him under the contract he had with the station, although Webb had already said he would fulfill the original contract. Also requested was an unspecified amount of compensation for defamation and fraudulent misrepresentations.

KESY FM’s format settled in during the summer of 1996 with the addition of “Delilah,” a syndicated soft pop and rock program via satellite out of Seattle with its hostess offering soothing advice. Kevin Cooper was made PD by this time, describing Delilah by saying she’s “honest, sincere and gets very intimate with her listeners.” Delilah ran 6 to 11 p.m. evenings, replacing *Night Breeze*.

By September it became apparent why Webb was wanting to beef up the station’s ratings. KESY FM and sister KBBX 1420 AM, the AM by this time running a separate Soul Oldies format from Satellite Music Network, were to be sold.

Webb and his group reached an agreement to sell to the Journal Broadcast Group in late 1997. Journal already owned four stations in the market, KEZO, KKCD, KOSR, and KOSJ.

But more troubles for Webb arrived before the sale closed. In December, Arbitron sued KESY and KBBX for quoting ARB ratings figures as a sales tool without being a subscribing station. Webb denied the allegations. As with the Rockett lawsuit, it must be assumed a quiet settlement was reached.

Journal took over the stations at the start of 1998 and set forth with immediate changes. The KESY format was moved to KOSJ 97.7.

The changeover forced the exit of four staffers, including Kevin Cooper, Terianne Hannibal, and long-time announcer and production director Tom Range. Webb, to his credit as he was no longer with the station, gave the exiting staff severance pay after learning they were let go.

For three days the KESY format was simulcast on both KOSJ 97.7 and KESY 104.5. Then at 3 p.m. Tuesday, January 14, 1998, KSRZ *The Star* was born, taking over 104.5. The KESY call letters were moved to 97.7, replacing KOSJ.

The new format played Hot Adult Contemporary featuring artists like Sheryl Crow, Matchbox 20, and the Wallflowers. The most direct competitor playing Hot AC was KTNP 93.3 *The Point* with its lowly 3600-watt signal now up against 104.5's 100 thousand watts.



The morning show was filled by EmJay League, a low-key smoothly-confident female personality who most recently had been doing personality news for Todd and Tyler on Z-92.

EmJay always insisted her initials be spelled out for her first name ever since entering radio as an intern at KXKT 103.7. From there she soon went to KKCD 105.9, then segued within the Journal organization to KEZO 92.3 joining TnT's morning show. Though proving herself a highly competent air personality, her show on KSRZ *The Star* remained music intensive.

The Star showed increases in broad demographics and came in at number two overall in the Spring 1998 ratings, just behind Country KXKT 103.7. *The Point*, KTNP 93.3 came in 7th.

The Star remained strong that fall, dropping to third only due to KFAB's annual Husker football ratings surge.

EmJay's morning show ran for about 18 months. In summer 1999 Dan Persigehl, formerly the program director at KZZO-FM in Phoenix, joined the morning show. The independent-minded EmJay resigned a month later saying she wanted to pursue writing in addition to her free-lance voice work career.

104.5 EPILOGUE

The Star remained strong with its Hot Adult Contemporary music into the new millennium and made few changes, eventually morphing its identifier to *104 Star: 80's 90's and Today*. It was also among the first of the Omaha stations to flip to an All-Christmas format around Thanksgiving in 2007 and again in 2009.

With the advent of High Definition broadcasting, KSRZ began airing *ESPN Deportes* on its HD Radio digital audio subchannel in 2007.

Journal Communications and The E.W. Scripps Company announced on July 30, 2014 that the two companies would merge to create a new broadcast company under the E.W. Scripps Company name.

The deal came to fruition on April 1, 2015, as both Scripps and Journal spun off their publishing operations into a new company called Journal Media Group leaving the merged broadcast properties to Scripps Broadcasting Holdings.

106.3 KBWH Blair

KBWH 106.3 was still relatively new, running 3000 watts at 469 feet as the decade commenced. From Blair, that was enough to just reach the northernmost portions of Omaha. Comfortable listening deteriorated as one traveled south, the signal becoming very spotty by the time it reached Bellevue.

The station's financial backing since the early '80s was CVC Capital, a Manhattan company owned by Joerge Klebe. His company specialized in lending money to minorities buying broadcast properties.

KBWH and its Black owners, LDH Communications, were on shaky ground mainly due to internal management problems. Klebe began foreclosure on the troubled KBWH 106.3 in 1989. Now adding the Midwest to his travel schedule of handling multiple stations, he made trips to Omaha to oversee the take over.

Klebe hired Kevin Van Grouw to be the new station manager for KBWH upon the foreclosure. Van Grouw recalls, "February of 1990 he (Klebe) came into town again and we started the process of taking over the radio station... and on a snowy day I met with Klebe and Larry Littlejohn to discuss making KBWH compliant."

Van Grouw found this to be a challenge, noting numerous legal discrepancies. "The current studio was in Omaha, but back then you still needed to have a remote studio within the city grade of the signal. I found a second floor room (in Blair) that we would use to set up the studio.

"I also started to make the FCC files current. They had not done anything for five years. With guidance of Klebe's FCC lawyers in Washington D.C., they sent me a letter stating no files have been completed in over five years and I had to put it in a folder and mark down the five year gap on the front."

The actual takeover came in mid-April. “Klebe called and said he was in Omaha and needed me to meet him up at the airport. We drove to Blair and he told me he was moving the station back into Blair. I reached out to (free-lance radio engineer) Dick Dennis. He, Klebe, and myself met for lunch and discussed the options.

“Two days later Klebe went into the Omaha Studios and met with Larry Littlejohn and his staff to inform them of his decision. About 10 a.m. that morning Dick and I showed up to dismantle the studios.”

Dick Dennis recalled Klebe out front literally chewing out the owners and managers while he was in the studio collecting the equipment. Van Grouw confirms this, saying, “Joerge was in the front lobby lecturing the staff on how they ran the radio station. It was a bit uncomfortable as a group of men started to mingle in the parking lot asking why KBWH was off the air.”

Sunrise closed the station down with plans to move the studio from 60th and Hartman Streets back to Blair. The station remained dark for six months.

The station returned to the air on October 3 with a staff of four, including the new General Manager Kevin Van Grouw. The offices and studio’s new home was at 1570 Washington Street. The transmitter remained near Modale on the Iowa side of the river, three miles east of Blair.

Sunrise Broadcasting made KBWH a local Blair station once again, no longer targeting a North Omaha listenership. The focus would be on local news and information targeting residents of Blair, Missouri Valley, and nearby Nebraska communities including Tekamah, Arlington, and Fort Calhoun.

The majority of the programming was automated, delivered by satellite. Van Grouw elaborates, “Klebe and I decided to use Unistar's AC format at the time and added CNN news, and I carried the Iowa Hawkeyes.” For the studio, “I upgraded from a five channel McMartin Board to an eight pot McMartin board.”

Most of the time it was a ghost studio. Visitors would enter and hear the programming but see only an empty room but for the audio board, a lonely microphone, and a computer the size of a breadbox.

Klebe was quick to pick up on new automated technology that by this time was all computer-driven and much less clunky than earlier mechanical automation.

Computer hard drives containing audio files and loaded with programming instructions combined with audio downloaded from the satellite to deliver crisp, full digital programming. Programming was seamlessly assembled and fed to the audio board with perfect timing.

(Klebe would incorporate the same automation with his new purchase in April, buying KNCY 1600 and KNCY 97.7 in Nebraska City for \$625 thousand. Owning the stations was all the more reason for him to make frequent trips from New York to the Midwest as his management style was very much hands-on. Klebe often preached ownership of one's job but conversely kept his management people on a short leash.)

KBWH proved to be an albatross for Klebe. Blair didn't have a lot of retail business and convincing Omaha businesses to advertise on the station was difficult. When any Omaha business was finally convinced of the benefits of advertising to the communities in Washington County, it expected cheap spots plus freebies.

An additional problem was the Iowa landowner on which the tower stood. VanGrouw recalls, "He didn't like anyone and always threatened to end the lease...March of 1992 the farmer called Klebe to inform him that he was going to terminate the lease and that was pretty much the nail in the coffin for KBWH's transmitter site."

Sunrise silenced KBWH in June 1992, finally ending the station's struggle for good.

But, it wasn't the end. Klebe was looking to turn his lemon into lemonade. New application filings began just a month later, Klebe now seeking a Class C3 for Blair on a new frequency. The new station would emerge from the KBWH license with fresh calls and more power, and a new dial position of 101.5. It would be KISP with 25000 watts at 391 feet.

From this point, the KISP 101.5 story begins as its own.

THE NON-COMMS

89.7 KIWR Council Bluffs

Of the three educational non-comm stations in the Omaha market, KIWR 89.7 was the most powerful at 100 thousand watts. Despite the good signal, the station lagged behind the other two non-comms in a struggle to survive. After a decade of delays and government funding cuts, the struggle continued into the 1990s reaching near-crisis proportions.

Since its founding in 1981 KIWR 89.7 grew to offer the most complete and appealing classical music programming available in the Omaha metropolitan area. State support was substantial in its early years, but that soon declined to nothing.

In 1990 a cutback in funding amounting to about \$140 thousand a year starting on July 1 was announced by its licensee, Iowa Western Community College (*OWH* March 17, 1990). The state of Iowa would continue to provide about \$35 thousand a year, but that was far short of KIWR's \$270 thousand annual budget. A recent spring fundraising drive brought in only \$30 thousand.

KIWR general manager Ward Bean said the station must now rely on increased support from its listeners while continuing to seek underwriting, foundation grants, and other revenue opportunities. In addition, he said, KIWR will also have to reduce expenditures.

National Public Radio was dropped in July, much of it already being duplicated on Omaha's KIOS 91.5. This saved \$67 thousand a year. Additionally, some syndicated programs such as "My Music" and "Weekend Radio" were dropped. The voids were filled with classical music programming as KIWR was already calling itself, *The Classical Station*.

The station budget was slashed to \$226 thousand for the coming year. To meet this, goals were set at \$50 thousand dollars in listener support and \$40 thousand in business underwriting.

KIWR 89.7 signed to become a secondary affiliate of American Public Radio. It was secondary to Omaha station KIOS 91.5, meaning the station could air only the network's programming not being aired by KIOS. KIWR also made plans to supplement its local news coverage with reports from the Associated Press Network News.

(American Public Radio was founded in 1983 as an alternative to NPR for public radio program distribution. Four entities established APR: the Minnesota Public Radio Network, WGBH Boston, WNYC New York City, and KUSC Los Angeles.

APR became APM, American Public Media, in 1994 under the umbrella of Public Radio International, PRI. The network's Minnesota arm distributed "A Prairie Home Companion," Garrison Keillor's popular show, carried exclusively in Omaha over KIOS 91.5.)

Program Director David Paisley added more local programming to help fill the NPR void. Former big band leader Lee Barron came over from KVNO 90.7 that July with his weekly one-hour show of Big Band classics.

The 75-year-old Barron began in radio in 1943 on KOIL. He's since worked at numerous Omaha stations, including KBON, KOWH, KSWI, KOOO, KESY, and KCRO. He remained with KIWR until his death in December 1993.

In September "The Music Box" was added, featuring a variety of non-mainstream music from classical to jazz and New Age. It ran weeknights at 11 p.m. to the station's sign off at midnight. On Sundays New Age "Music from the Hearts of Space" aired for two hours at 10 p.m.

Things worsened when Southwestern Iowa voters turned down a proposed \$27.5 million bond issue in February 1992, creating a severe money crunch at the school.

By April, KIWR was \$62 thousand in debt. Iowa Western began seeking buyers for the station with intentions to cease operating after June 30 (*OWH* April 7). Iowa Western President Carl Heinrich said the college cannot continue to absorb the costs of the station at the expense of academic programs.

Three thousand-watt KVNO owned by the University of Nebraska at Omaha expressed interest in the signal, as did Nebraska Public Radio whose programs were not carried in Omaha by either KVNO or KIOS. Fourteen organizations showed interest in the non-comm. Seven bids were received by the deadline.

A reprieve came with a last-moment week-long on-air appeal that generated \$76 thousand in donations, more than enough to cover current fiscal year expenses. A corporate fund drive was set to follow for another \$150 thousand for the next year. With that, the college board of directors gave KIWR more time. December 30 was the next deadline to develop a program to make the classical music station self-supporting.

By December less than a third of the expenses were covered by donations for the new year and the college board again voted to sell off the station, setting the date as March 15, 1993.

Three groups submitted bids. The Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Commission, that operates the Nebraska Public Radio Network, bid \$100,000. An organization known as EYE2, made up of supporters of Grace College of the Bible, made an offer of \$245,000. The highest bid, \$525,000, was submitted by Freedom Broadcasting Network of Omaha.

Bidding requirements were that the winning bidder pledge to retain the current classical music format of KIWR and be an institution of higher learning. None of the three bidders met these requirements in full. Iowa Western Community College instead made a renewed commitment to the station, giving it the next three years toward a goal of self-sufficiency.

Program director David Paisley was asked to resign after six years. In May a full-time general manager was named. Scott Hanley from WGVU Grand Rapids came in with fourteen years of public broadcasting management and fundraising experience.

Hanley found KIWR was running a clear second behind KVNO in serving the classical music audience. By July he changed the station from *The Classical Station* to *Heartland Public Radio*.

While keeping APR, NPR programming returned to the station at a much lower cost. Back were "Morning Edition" and "All Things Considered," along with a mix of classical, jazz, acoustic, and new age music.

Hanley hired the station's first news director, Martin Wells, to provide local and regional news and information plus feature-length stories on local issues. Wells, like most morning newscasters, lifted stories from the *Omaha World-Herald*, a practice of many local stations that chafed the newspaper to no end. However, Wells was recognized in the newspaper as being unique in that he would give the *World-Herald* on-air credit for the stories used.

The programming schedule began with "Morning Edition," "Morning Classics," "Adventures in Good Music with Karl Haas," and "Lunchtime Concerto." It continued with "Afternoon Jazz," "All Things Considered," "Marketplace," classical music from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., and "The Music Box," a local contemporary jazz, acoustic, and new-age music show hosted by Bill Rodgers. A Saturday night blues program began in January 1994.

In February 1994 Hanley reported the station's audience increased by about 37 thousand listeners according to Arbitron's fall 1992 to 1993 surveys. But still, KIWR was third among Omaha's three public radio stations.

Scott Hanley left KIWR after only a year, going to the Duquesne University station WDUQ Pittsburg in January 1995.

The new GM was Vicki Ratliff. After a settling in period, Ratliff in October announced a new direction for KIWR 89.7.

KIWR would become a teaching station, with hands-on instruction. It would start with a broadcast journalism program that would generate support through tuition, thus permitting less reliance on public donations. The program would permit the student to move into the broadcast industry with a two-year degree or transfer into a four-year broadcast journalism program.

Some programming changes were also in the works. A savings of \$77 thousand through the elimination of NPR meant that “Car Talk” and “All Things Considered” were once again gone. Music and jazz would fill the voids, along with local events coverage and adult-contemporary programming. Classical music was set for mornings, jazz in the afternoons, and New Age music in the evenings.

Those music programs turned out to be simple placeholders until huge changes came at the dawn of 1996. Suddenly gone were the classical, jazz, and new-age selections. On January first listeners instead heard contemporary mainstream pop-rock artists, like Bruce Hornsby, Bonnie Raitt, Huey Lewis & the News, and Hootie & the Blowfish. KIWR was reborn as *89.7 the River*.



Funding changed, too. While still seeking underwriting, the focus shifted to local businesses and retailers. On-air fundraising would include auctions like those held by public television. Items auctioned were donated by businesses that in turn received promotional credit and on-air talk. Tuition from Iowa Western students in the school’s broadcast program supplemented the annual grants from the CPB.

KIWR 89.7 was now competing with the commercial stations, raising some hackles because it still qualifies for tax funds as a non-commercial station committed to its community.

Three students went to work for KIWR right away with another 16 enrolled in the two communications classes set to begin in mid-January. The station became a teaching station with a full-time on-air staff for students in broadcasting classes

High schoolers were invited to host an hour show called, “Look Ma, I’m On The River.” To qualify, the student would submit an essay on why he or she should be a guest DJ. Selected students would then record a promo running for the week up to the Friday night broadcast. They would select the music and run the show, all under the watchful eye and ear of a full-time instructor.

In June an unusual relationship with a professional sports team was arranged. Omaha Racers basketball was signed for two years. Previously on KOIL 1180, the games continued to be called by Bill Roberts.

The River was now a unique entertainer in the Omaha market and funding problems melted away. Voters approved a \$3 million bond issue in fall 1996.

The turnaround became evident in January 1997 when plans were revealed for a 27,000 square foot classroom addition to the Kanessville Building on campus that would house the broadcast program and KIWR studios.

The morning show added ex-KQKQ personality Dave Gray in March 1997 teaming with former afternoon co-host Connie Kallie. Gray had been the sidekick with KQKQ's Johnny Danger but both were let go in January when G. Rockett Phillips returned to KQKQ 98.5.

Gray was gone by mid-April over "creative differences." Connie Kallie continued mornings until joined by Fish Calloway in September. Connie soloed again when Calloway moved to Florida two years later.

Contemporary music and personality brought an eclectic mix of programs. Rick Galusha's "Pacific Street Blues" show ran Mondays at 9 p.m. beginning in November 1997 after having run on KKCD 105.9 for a number of years. Classic disco ran Friday mornings starting in January 1998.

In April 1998 KIWR's music took a turn for the harder, alternative edge. Program Director Bill Stewart adjusted the night time music mix from Adult Contemporary to an Alternative sound that most often would be heard on college-based stations.

Added were artists such as the Beastie Boys and Creed. Also, some local original acts would make it into the rotations. Likely a catalyst for the decision to go harder was that KGDE 101.9 *The Edge* had just left its Alternative Rock format, flipping to Classic Hits.

The morning show underwent a change in April 1999 with long-time host Connie Kellie moved to evenings, replaced by afternoon personalities Free Beer (Gregg Daniels) and Hot Wings (Chris Urly). Afternoons were filled by Big Party, formerly on KQKQ 98.5 and *The Edge* KGDE 101.9.

With an edgier music mix and numerous underwriter's plugs, KIWR 89.7 ended the decade on a high note that would take it well into the next century as an Alternative, New-Rock station.

In just one year the listenership increased dramatically. In the summer 1999 ratings, the 18-34 age demo quintupled, beating out *The Fox* KZFX 101.9 and KEFM 96.1.

Among the non-comms, KIWR was the second highest-rated in the market, trailing only Christian formatted KGBI 100.7. It was ahead of KVNO 90.7 and KIOS 91.5, in that order. *The River* found its course and the harrowing struggles were over.

89.7 EPILOGUE

In September 2000 a brokerage firm representing an unidentified company asked Iowa Western Community College if it was interested in selling the station. That inquiry created interest from at least five other parties, which in turn sparked listener and student e-mail campaigns and concerts to save the station.

Speculation abounded. With all frequencies currently taken, will the Grace University station KGBI 100.7 move to the River's frequency in the non-commercial portion of the FM band, freeing a spot for a new commercial radio station? Such a move could prove lucrative. Grace University showed no interest in doing so.

In the end, only one party submitted a bid by December 14. It was for a lowly \$352,000, offered by Calvary Satellite Network, a nonprofit religious broadcaster. Not surprisingly, the bid was rejected as too low. An earlier appraisal had put KIWR's worth at \$4.5 million. KIWR continued on its successful course as a popular "Cutting Edge of Rock" station.

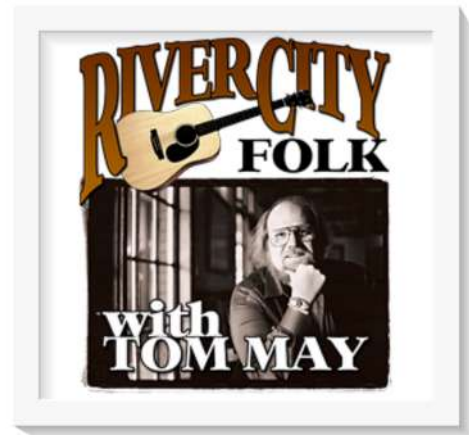
90.7 KVNO Omaha

KVNO, the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) campus radio station, was unique among the three educational non-comms as *all* programming was local. This factor likely was the key element in KVNO's leading popularity over the other two NCEs, both affiliated with NPR and APR.

However, KVNO had a working relationship with NPR in that KVNO-produced programming was made available to the national network. One such program was the ambitious production of "TekniKoulour Radio" dramas. About 50 public radio stations nationwide aired the series from KVNO in 1989.

The "TekniKoulour Radio" production continued into 1990 for its second series of 14 radio dramas. The scripts were selected from 32 dramas submitted by local authors.

KVNO's most popular program offering to NPR was Tom Mays' "River City Folk," a weekly show since 1985 airing Sundays from 4 to 6 p.m.



The popular "River City Folk" originated at KVNO.

An hour-long version of May's "River City Folk" show went national on NPR beginning April 5, 1991, and was initially carried on 25 stations. Just a few months later, the newly-completed Nebraska Public Radio network also began carrying "River City Folk" on Saturdays from 8 to 10 p.m.

(The nine-station Nebraska Public Radio network covered all of Nebraska except Omaha as the Omaha non-comms aired their own schedules choosing to remain independent.)

The national edition of "River City Folk" featured a different folk artist each week. The guest would perform about a half dozen songs, perform with May, and choose and play five or six recordings by artists who had influenced the guest.

The affiliate number for the show was up to 80 stations by March 1992. By 1994 the show's affiliate count approached 200, and a half-hour television version of the show began production at UNO's KYNE TV 26.

The working relationship with the state network blossomed in 1992. In July KVNO entered a cooperative arrangement with the Nebraska Public Radio Network and began airing "Soundstage," a program produced by the statewide network.

"Prime Time Jazz" was also added to the Nebraska Public Radio Network in 1992. KVNO had been running "Prime Time Jazz" on Friday and Saturday nights for 16 years. It was hosted by Omaha native Bill Watts, featuring what he called "mainstream" jazz, as opposed to contemporary or modern jazz.

Watts' tastes went back to traditional jazz days. In his 70s, his love for jazz dated back to his Merchant Seaman days in World War II. Watts' first radio show, "Music Room," was with KIOS, the Omaha Public Schools' station.

Watts was known for his impeccable musical taste. His show featured traditional jazz, swing, and blues, and stayed away from progressive and fusion styles. Often drawing on his own record collection, it was clear he especially admired Kansas City jazz.

Watts' theme song opening and closing his program, was a Count Basie tune, "Blue's and Hoss's Flat." His show continued until his death in November 1996.

In addition to classical and jazz, KVNO began carrying the school football and basketball schedule in 1988. UNO Maverick games were picked up that season after KOIL 1290 dropped the coverage.

Unlike most sports franchises that sold broadcast rights, UNO often paid for their broadcasts. Maverick games had been kicking around on AM since 1983, with KOIL airing only the 1987 season.

Maverick football and basketball remained on KVNO into the 1990s with Leo Morris and Torri Pantaleon at the mics. When Morris left, Pantaleon took over play by play and Joe Patrick came aboard to provide color. Pantaleon, also sports director at KKAR 1180, left both positions in 1993 due to a heavy workload. He was working full time as a news photographer at KETV 7.

Select games of Maverick football moved to KOSR 1490 in 1996.



There was occasional behind the scenes turmoil at KVNO. General manager Peter Marsh resigned in February 1990 after five years at the helm due to unspecified "extenuating circumstances." While general manager, Marsh retained his leadership of the Knowledge Network, a community-based educational television consortium of which UNO

was the managing partner. He was finally replaced in June by Howard Lowe from UNO's television department.

Longtime Omaha broadcaster Frank Bramhall abruptly left KVNO in June 1993 and revealed through his attorney that he was fired. "Breakfast With Bramhall" had been airing in Omaha for 22 years, its first eight years on KIOS. Before that, Bramhall had worked at WOW 590 and WOW-TV 6 as a weatherman. His colorful career dated back to being a Top 40 personality on Don Burden's KOIL.

Bramhall filed a grievance with the University of Nebraska at Omaha alleging that he was a victim of age and religious discrimination. The university denied his claim in October as unfounded. Bramhall found work at KOTD Plattsmouth in sales with some on-air work.

Dake Munson was moved from afternoons to mornings 6 to 9 a.m. in August 1993 to replace Bramhall. Munson had joined KVNO a couple of years earlier after retiring from his weather forecasting job at WOWT channel 6. He had been with the WOW stations since 1963 and became the television's chief weathercaster in 1971.

When PD Mark Ford hired Munson in May 1991, he acknowledged him as a longtime listener and supporter of KVNO with extensive knowledge of classical music. Munson remained on the morning show until retiring from broadcasting after 43 years in August 1999.

The midday "KVNO Concert" ran six days, hosted by KVNO music director Victor Hahn until September 1992. Hahn had been with KVNO since 1979 and went full time in 1985. He was replaced the following January by William Jenks, former associate conductor of the Omaha Symphony. Jenks stayed for eight years while continuing to serve as music director and conductor for Ballet Omaha and the Heartland Philharmonic, formerly the University Orchestra at UNO.

Frank Coopersmith began hosting an afternoon classical music program in 1992, Monday through Friday from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. Coopersmith arrived in Omaha from Michigan in 1983 to manage KIOS 91.5 but stayed only a year. After working as a family teacher with his wife at Boys Town, he returned to radio, joining KVNO in 1990.

Coopersmith admits to being a DJ, "but with the difference that I don't have to sell anything to the listener, who tunes in for the music." Like a good DJ, he knows his listener's habits. "I never schedule anything longer than 15 to 20 minutes," he said, "and usually not that long because in drive time, listeners are with you for shorter periods. So most musical pieces are seven to eight minutes, though I may go with one longer piece a day. I always open with something short, two or three minutes. Just before a break, we'll have shorter pieces again."

Playlists are the norm at mainstream music stations, but Coopersmith knows the fare for classical audiences. "They request 'Clair de Lune,' Brahms' 'Academic Festival Overture' which is the single most-played classical piece in the world, Liszt's 'Les Preludes,' Beethoven's 'Moonlight Sonata' and his fifth and seventh symphonies, lots of Copland, Tchaikovsky's 'Capriccio Italien' and Gershwin, lots of Gershwin."

Frank's Greatest Hits List-- Drive-time favorites requested by KVNO listeners:

1. "Clair de Lune," Debussy
2. "Academic Festival Overture," Brahms
3. "Great Gate of Kiev," Mussorgsky
4. Gershwin musicals, especially "Porgy and Bess"
5. "Moonlight Sonata" and "Emperor" piano concerto, Beethoven
6. "Appalachian Spring" and "Rodeo," Aaron Copland
7. "Les Preludes," Liszt
8. "Scheherazade," Rimsky - Korsakov
9. "Swan Lake," "The Nutcracker" and "The 1812 Overture," Tchaikovsky

“Sometimes I’ll play patriotic music or barn-burners from Offenbach or Rossini, then change tempo to slower pieces by Borodin or Rimsky-Korsakov. I do what most public radio announcers don’t do: comment on the music. I get in some vocal music, too, and some instrumental, usually one piano piece per hour.” (OWH interview March 4, 2001)

KVNO’s popular jazz programming suddenly found competition from newcomer KKVU 105.9 *The View*, which signed on in August 1990. Its format was more Progressive Adult Contemporary featuring contemporary jazz mixing with popular vocals and album-oriented rock that had an orchestral flavor.



The View was similar but not identical to KVNO’s offerings. KVNO’s contemporary jazz ran weeknights from 7 p.m. into the overnights to 4 a.m. KVNO program director Mark Ford said it was blended with a mix of Adult Alternative and New Age music.

For KKVU, jazz on a commercial level failed to gain traction. Clients found their spots were reduced to a nearly-unheard background level on such stations. *The View* didn’t last long, flipping to Classic Rock with new calls KKCD in November 1991. KVNO had weathered the storm, but in doing so had apparently adjusted its format enough so that some jazz fans angrily complained about *The View*’s lasting negative effect on their favorite station.

KVNO was 11th in the nation among 161 noncommercial radio stations ranked by Arbitron during its winter 1993 survey. The ranking listed stations by share of audience in metropolitan areas.

Music director William Jenks launched a new weekly music show in the summer of 1995 called "On the Edge." Jenks said the show blends "influences from jazz, rock 'n' roll, rhythm and blues, and everything else." It aired at 5 p.m. Saturdays. (OWH July 24, 1995).

In 1996 federal funding was threatened, but public support increased and congress merely reduced rather than cut off funding. KVNO general manager Howard Lowe said, "Our audience came out strongly in support of us...So it has been a difficult but ultimately very positive process for testing the support in this country for public broadcasting."

KVNO gets its money every year from three primary sources. Lowe’s account was that about 17 percent came from the federal government, about 30 percent from the state through UNO, and 53 percent from individuals and businesses, primarily the former. Lowe said, “Our budget this year is \$428,000”

In July, Howard Lowe left his position as general manager and president of KVNO 90.7 and UNO Television after eight years. He moved to Plattsburgh, New York, taking over leadership of Mountain Lake Public Broadcasting. He was replaced by Debbi Aliano.

Aliano was soon tasked with finding a replacement for the longtime popular "Prime Time Jazz" show on Fridays and Saturdays, left vacant with the November 1996 death of host Bill Watts. In addition, the late-night "Blues With Mac" show ended when host Kevin McCarthy left the station.

By March 1997, Aliano went with classical music on Friday nights and show tunes on Saturday nights. The new Saturday night programming began at 6 p.m. with "That's Really Entertainment," hosted by Frank Coopersmith, a classical music host on KVNO who also is a Broadway musical buff.

Says Coopersmith, "I'll play some movie music, some Broadway. You can't separate movie music from classical. Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony was written originally as a film score. Hollywood composers like Erich Korngold, Miklos Rozsa, and Franz Waxman all wrote classical music" (*OWH* March 4, 2001).

Jazz wasn't ignored, getting the 7 p.m. to 2 a.m. spot following the show tunes on Saturday nights. "Jazz Source" was the new show, hosted by Scott Blankenship and Mike Hagstrom who focused on jazz of the 1950s, '60s, and '70s.

William Jenks was named program director in September 1997. Jenks, with an extensive classical music background, joined KVNO four years earlier as music director. He came to Omaha in 1984 as associate conductor for the Omaha Symphony Orchestra after founding the Oklahoma City Chamber Orchestra. While at KVNO Jenks continued to conduct the Heartland Philharmonic.

Jenks added the first syndicated program on KVNO at the end of the year announcing it will air the Public Radio International debut of "From the Top" in January. It will also air on the Nebraska Public Radio Network.

"From the Top" featured pre-college age student classical musicians recording in concert halls across the country. One of the early programs featuring Nebraska students was taped in Kimball Recital Hall at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

In 1999 KVNO made a format change and Tom May's popular *River City Folk* for a one year period became a production of Nebraska Public radio in Lincoln, though the episodes were still produced by May in Omaha at Clete Baker's studio B, and at various locations in the Pacific Northwest, where Tom May now resides.

As the decade ended, KVNO had consistently been the leader among the educational non-comms. Quarter-hour shares released in November 1999 showed an average of 2300 listeners for KVNO and 1900 for KIOS. KIWR 89.7 in Council Bluffs, though still educational, had already flipped to hard rock by this time.

It's clear that between the two Omaha educational non-comms, KVNO out-programmed KIOS. Perhaps it's because the ownership of KVNO is at a college level while that of KIOS remains more prep school.

While KIOS relied on NPR and APR programming for a major part of its broadcast day, KVNO had an active studio, resulting in more locally produced shows that went national. Also, KVNO attracted two of what proved to be longtime and well-liked talents from KIOS, namely Frank Bramhall and Bill Watts.

90.7 EPILOGUE

Nebraska Public Radio Network flagship station KUCV in Lincoln moved its dial position from 90.9 to 91.1 on November 1, 2001. This was to allow a power increase from 16 thousand watts to 100 thousand watts though dropping its antenna from 219 meters to 210 meters and making the antenna directional.

The frequency change and upgrade allowed the Lincoln station better coverage in Omaha. Previously KUCV was difficult to hear due to adjacent-channel interference from KVNO 90.7.

KVNO was off the air for several days in July 2003 with the collapse of the KETV Channel 7 tower at the Crown Point antenna farm. KVNO had been a tenant on the tower for years. During the downtime, the station continued to stream on the Internet.

Maverick sports returned to KVNO in the summer of 2009 upsetting some classical music fans whose programs were pre-empted. The station aired the University of Nebraska at Omaha's football, hockey, and most basketball games, bringing in a steady income and saving the athletic department about \$8 thousand per year. Unlike most sports franchises that are paid for broadcast rights, UNO had been paying commercial stations to broadcast play by play.

Folk singer Tom May's popular "River City Folk" radio show that was produced on KVNO starting in 1985 celebrated 25 years in 2010, airing on more than 80 public radio stations as well as on XM satellite radio. May returned to Omaha in April for a special performance at the P.S. Collective, 6056 Maple Street. By this time his show had moved to KIOS 91.5, still on Sundays at 2 p.m.

91.5 KIOS Omaha

Omaha's first Public Radio station consistently ranked second among its peers, trailing KVNO 90.7 at the University of Nebraska Omaha but ahead of Iowa Western Community College's KIWR 89.7. This wouldn't change for much of the 1990s.

Owned and operated by Omaha Public Schools, the KIOS studios at 3230 Burt Street occupied a small portion of the ground floor in the old Technical High School building, which by this time was the school district headquarters. The 1923 four-story building's five wings sprawl between Cuming and Burt Streets and 30th and 33rd Streets. The building itself has a 3215 Cuming Street address.

The old Technical High School building was the site of one of Omaha's first broadcast stations. KFOX broadcast from the building as a high school station in the 1920s.

When the high school was closed in 1984 a \$5.5 million renovation got underway. It included the radio studios but omitted a perfect venue for broadcasting major live shows, the 2600-seat auditorium. Its stage and wide marbled lobby remained dark and empty, gathering dust.



1990 KIOS logo.

The auditorium had seen many performances in its day including the Metropolitan Opera Company of New York in November 1926 and John Philip Sousa and his marching band in October 1928. Helen Hayes and Douglas Fairbanks Jr. also gave performances at Tech.

Will Perry, station manager for KIOS, envisioned live broadcasts from Tech's auditorium, saying "... when the building was renovated we had stereo lines run down there from the KIOS station in Tech's career center" (*OWH* June 28, 1990).

When APR brought one of its programs to Omaha for airing on June 26, 1993, the Tech High auditorium went unused. Instead, "Whad'ya Know," a weekly comedy and quiz show with host Michael Feldman out of Madison, Wisconsin, aired the show from Burke High School in West Omaha. Burke's auditorium seated about half of what Tech's auditorium could hold.

Funding for any further renovation of the auditorium was far off and would have to come from private sources. Station funding came from the school district, on-air fund drives, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

Government cutbacks along with budget cuts at Omaha Public Schools forced KIOS to temporarily curtail its 24-hour schedule and go to an 18-hour broadcast day on September 1, 1990. Programming from the BBC World Service was dropped as it was airing overnights.

The remaining programming was unchanged. KIOS kept NPR and APR, with first rights to programs on the latter. (KIWR 89.7 Council Bluffs was the secondary APR affiliate in the market.)

For KIOS, this included APR's popular "Prairie Home Companion" with Garrison Keillor, possibly the last live regularly-scheduled variety show to air nationally on radio. Classical music and Jazz filled the rest of the KIOS schedule.

Satellite equipment purchase problems delayed KIOS from adding the 30-minute "Nebraska Nightly," a new statewide news and public affairs radio show produced by the Nebraska Public Radio Network. The show was finally added to the KIOS weekday schedule in July 1992, eight months after the show premiered.

"Nebraska Nightly" was the first series produced by the statewide radio network to air regularly on an Omaha station. The Nebraska Public Radio Network has no Omaha affiliate as the three educational non-comms independently provide local programming or that of NPR and APR.

Much of KIOS's programming came from NPR, including the popular shows, "Morning Edition," "All Things Considered," "Fresh Air," "As It Happens," and on Saturdays, "Car Talk" with Click and Clack.

"Car Talk" was just 18 months old in October 1991 and already the show was logging 400 calls from Omaha's 402 area code. Manager Will Perry said, "I think people listen who don't even have cars. In this area, it's our No. 1 weekly program" (*OWH* Oct 6, 1991). The show countered KFAB's Saturday morning automotive talk show with Tim Powers.

KIOS also carried “Saint Paul Sunday Morning” from Minnesota Public Radio, distributed by APR. In production since 1980, the show was one of the few remaining programs devoted to live chamber music and commentary.

Local program production saw KIOS go outside the studios to record numerous forums, concerts, and other performances for delayed airing. The Omaha Symphony concerts at the Orpheum Theater were recorded with an overhead microphone for later broadcast starting in 1983. Forums at the Omaha Press Club and the "Christmas at the Cathedral" concert at St. Cecilia Cathedral were also among the recorded productions for broadcast.

The Omaha Symphony broadcasts were hosted by program director Bob Coate. Over the years, Coate commented on the conductors, saying “I have seen good conductors, mediocre conductors, and great conductors. Maestro Victor Yampolsky is by far the greatest conductor the Omaha Symphony has ever had.” Yampolsky had been dismissed by the symphony for lack of charisma.

Perhaps the station’s biggest production was an effort by cinema aficionado Bruce Crawford and KIOS program director Bob Coate in 1994. In July, the two produced the documentary, “Ben Hur: The Epic Film Scores of Miklos Rozsa.” The show included an interview with Charlton Heston. This was a follow up by the pair who produced another successful documentary in 1988, “Bernard Herrmann: A Celebration of His Life.”

Crawford was already hosting film tributes at Joslyn since 1992 bringing in one of the film’s principals each time. He featured eight classic movies by the end of the decade. The radio documentaries gained him national attention among cinema buffs.



The “Ben Hur” documentary reached a national audience airing on NPR. By year’s end, it had repeat air dates on WNYC New York, WGBH Boston, and KUSC Los Angeles. The Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Pictures asked Crawford to donate a copy of the show to its archives.

In April and May of 1995, KIOS produced “Bravo, Bruce” featuring conversations with Bruce Hagen of the Omaha Symphony in four one-hour shows.

1996 began with KIOS being the sole provider of NPR programming for Omaha when KIWR 89.7 dropped the network. The two stations had been duplicating some of NPR's programming, though carefully avoiding airing segments simultaneously.

Musically, KIOS offered classical music and a limited amount of jazz. The 1998 schedule saw an hour of jazz weekdays at 2, Wednesdays from 1 to 3, and an hour Saturdays at 8:30 p.m.

The longest-lasting jazz program on KIOS was *Love Notes*, hosted by Omaha musician Preston Love, running since 1982. Love had performed with some notable greats, including Count Basie and Ray Charles. He was the leader of the West Coast Motown Band from 1966 to 1971 where he backed singers including Diana Ross, Marvin Gaye, and Stevie Wonder.



Omaha jazz great Preston Love, whose "Love Notes" jazz show aired for 15 years on KIOS.

Preston Love was a strong advocate for jazz and rhythm and blues and was well-known for his promulgation of the jazz heritage of Omaha and Kansas City. Love and co-host Adrienne Pressley aired nearly 400 shows over KIOS until his retirement in 1997.

Both KIOS and KVNO had successful pledge drives in fall 1998. KVNO brought in \$95 thousand while KIOS's total was \$80 thousand. But public radio couldn't touch the appeals of religious broadcasters. Omaha's other FM non-comm, Christian radio KGBI operated by Omaha's Grace University, brought in about \$747 thousand (OWH Nov 21, 1998).

As the decade ended, KIOS had consistently trailed KVNO in the ratings. Quarter-hour shares in November 1999 showed an average of 2300 listeners for KVNO and 1900 for KIOS.

KIOS's strength lay in the high appeal of NPR and APR programs, the station's affiliation with the Omaha Symphony, and "recorded live" programming from forums, political debates, and special events. Between KIOS and KVNO, Omaha listeners were delivered public radio programming of the highest quality.

91.5 EPILOGUE

Michael Feldman in 2011 returned to Omaha with his popular radio show "Whad' Ya Know" for a live broadcast from the Holland Performing Arts Center, his first appearance in Omaha since 1993.

By the time KIOS turned 50 in 2019, it's yearly budget was \$1.2 million and it employed 15 people.

100.7 KGBI Omaha

KGBI, operated by the Grace College of the Bible, was Omaha's only non-commercial station on the commercial portion of the FM band, its 100 thousand-watt channel often coveted by commercial broadcasters.

Religious radio stations began proliferating as early as the 1970s. There were 111 stations nationwide in 1973. By 1995, there were 1,400. Stations were predominantly Christian and evangelical. Half were commercial operations that sold advertising and blocks of air time to ministries. The other half, including KGBI, were nonprofits supported mainly by listeners.

KGBI's income was derived primarily from listener donations during on-air "Share-A-Thon" drives. The station's totals often dwarfed those of the educational non-comms.

This lucrative cash flow was behind the construction of a new \$925,000, 1197-foot tower at the start of the decade. The upgrade was in response to new FCC rules requiring 100 thousand watt Class C stations to broadcast from a prescribed minimum tower height or be downgraded to a lower classification. The old tower located near Louisville stood at just 500 feet.

The new tower went live from its location at 180th and Buffalo Road in Sarpy County near Springfield on June 1, 1990. Dr. Warren Bathke, president of Grace College of the Bible, claimed a reach of 100 miles from the new site and expected to increase the number of listeners by 20 percent. A public dedication service was held at the tower on June 10.

Funding continued to be no problem for KGBI. The November 1992 drive brought in more than \$480,000 in just three days, exceeding its goal. KGBI celebrated with a 25th-anniversary open house at its 831 Pine Street studios, using the occasion to announce a free Christian music concert at City Auditorium for the following spring.

That 1993 concert in April featured five-time Grammy winner Larnelle Harris. A few months afterward KGBI sponsored a Sandi Patti concert at Westside Baptist Church. KGBI's October 1993 fund drive generated over \$525 thousand.

At first the domain of a top-heavy older audience, it was the modernizing of religious music that began drawing in younger listeners and a more contemporary audience. Christian pop began blossoming in the mid-1980s, and by the end of the millennium, there was Christian Country and even Christian rap available.

Besides the popularity of new Christian music, the rise of FM was another major factor in the proliferation of religious broadcasters. On AM, religious formats were generally the last resort for stations that struggled or failed to succeed commercially. On FM, new stations could be licensed and constructed at much less expense.

KGBI's competition was primarily from AM stations at the start of the 1990s, although a number of FM low power religious broadcasters appeared by the end of the decade. In the immediate market on AM the competitors were KCRO 660, owned by RadiOmaha Inc. of Indianapolis, and KLNG 1560 Council Bluffs, owned by Wilkins Communications Network Inc. of Spartanburg, South Carolina. On the outskirts was KYFR 920 Shenandoah, formerly KFNF, owned by Family Radio in California delivering a good signal into the market.

The formats of the AM stations at the time typically included religious music, talk shows, and Bible instruction. KGBI, calling itself *The Bridge*, offered a combination of Christian music and teaching programs. Its music was a mix of "inspirational" traditional church music and light contemporary Christian music. Network newscasts from the USA Radio Network would often fit in at the top of the hour. Most teaching and preaching programs were syndicated.

Canned sermons began giving way to theology-based programs, very much resembling secular talk stations that also were conservative in their views. The schedule included such industry heavyweights as Charles Stanley, "Focus on the Family" founder James Dobson, Chuck Swindoll's "Insight For Living," and "Back to the Bible," a Lincoln, Nebraska ministry.

Local personality Heath Kramer joined KGBI handling the morning show in 1994, staying at the helm for five years. He left for a position as a youth pastor at Northwest Community Church.

The November 1995 pledge drive brought in \$625 thousand, while the educational non-comms could only raise a fraction of that figure. KIOS FM received about \$50 thousand that year while KVNO reported nearly \$43 thousand.

In 1997 KGBI was named Radio Station of the Year by the National Religious Broadcasters association. A year later in November 1998, the "Share-A-Thon" drive brought in \$747 thousand.

As the decade drew to a close, KGBI's audience equaled that of KVNO 90.7 and was just ahead of KIOS 91.5.

The other two non-comms were running secular formats at the time--KIWR 89.7 was pop-rock, and newcomer KNOS 88.9 was Urban. KNOS flipped to religion just weeks after the survey and would soon become Catholic-formatted KVSS.

KGBI claimed recognition as the first Nebraska station to use the “dot FM” extension on the Internet by launching a website, TheBridge.fm.

KGBI also claimed to be the first in the country to link its studio audio to its transmitter site by digital transmission, using Digi Link in February 1997.

100.7 EPILOGUE

Grace College cashed in its chips in January 2005, selling KGBI to Salem Communications in a \$10 million deal that included a cash payment and a promotional package for Grace University.

Salem Broadcasting was based in Camarillo, California and focused on Christian and family programming. At the time Salem owned 104 stations and a network with which to feed its stations plus about a thousand affiliates. In addition Salem had a national sales force and was involved in web networking and publishing.

Salem also purchased Omaha AM stations KCRO 660 and KOTK 1420 the same year as gaining KGBI. All three were then moved together into new studios in the Burt Street Professional Building, 11717 Burt Street. KCRO had occupied its previous facility for 25 years, and KGBI had been on the Grace Bible Institute campus since signing on in the early 1970s.

Six studios were built at the Burt Street facility. Five of the studios were fully equipped with studio equipment, while the sixth was a talk studio with mics and telephone control interface. The studios were completed in 2007.

During new studio construction, KGBI chief engineer Jim Leedham installed a new transmitter at the WOWT-TV facility in northwest Omaha. The old transmitter and 1186-foot tower near Springfield in Sarpy County served as a back-up and also became the site for Lincoln’s KOOO 101.9 during its effort to move into Omaha. John Mitchell purchased the tower for his 101.9 station which in 2012 changed its community of license to La Vista, an Omaha suburb.

Mike Shane became operations manager of the two AM stations. Salem moved KGBI's remaining talk programming to KCRO 660 to allow more music on the FM, dropping music on the AM altogether. The KOTK 1420 facility was flipped to Hispanic Religion.

In early 2010 KGBI started the "KGBI Rock Block" playing Christian rock music from bands such as Skillet, Family Force 5, and Paramore.

On March 31, 2014, KGBI-FM rebranded as *100.7 The Fish*.

MORE NEW STATIONS

1000, 1020 KOTD Plattsmouth

Plattsmouth station KOTD on 1000 kHz since signing on in October 1970 was a peripheral station to the Omaha market. Just 250 watts, it had just enough listeners in the Omaha market to periodically gain a listing in the *OWH* radio columns.

KOTD's weekend *South O Polka Show* was popular in South Omaha, a longtime home for those of Eastern European descent who worked the meatpacking houses during the stockyard's heydays of the 1950s to 1970s.

In 1986 the Polka show was hosted by Bob Zagozda. He organized a Sunday polka show at the Polish Home, 25th and L Streets, celebrating South Omaha's centennial anniversary in October.

Polka music occupied four to seven hours of KOTD's programming every week. The rest of the time the format was described as a mix of adult contemporary and country music. The station was affiliated with the ABC Radio network and Brownfield, a regional agricultural network.

The music mix changed to Nostalgia/Standards at the start of 1993 when KOTD picked up the *Stardust* format from SMN, Satellite Music Network, a pioneer in satellite music program delivery. *Stardust* featured live personalities playing music from the 1940s, '50s, '60s, and '70s, that included such artists as Glenn Miller, Andy Williams, Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Nat King Cole, Barbra Streisand, and Anne Murray.

Nostalgia/Standards as a format since the 1980s was seen as an AM radio niche format. Its listenership was primarily an older 55-plus demographic, fiercely loyal but seen by advertisers as having little buying power or too set in their ways to try new products.

(The Satellite Music Network began in a strip mall in Mokena, Illinois outside Chicago in 1981 with just two formats. It was the first satellite-delivered program service to provide round-the-clock live music programming to local stations. SMN hired experienced major market broadcast veterans as air talent and maintained a library of carefully selected music.

(The syndicated *Music of Your Life* along with SMN and Transtar satellite networks became the primary providers of Nostalgia programming. All Hamm's *Music of Your* was delivered on reels of tape and aired in Omaha from 1981 to 1983 on KOOO 1420.

(By late 1989 SMN merged into ABC Radio and moved to Dallas, expanding the number of available formats to ten. The *Stardust* format ended in 2010.)

When KOTD's sister FM signed on that summer, July 10, 1993, the SMN *Stardust* programming was simulcast in stereo. KOTD FM 106.9 was six thousand watts at 328 feet, atop one of the KOTD-AM towers along Webster Road north of Plattsmouth. KOTD was daytime only, but the FM continued broadcasting to midnight.

Meanwhile, the owners, the Warga family (Charles Warga, president and general manager, and Steve Warga, station manager and PD) sought an upgrade for their AM.

KOTD 1000 was granted a construction permit for a higher power of 1000 watts in October 1994, but it involved a frequency shift upward from 1000 kHz to 1020 kHz and a change in the signal pattern. Still limited to daytime operation, the frequency shift with new power took place on August 22, 1996.

KOTD, now on 1020, continued carrying ABC and SMN in addition to its weekly two hours of German, six hours of farm programming, and four hours of polka programming.

KOTD often appeared in Omaha's ratings, but always near the bottom. In spring 1998 the previous winter ratings showed KOTD was just ahead of the last place station, religious broadcaster KCRO 660, but only when its AM and FM numbers were combined.

KOIL kept barely ahead of KOTD's combined ratings as it's nostalgia audience was shrinking, down by over one-third from the previous year. KOIL 1180 had joined the older crowd five years earlier calling its format *Great Songs, Great Memories*. But this book was enough for KOIL to give up the Nostalgia format. After KOIL flipped to sports, the older Nostalgia listeners were left to rely only on KOTD AM and FM for their music.

The Wargas were positioning to sell the FM outlet. An internal deal transferred license ownership from Platte Broadcasting Company to Warga Broadcasting in April 1998. KOTD FM was sold off in 1999 and flipped to a Rock format that October. After losing the Nostalgia format on FM, KOTD 1020 AM with just 1000 watts, saw ratings nearly triple those from a year earlier.

A month after KOTD FM flipped to rock, Journal Broadcasting saw an opening for its newly-purchased AM station on 590. WOW 590 flipped from Country to Nostalgia, calling it *Great Songs, Great Stars*, and changed the calls to KOMJ 590.

590's superior signal and local programming boosted the station to a 5.9 share in the 35+ demographics that winter, compared to KOTD's drop to .5 percent.

Two years later the Wargas sold KOTD 1020 to Waitt Radio for \$750 thousand. The deal closed in January 2001. Major changes and upgrades lay in store for the once sleepy small-town station south of Omaha.

1020 EPILOGUE

The new millennium saw the Plattsmouth AM on 1020 finally become a true de-facto Omaha station. With it came a flurry of format changes.

When Waitt Radio bought the AM for a whopping \$750 thousand in early 2001, the new owners immediately set forth to find a way to upgrade the signal. An ambitious plan to make it a full 50-thousand-watt station was launched and surprisingly granted by the FCC before the end of the year.

The power upgrade from 1000 watts to 50 thousand watts was for daytime only, but in June 2002 the permit was amended to allow 1400 watts for nighttime operation which would make KOTD, at last, a full-time station.

The low night power and the new pattern beaming west was to protect KDKA Pittsburgh, for decades the primary clear-channel station on 1020. The pioneer broadcaster from Pittsburgh would sometimes still be audible under KOTD's night signal some places in Omaha once the full-time operation began.

The complexity of the 50 thousand watts plan was that it called for different directional patterns for day and night operation. The design required seven towers. A site was found on the Iowa side of the Missouri River, at 250th and Ellington Road, about four miles NNE of Glenwood.

On February 14, 2002 the calls were changed to KKSC in anticipation of targeting listeners in Sarpy County on south side of Omaha's Douglas County. Studios and offices were moved from Plattsmouth to Bellevue at 11527 South 36th Street.

The upgrade was gradual. In April 2002 KKSC was authorized to broadcast at 33 thousand watts day and 250 watts night. The construction permit for the full 50 kilowatts was still in place and granted in June. This put an excellent signal into both Omaha and Lincoln, and a pretty fair daytime signal into Grand Island, 130 miles west.

The plan to target Sarpy County looked good on paper. The county, bordering Omaha and Douglas County along its northern edge, held the cities of Bellevue, Papillion, and LaVista. The rural farmland area south of Bellevue along US-75 was still growing into suburbia in the direction of Plattsmouth.

Other than that, Sarpy County was primarily agricultural, long farmed by family homesteads since the 1800s. This area was targeted as KKSC went after the agricultural dollar. The Waitt Radio Farm Network was added and provided cash market and futures prices along with stock market updates.

KKSC's signal was beamed westward and covered farmland well beyond Sarpy County. Its reach from its Southwest Iowa towers covered much of Eastern Nebraska.

But unlike KRVN 880 Lexington, the high-power station in Central Nebraska that succeeded as a rural voice, KKSC failed to gain traction. It may have been an identity problem, as KKSC sought a broad rural audience while calling itself Sarpy County's "home town station." KKSC gave up the format after just 14 months.

KKSC flipped to Classic Country on April 22, 2003, and took the KOIL call letters from its sister station in Bellevue on 1180. KOIL 1180 had been airing the Radio Disney format and in turn, changed its calls to KYDZ for "Kids."

KOIL Country 1020 AM picked up its programming via satellite from the co-owned Waitt Radio Networks which was in Omaha at 90th and Western Streets. Along with WRN's Country format, the station continued to carry agriculture news from the Waitt Farm Network.

The 1020 studios were moved to the group's cluster location at 50th and Capital Streets but programming continued from the Waitt Radio Network studios at 90th and Western. J.D. Gibbs, himself a carry-over from KKSC, was handling the WRN Country network morning show for KOIL as well as for other net stations around the country.

Corporate merger-mania didn't leave 1020 untouched. In March 2006, the entire Waitt Radio station group was merged with New Radio Group, a Cedar Rapids, Iowa company. The result was a company renamed NRG Media, headed by President/CEO Mary Quass, who began in radio sales at KHAK 1360 Cedar Rapids in the early 1980s.

Quass built her radio group focusing primarily on small and medium market stations. The 2006 NRG deal included the Waitt Radio Networks in Omaha, that she later spun off to Triton Networks' Dial Global in 2008.

In January 2006 after a three-year run, the Country format was dropped from 1020 and *Radio Disney* was moved in from KYDZ 1180 to take its place. The call signs didn't follow the change, however, and the KOIL calls remained on 1020.

After another three years, *Radio Disney* was dropped and programming in Spanish took over. It began with a Regional Mexican format, *La Preciosa* on January 1, 2009, that had been airing on NRG Media's KYDZ 1180. The calls were changed to KMMQ for *Mas Musica Q*, and the KOIL calls were returned to 1180 kHz which had flipped back to a News/Talk format.

In April 2009 *La Preciosa* was dropped for the station's own Regional Mexican/Tropical format, *Ke Padre 1020*.

In January 2011 KMMQ switched to a hit-driven Spanish format, calling itself *La Nueva 1020*. Under the slogan, *La estación de la raza* (the station of the people) KMMQ programmed new regional Mexican hits and featured a talent lineup that included Juan Muñoz and José Muñoz in afternoon drive and popular morning personality Eddie Piolín, syndicated out of Los Angeles from Univision's KSCA.

1620 KAZP Bellevue

The market's newest AM station was the result of the FCC's expansion of the AM band upward from the top end. The new frequencies of 1610 to 1700 kHz added ten broadcast channels to the AM band, later reduced to nine when 1610 was reserved in the U.S. for low-power traveler's information stations.

The FCC intended to ease congestion on the aging AM band by allowing select stations to migrate to this new portion of the AM dial where they would be afforded a better signal. In most cases, the new stations would be granted 10 thousand watts daytime power and a kilowatt at night.

The old and new stations would each be permitted to continue operating simultaneously for five years before owners determined which one to keep and which one to shut down

The FCC plan began in 1994 with a list of 79 stations selected as gaining the most from such a move. Objections over a flawed database in choosing the stations forced another round in 1996 which encountered similar objections. Finally, in March 1997 the third round was acceptable, listing 88 stations that could make the move. KOIL1180 Bellevue/Omaha was on the list.

This meant KOIL could remain on 1180 for at least five years while a co-owned second station with separate calls would operate on 1620. Mitchell's Ageus Broadcasting, owners of the 1180 facility, filed its application by the June 16 deadline.

Mitchell at this time owned KKAR 1290 and KOIL 1180, along with KQKQ 98.5, KZFX 101.9 *The Fox* in Lincoln, the KZFX Omaha translator K299AK/107.7, and KHUB/KFMT in Fremont.

The transmitter site of KKAR 1290 at 60th and Harrison Streets was selected as the site for the new 1620 transmitter. This had been the old KOIL 1290 site since the 1960s.

The call letters KAZP were assigned in January 1998 as space was being made for a new ten-thousand-watt transmitter and a combiner in the small KKAR 1290 cinder block transmitter building. Through the combiner, both KKAR and KAZP would use the center tower at KKAR's three-tower site.

The new station's studios were combined with the other stations in Mitchell's cluster at 1001 Farnam-on-the-Mall.

Unlike the AM stereo debacle some years earlier, receiver manufacturers immediately included the AM expanded band in their new products with car radios leading the way.

On May 30, 1999, KAZP 1620 signed on with reduced power simulcasting KOIL 1180 Sports programming. KAZP would adopt a second sports format of its own after equipment tests were completed.

In September, KOIL 1180 instead flipped to *Radio Disney* leaving the ESPN sports format to KAZP 1620. Sports radio competition was already intense as KOSR 1490 had been airing an All-Sports format since 1996.

1620 EPILOGUE

The two-station sports competition by some was considered unusual for a market with no major professional sports team. Ratings were seldom high, but revenue was reliable, enough so that a third sports station would eventually appear.

KAZP's ESPN sports format was augmented with some play by play and local sports-talk shows, more host-driven rather than by callers. The original morning team of John Desjardins and Mike Steele, aka "Louie & The Animal" was called "The Cage."

The afternoon call-in show became the long-running "Unsportsmanlike Conduct" with Kevin Kugler and Bob Bruce. When Bruce left he was replaced by Mike'l Severe. Kugler left in 2012 joining the Big Ten Network and was replaced by John Bishop from KLIN Lincoln.

The KAZP calls were changed in October 2001 to KOZN *The Zone*. Interestingly those were the same calls used in Omaha during the 1960s by *Country Cousin* KOZN 660.

In January 2002 Waitt purchased Mitchell's stations for \$36.6 million. Studios were consolidated at 50th and Capitol Streets, though the building itself fronted busy Dodge Street. Waitt later merged with New Radio Group, forming NRG Media, headquartered in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

When the period for the dual-station operation was up in 2006, 1620 was selected as the station to keep. KYDZ 1180 went dark in February. But in June it was allowed to return to the air during a national push by numerous owners to continue operating stations on both the new and old frequencies. Waitt was among those petitioning "for rulemaking that would extend the license period in return for certain public interest commitments." KAZP remained unaffected through it all.

Local pro football arrived on KOZN in 2010 on September 24 with the inaugural season of the UFL's (United Football League) Omaha Nighthawks. Play by play was by Omaha native Mark Kraynak with Mike'l Sever providing color and J.J. Davis, formerly Sports Director at KPTM, doing sideline reports. The Nighthawks soon moved from Rosenblatt Stadium to the new TD Ameritrade Park downtown. The league folded midway into its fourth season in 2012.

KOZN dropped ESPN Radio on February 1, 2011, and picked up Fox Sports Radio, adding the Jim Rome Show. ESPN went to KXSP 590.

KOZN kept its local “Sharp and Benning in the Morning” with Gary Sharp and Damon Benning, as well as the afternoon’s “Unsportsmanlike Conduct.” Also retained was NFL football, NCAA basketball, and the College World Series options from Westwood One. KOZN continued to broadcast Chicago Cubs baseball while KXSP kept Creighton basketball, Iowa football, and the Kansas City Royals.

The Zone Two was added to Omaha’s sports radio arena in 2012 when sister station KOIL 1180 dropped News/Talk to become a secondary sports outlet for NRG. It carried a mix of shows from Fox Sports Radio and Yahoo Sports Radio, plus local play by play. The call letters were changed in June to KZOT 1180 and the KOIL 1180 calls were returned to 1290. The KKAR calls on 1290 were retired.

In August 2012, KOZN launched a Husker post-game Show as an outlet for fans to vocalize immediately following the Husker football game. Called “Big Red Over-Reaction,” the program aired immediately upon the conclusion of each game to feature fan comments. The show was hosted by “Unsportsmanlike Conduct” co-hosts John Bishop and Mike'l Severe along with Gary Sharp and former Husker Jason Peter who was now part of the morning show, “Sharp and Peter in the Morning.”

KOZN 1620 went all local in July 2013 by adding former Creighton Bluejays Nick Bahe with a show replacing the midday “Jim Rome Show.”

Among Omahans, the strongest support was overwhelmingly for Nebraska Husker sports, especially during football season. As for pro teams, the Kansas City Royals would be expected to have a following, being the closest MLB team and having a local history with their farm club, the Omaha Royals. But according to PD Neil Nelkin, carrying the Kansas City team didn’t generate much revenue or response. Omahan’s seemed to prefer the Chicago Cubs, Minnesota Twins, and St. Louis Cardinals. The Cardinals had an Omaha farm team in the 1950s.

Locally, Omaha Royals Baseball, UNO Hockey, and Creighton Bluejays basketball generated interest when in season. Also, the College World Series held in Omaha each spring grew into a major event. KOZN originated and produced all game broadcasts of the NCAA Men’s College World Series each June for national distribution by Dial Global. After CBS picked up the College World Series championship game to fill its schedule one year, the series gained national attention.

By 2015 KOZN carried Creighton University Baseball, Dial Global’s NFL Football and NCAA Basketball, and University of Nebraska-Omaha Basketball.

88.1 KMLV Ralston

Religious broadcasting rose to new heights in the 1990s when the FM band offered opportunities to find open channels and construct relatively cheap stations. Religious organizations began to seek licenses for stations and translators, particularly in the non-commercial part of the FM band.

in Omaha, Joy Public Broadcasting of Bethesda, Maryland applied in 1990 for 88.5 seeking 5000 watts at 314 feet. The app was dismissed. It wasn't until the latter half of the 1990s that religious broadcasters began appearing in greater numbers

The 88.5 channel eventually went to Lincoln, where KLCV signed on in 1996. KLCV was initially owned by the Bible Broadcasting Network of Charlotte, North Carolina, and was soon sold to the religious-oriented Bott Radio Network.

In Omaha, the bottom FM channel of 88.1 assigned to the nearby community of Ralston opened up. Ralston is a small enclave of about six thousand on the southern edge of Douglas County, surrounded on three sides by Omaha. When founded in 1907 it was a small settlement in a rural area some seven miles from Omaha's downtown. Ralston was kept safe from annexation by Omaha thanks to a rare agreement that the small town would not expand on its own.

The 88.1 channel was immediately sought in 1997 by two religious-based organizations. Educational Media Foundation (EMF) out of Sacramento, California, filed for six-thousand watts at 75 meters in March 1997. Positive Programming Foundation, a murky non-profit out of Dallas that existed for just one year, filed in September.

The channel went to EMF Broadcasting and its *K-Love* Radio Network. *K-Love* was born at a single station in Northern California and began expanding its reach during the 1990s by purchasing small stations and translators. In 1992, *K-Love* inaugurated satellite delivery from its northern California base to its distant outlets.

EMF set forth to build its Omaha station on the northernmost television antenna at the tower farm at North 72nd Street and Crown Point Avenue. Initially, the power authorized was 420 watts at 1378 feet. That was later changed to six-thousand watts at 430 feet.

KMLV signed on July 21, 2001, broadcasting the K-Love Radio Network originating from California. *K-Love*, billboarding itself as "Positive, Encouraging, K-LOVE," aired contemporary Christian music with live personalities. KMLV broadcast in stereo, 24 hours a day, with no local programming.

KMLV thus joined KGBI 100.7, KCRO 660, and KLNG 1560 in the religious broadcasting arena. It would soon be joined by KVSS 88.9 and KOTK 1420 for a total of six non-secular signals in the Omaha market.

88.1 EPILOGUE

As of 2009, KMLV was broadcasting with 3.7 kilowatts at 794 feet on WOWT Channel 6's tower, the northernmost tower at the TV Antenna farm. KMLV later gained Class C0 status to 59 thousand watts at 1280 feet with a directional antenna.

88.9 KNOS KVSS Omaha

Urban radio has a poor track record in Omaha. Problems for urban stations included poor facilities, a lack of professional management, and little advertiser support. KOWH 660 and 94.1 operated with a Soul format in the 1970s, followed by KBWH-FM in the '80s. and a satellite-delivered urban Oldies format on KBBX 1420 for a short time in the 1990s ending in 1998.

KNOS 88.9 gave it a try in 1997 for a short run.

88.3 was first sought by Nebraska Communications Inc.. It instead was granted 88.9 licensed to Bellevue for 3000 watts at 116 meters in February 1996. The calls KAQB were awarded in April. It went nowhere, the application was soon dismissed.

Weeks later, Omaha Community Broadcasting was awarded the channel with 500 watts power and with Omaha the community of license. The calls KNOS were approved in November 1996.

Bill Thompson, the sole owner and operator of Omaha Community Broadcasting, debuted KNOS 88.9 as *North Omaha's Soul* on May 26, 1997. Broadcasting with 210 watts ERP, despite media reports indicating the power at 500 watts, KNOS was poised to cover North Omaha's Black community.

Programming ran for thirteen hours per day from the old KBWH studios at 5829 No 60th Street. The transmitter tower at the studio site was about 78 feet tall with the antenna at the 59-foot level (per FCC License to Cover document BLED-19971015KG). It was dwarfed by the KCRO 660 tower across the street.

KNOS featured rap, gospel, jazz, oldies, and R&B. Its only competition was KBBX 1420 that aired a more mainstream, satellite-delivered, urban oldies format.

KNOS was a non-comm that depended on underwriting, sponsorships, and listener donations for support. To keep its nonprofit status KNOS had to include educational programs and public service announcements.

KBBX gave up its urban oldies format in favor of Spanish in April the following year, its audience dwindling with the sameness of the music format and its lack of audience interaction. But problems began appearing at KNOS signaling its possible demise nearing as well.

A concert featuring the group Zapp at the Orpheum Theater on August 8 saw a meager crowd, and Thompson took some of the heat for it. A financial dispute between the show's promoter and KNOS may have given the false impression the concert was canceled when the spots were pulled. Zapp had been a successful act at other venues.

A November 28 concert fail at AkSarBen Coliseum featuring the Isley's piled more heat on KNOS. A late starting time, the absence of opening act Angela Winbush, and an abbreviated post-concert party at a nearby hotel resulted in a barrage of complaints to KNOS the following Monday. Among those taking calls on the air was Anthony "Mac D" McCloud, the KNOS personality who promoted the concert.

With that, Bill Thompson took his station off the air after the daylong on-air discussion on November 30. Thompson hinted that when it returns to the air it might be leased out and have a religious format, saying "Omaha needs a spiritual healing."

Some former employees disputed Thompson's assertion that his station lacked support. Former morning host Wes Hall who came to KNOS from Oakland, California said "KNOS was north Omaha's knight in shining armor." The latest ratings showed a 12-plus cumulative listenership of 26,200 people, a respectable number among non-comms.

Thompson countered, saying that the Black community thinks "that support is actually turning the knob on and listening. Well, support goes further than that. Underwriters are not going to underwrite a station that doesn't get results...The community cannot say that I haven't warned them." (*OWH* Dec 5, 1998).

Thompson's hints of a new owner and a religious format proved true. The new owner was VSS Catholic Communications Inc., a group that formed at about the same time that KNOS went on the air with the intent of starting a station of its own.

88.9 remained off for several weeks while automation equipment and a satellite dish and receiver were installed. It returned to the air on January 9, 1999, gaining the calls KVSS in February, for the Latin words "*Veni, Sancte Spiritus* (Come, Holy Spirit)."

Sherry Kennedy-Brownrigg left KEFM 96.1 after 14 years at the station to become general manager of KVSS.

The new owners began with a 24-hour schedule. Satellite programming commenced from the Catholic network EWTN that offered Catholic teaching, talk, and devotions.

Still a non-profit educational station, KVSS 88.9 was governed by a lay Catholic board of directors receiving support, but no money, from the Omaha Archdiocese. The station depended on donors and underwriters as did most non-comms.

Cash came in more easily for religious broadcasters, and donations started almost immediately. The first on-air pledge drive in October brought in \$64 thousand, a total similar to educational non-comms but dwarfed by the \$747 thousand brought in by KGBI 100.7 the previous year.

Permission for a power upgrade from 420 watts to 1000 watts came on September 9, 1999, though the station reportedly increased power to only 500 watts. The tower height was likely a factor in the reason for the lower power.

Some local programming was added in 1999, including a live call-in show Monday mornings at 9 produced by area high school students called "His Rock Radio."

88.9 EPILOGUE

Funding continued to increase. A subsequent fund drive brought in \$120 thousand and in February 2000 an anonymous donor gave \$300 thousand.

KVSS announced plans in November 2001 to include an adjacent chapel at its strip mall location. Also, it received permission to increase power to 2.75 kilowatts from a taller tower than that on the studio premises.

A taller, 195-foot tower was sought but failed to get city approval. KVSS stayed at its lower power but soon leased space at 393 feet on the WOWT Channel 6 tower at the 72nd and Crown Point TV antenna farm. The *M Street Directory* listing, however, shows the completed upgrade to be 1.5 thousand watts at 482 feet.

But a major upgrade was in the works. In March 2008 Omaha's Catholic radio station held a fund drive to finance a move that would permit a power level of 100 thousand watts.

The plan was kept under wraps during the fund drives, but it was obvious to other broadcasters the upgrade wouldn't be permitted on the present 89.6 channel, in part due to the recent sign-on of KNBE 88.9 Beatrice. Also, the station was known to be partnering with Kolbe Media, a group trying to launch a Catholic station in Lincoln.

KVSS said it needed to raise \$2.5 million by May 26 in addition to a million dollars already raised to make the secret project possible. By June, KVSS announced an agreement had been reached to purchase a 100 thousand watt signal. Speculation centered on 102.7 occupied by KBZR Lincoln as its signal pattern most closely matched that being teased on the KVSS website. KBZR was airing an Adult Contemporary format.

(The 102.7 and 106.3 Lincoln story is quite convoluted but is an interesting example of how FM licensing seemed almost free-form in the '90s. 106.3 lit up originally as KWHG May 2, 1965, with three-thousand watts at 125 ft ushering in FM stereo with fine music for Lincoln. But it was temporary; KWHG had a construction permit for 25 thousand watts on 102.7 and moved there a short time later.

(After some ownership changes KWHG 102.7 became KFOR FM in 1975, the forerunner to KFRX. Meanwhile. 106.3 lit up again in 1974 as Country-formated KHAT FM. It went through a series of ownership and format changes as KMXA, KIBZ *The Blaze*, KLMY, and KBZR.

(Contemporary Hits KFRX. 102.7 traded dial positions with co-owned KBZR 106.3 in September 2007. With that, KBZR, now on 102.7, was available for upgrading to include coverage reaching Omaha.)

Within days of the announced purchase agreement, KVSS confirmed that KBZR 102.7 was indeed the targeted station. The purchase price was \$4.5 million. It was also noted that KBZR had an active construction permit to add city-grade coverage over Omaha.

KVSS sold the 88.9 license to Bible Broadcasting Network for \$825 thousand. The sale included translator K276FB/103.1 (Schuyler). BBN was the owner of dozens of stations, mostly in the South. KVSS still sought a buyer for the construction permit for co-owned KOLB/93.7 (Firth-Lincoln) that it had launched before the 102.7 opportunity.

On January 29, 2009, KBZR 102.7 began simulcasting KVSS 88.9.

Plans were underway to move the transmitter in April to the KPTM 42 tower near Gretna, where it will broadcast with 46.1 thousand watts at 1343 feet, nicely covering both Omaha and Lincoln. 102.7's community of license would be changed to Papillion as part of that move.

KBZR 102.7 Lincoln completed its move to the KPTM channel 42 tower on June 9, 2009. KVSS programming left 88.9 June 12 after the Bible Broadcasting Network closed on its purchase of the station, immediately changing the calls to KYFG. The KVSS calls were moved to 102.7 on June 23.

With KVSS 102.7 successfully operating at 100,000 watts and now licensed to Papillion, the old 88.9, now KYFG, remained on the Channel 6 tower at 482 feet with 1.5 kilowatts well into the 2000s.

93.3 KRRK KTNP Bennington

KRRK joined the Omaha FM band in the early 1990s launching a story with twists and turns that illustrates some of radio's wild ride of the 1990s and beyond. Just a class A station, KRRK was licensed to Bennington, a small community of about one thousand on the northwest side of Omaha in Douglas County. Starting with just 3600 watts, the licensee intended to serve the metro from atop the old WOWT Channel 6 tower in midtown Omaha at 35th and Farnam. Power was soon upped to the Class A level of six-thousand watts at 328 feet.

The licensee was Matt Markel, owner of the Ranch Bowl on 72nd Street just south of Pacific Street. Markel was a Creighton business graduate who was involved in consulting failing hotels around the country. When that and the associated travel ended, he settled in and bought the Ranch Bowl at 1606 South 72nd Street in 1977.

Markel turned his aging bowling alley, dining room, reception hall, and bar into an entertainment center. He began bringing live music into the dining room and also found himself booking acts for Peony Park and later was bringing blues acts into the Jones Street Brewery in the Old Market.

Local and up-and-coming national rock acts had few venues in Omaha in which to perform. The Music Box at 20th and Capitol had closed, leaving Sokol Auditorium at 13th and Martha as the leading venue. Markel found he was adept at music promotion and began a new career as a music promoter. He quickly became a catalyst on Omaha's New Music scene.

Markel turned his Ranch Bowl into a hot spot for new music. Major bands such as the Foo Fighters, Red Hot Chili peppers, and Green Day recall playing the Ranch Bowl during their salad days. Some already established talent with a narrow but strong following were also booked in, such as Leon Russell. Next, Markel was adding a radio station to the venue to air cutting edge rock music.

Markel received his construction permit in December 1989 for 93.3. His 10 percent partner was Paul Kriegler, a heavy metal music enthusiast who in the mid-1980s ran a low-power pirate station at about 94 on the FM dial. When it was shut down in 1986 by the FCC, Kriegler re-launched his station on Cox Cable in Omaha calling it *K-Rock*.

KRRK 93.3 signed on in June, 1991, launching with the slogan, *Pure Rock*. With that, Kriegler could air the likes of Metallica, Slayer, and Iron Maiden on a legally-licensed FM station. Curiously, he sold his interest to Matt Markel just before the station's sign-on, though his screeching heavy metal music format would remain intact.

The Alternative music audience in Omaha was rabid and underserved. But it was small, and Markel's move was considered to be bold. Aiming for a big splash, Markel began pirating talent from Omaha's rock leader, KEZO 92.3



Markel hired Bruce McGregor away from a successful programming gig at KEZO 92.3 to become the manager and program director by offering him part ownership in the station. He did the same with KEZO account executive Mike Connell to become the sales manager. Before it was over, nine former Z-92 employees wound up at KRRK.

A station vehicle was added. It was a gaudily painted hearse with prominent station logos that would appear at events and otherwise remain parked in front of the Ranch Bowl as a marquee.

Mornings were handled by Vaughn Montana, whose "Vaughn at Dawn" show included a cast of characters. Montana left a few years later in 1994 claiming he was burned out on radio.

Meanwhile, KEZO management took their personnel losses in stride, but only on the surface. It was later learned remaining personnel were asked to sign non-compete contracts to stay employed.

That news came out when the new KEZO PD Randy Chambers wrote letters to national record companies indicating a less than favorable acceptance of their acts getting airplay if they continued to book their concerts at the Ranch Bowl. Few cancellations took place.

Heavy metal screeched for a full year on KRRK until marketing reality set in. By June 1992, the metal was softened a bit toward a more Alternative Rock format that included bands such as 10,000 Maniacs, Mathew Sweet, Van Halen, U2, and The Rolling Stones. PD Bruce McGregor left for KKCD 105.9.

A new PD arrived in April 1993. Bobby Cook from WZNS Myrtle Beach, South Carolina took over the reins while handling the afternoon drive shift.

KRRK's ratings hovered in the low single digits, at best going from 3.3 to a 4.9 share in summer 1994.

Direct competition arrived in 1995. A Lincoln station on 101.9 that had moved into the Omaha market by building a new tower at Eagle, Nebraska was airing a Country format but was looking for a change.

The station was KYNN FM 101.9, recently purchased by John Mitchell who also owned KQKQ 98.5. Speculation was that Mitchell was seeking a way to protect his contemporary hits leader on 98.5 from inroads being made by Alternative Rock.

KYNN FM flipped to modern rock on February 21, 1995 calling itself *The Edge*. Country twang was gone, replaced by groups like Green Day and Pearl Jam. The calls a short time later were changed to KGDE in April.

The Edge took direct aim at KRRK. On April Fools day Michael Steele presented himself as Matt Markel on-air throughout his afternoon show. Markel countered by bringing back Vaughn Montana who was the host of KRRK's morning show from 1991 to 1994. Vaughn and his cast of characters from his old morning show joined Nick Meloy on morning drive.

Within months Markel was presented with what he called an offer he couldn't turn down. Before the year was out, Triathlon Broadcasting of San Diego announced its purchase of KRRK for \$2.7 million.

At the same time, Triathlon also bought KXKT 103.7 for \$8.125 million in December. Triathlon added the two Omaha stations into its new Nebraska portfolio that also included KTGL Beatrice/Lincoln and KZKX Seward/Lincoln.

The deal closed in April 1996 and plans were announced to move both Omaha stations to new studios under construction at 88th and F Streets. Markel immediately converted the old KRRK Ranch Bowl studios into a recording studio for launching his own record label.

Triathlon kept the Alternative Rock format on KRRK for only a short while. Even though *The Edge* was more of a Lincoln station than an Omaha station, it had the superior 100 thousand watt signal. 93.3 was still 3600 watts. The Bennington Class A covered much of Douglas County with its primary contour, but only about half of Sarpy and Washington Counties on the south and north, and just the edge of Iowa's Pottawattamie County to the east.

Changes began in June 1996. The station slogan was changed from *K-Rock* to *The Point* as the format flipped to a modern adult-contemporary mix. The music was kept familiar with contemporary hit oldies and recurrenents, targeting an audience aged 20 to 44. Artists such as Police, Gin Blossoms, Blues Traveler, Tracy Chapman, and Collective Soul were added to the playlist.

The Edge, KGDE 101.9, gleefully acknowledged KRRK's change by airing spots mocking the station's demise calling it the death of *K-Rock*.

The KRRK morning show, less than a year old, went through a revamping as well, the last broadcast of "Nick and Vaughn at Dawn" being June 8.

The midday show had already undergone a change when midday jock Nicki Boulay crossed the street to *The Edge* in February. Allison Steele had already left for KEZO in 1995 after two years at KRRK.

Triathlon's general manager Donn Siedholtz was in talks with G. Rockett Phillips who was freshly-fired from his disastrous eight months at KESY 104.5, but Rockett's pending lawsuit against KESY prevented this from going any further. Rockett did appear one morning as a gag on the KRRK morning show, but only in pre-recorded intros and liners.



The station introduced new local on-air personalities in July 1996. The new morning crew would be Tony Motteo and Keri Benjamin. Nick Melloy remained program director.

The calls were changed to KTNP to better match *The Point* monicker in September.

The morning team didn't last long, replaced in November with Terry Boyd and Kim Berk from WKRQ Cincinnati. Keri Benjamin was unceremoniously moved to nights.

The following month Boyd and Berk were suspended for several days for talking about alternative Barbie dolls and using a derogatory term while addressing a male caller who admitted he had a Barbie doll.

The Boyd and Berk morning duo was fired the following June for referring to Hall of Fame baseball player Bob Gibson as a "jerk" and a "pinhead." Gibson was in town for a golf tournament co-sponsored by *The Point* and was said to have made a comment referring to the station as jerks. The morning duo's response followed the next day. Keri Benjamin was resurrected for the morning show, teaming again with Tony Matteo.

At the same time in June 1997, Triathlon Broadcasting closed on two more Omaha stations adding KFAB 1110 and KGOR 100.9 to the stable. With that, KTNP, along with KXKT, moved from 88th and F Streets to the KFAB studios at 50th and Underwood Streets.

KRRK's nemesis, *The Edge*, threw in the towel in April 1998. It wasn't because of competition with *The Point* but simply that alternative music was becoming mainstream and was being played on more and more stations. *The Edge* flipped to Classic Rock. With that, KIWR 89.7 *The River*, a non-comm in Council Bluffs, filled the void by hardening its music from a Hot AC mix to an Alternative sound.

By this time *The Star*, KSRZ 104.5, was *The Point*'s closest competitor with a very similar playlist. *The Star* had flipped from a soft format to Hot AC in January 1998 and overpowered *The Point*'s 3600-watt signal with its 100 thousand watts. By spring, *The Star* was No. 2 overall while KTNP *The Point* came in 7th.

Keri Benjamin left the morning show in June 1998 for a gig in Kansas City. She was replaced by Mary O'Keefe who was already doing afternoons on sister AM KFAB 1110, co-hosting with Charlie Stone. O'Keefe now did a double shift by adding co-hosting duties with Tony Matteo on FM.

Among the duo's morning features was "Trash Talk," where they would send staffers to rummage thru the trash of locally known people and describe the contents on the air. Among those hit were Julie Cornell, news anchor at KETV 7, and Tony Moton of the *OWH* who later wrote in his column that he was not amused.

A month later, in July 1998, it was announced that Triathlon had been bought by Capstar Broadcasting of Austin, Texas. Besides *The Point*, sister stations KFAB, KGOR, and KXKT were included, as well as Pinnacle Sports and nearly 30 other stations nationally. The total deal went for about \$190 million.

But the consolidation frenzy was just ramping up. Only a month later, Capstar Broadcasting sold out to Chancellor Media Corp. of Irving, Texas, for \$4.1 billion in August 1998. After acquiring Capstar, Chancellor would own 463 radio stations in 105 U.S. markets, making it the largest radio station owner in the country.

Co-owned KKNB 104.1 in Lincoln began effectively programming *The Point*'s format in April 1999. The modern rock playlists and formats were identical, though each was run individually from its own market with its own live morning show. Promotional advertising was shared, however, identifying as, "In Omaha, *The Point* is 93.3. In Lincoln, *The Point* is 104.1"

93.3 returned to its roots of heavy rock in August 1999. The slogan was changed back to *K-Rock* as a song by Tom Petty gave way to Limp Bizkit's "Nookie." Listeners taunted competitor KEZO, one saying "They can't rock this loud. The boss won't let them. But we don't have a boss at 93.3 K-Rock."

But, the bootleg vibe was missing. The playlist included lots of '80s hair rock by bands such as Poison, Motley Crue, Great White, Van Halen, and Ozzy Osbourne. Also competition from non-comm KIWR 89.7 *The River* was a huge thorn.

Meanwhile, plans were afoot to finally get a power increase for 93.3. It meant asking KIOA 93.3 in Des Moines to decrease its power to allow minimum distance separation, a request usually accompanied by a substantial cash payment. It was later revealed the deal took four years and cost \$3 million.

KIOA went from Class C to Class C1 allowing it to pull back from 100 thousand watts to 82 thousand watts with little noticeable difference to its in-market listeners. This permitted an upgrade for 93.3 Bennington/Omaha that was seeking 25 thousand watts but settled for 8.5 thousand watts, a Class C3 non-directional on the old WOWT tower at 35th and Farnam.

93.3 EPILOGUE

K-Rock entered the new millennium playing rock while exhibiting a wild irreverence for rules. It featured loud music, strippers as guests, and what better prize could there be than free beer.

KTNP 93.3 awarded six-packs of beer during afternoon drive on “Free Beer Fridays.” PD Sophia John and GM Donn Seidholz said they checked, and it’s legal, as long as the winners are verified individually to be of legal drinking age.

A series of call letter changes began in 2000. A call change to reflect the *K-Rock* slogan came in March. The old KRRK calls were taken, so KTNP changed to KRQC.

Then the *K-Rock* slogan itself came under fire as the station learned the *K-Rock* image was owned by Infinity Broadcasting. The slogan was changed at 5:00 p.m on New Year's Eve of 2001 to *New Rock 93.3 The Dam*.

Hard rock on 93.3 finally ended in 2004. KEZO 92.3 and KIWR 89.7 *The River* were tough enough competition, but others were coming in. KQKQ 98.5 repositioned itself to Hot AC while KCTY 106.9 Plattsburgh moved in and flipped to an Alternative AC format.

On March 17th the station flipped to Classic Country as KHUS, becoming *Legendary American Country US-93*. Longtime KXKT jock TJ was moved over to co-owned KHUS to host the new morning show.

The format move was believed a measure to protect the flanks of sister Hit Country station KXKT 103.7. Waitt Radio’s KOIL 1020 also was running a Classic Country format at the time, though on AM.

US-93 lasted three and a half years, ending in November 2007. PD Tomy Matteo left for a gig in Nevada that month after being with the station since its KRRK days, the last 10 years as program director.

After a weekend of stunting, the format was flipped to New Country with the slogan, *The Twister*. Calls were later changed to KTWI in May 2008.

The Twister lasted to 2011 when it again began stunting, this time playing all-Christmas music on December 16. The identifier was changed to *Jingle 93.3* and the Christmas music mix was predominantly by country artists, so the stunt indicated more of a format tweak than a change when the holidays concluded.

On January 2, 2012, 93.3 reverted to Classic Country, now calling itself *The Wolf*. Before the month’s end, the calls were changed to KFFF. The former New Country format continued airing on the HD2 channel of KXKT 103.7. The HD2 channel on 93.3 carried Smooth Jazz.

Two footnotes to 93.3's story: KRRK's original owner Matt Markel sold the Ranch Bowl in 2005. It was demolished and replaced by a huge Walmart. And, ironically, after all the money KRRK spent to get KIOA 93.3 Des Moines to reduce power, a new FCC rule change creating a Class C0 allowed KIOA 93.3 to return to 100 thousand watts in 2001.

97.3 KMRV KBLR Blair

Historically, this would be the fourth station to serve Blair. The first was low-power KDCV 91.9 run by Dana College. It operated during the school year, usually from 4 p.m. to Midnight, with a staff of 35 students.

Then came KBWH 106.3 struggling through the 1980s. KBWH was taken over by Joerge Klebe and his Sunrise Broadcasting in 1989, foreclosing on the station after the previous owners failed in their attempts to serve North Omaha with an African-American format.

Klebe re-positioned the programming to serve Blair and surrounding communities, but that, too, proved non-viable. KBWH was silenced in 1992 as Klebe sought ways to upgrade the signal. In November 1993 he applied for a Class C3 on 101.5, allowing 25000 watts, which would become Blair's third station.

Just months later came the allocation for a Class C3 on 97.3 for Blair. Sunrise was already tied up with its 101.5 application and watched as the 97.3 construction permit went to Joseph A. Nugent, seeking 25 thousand watts at 325 feet, granted in October 1994.

Nugent sold the permit for \$18 thousand to Terri E. Simpson in May 1996. Call letters had been assigned, KMRV, but Simpson failed to get construction underway in a timely manner. She was denied an extension in May 1996, resulting in the construction permit to be canceled and the transfer dismissed.

The vacant Blair 97.3 frequency was again offered by the FCC during a one-month window in June 1997. This time five applicants stepped up.

Klebe's KISP 101.5 was nearing completion keeping him out of the running for 97.3, but Bob Maines who was handling operations for Klebe's KOSJ and KISP was eligible and was one of the five, along with now-powerful Mitchell Broadcasting. It was Mitchell winning the construction permit in August 2000, setting the stage for another FM station in Blair.

Klebe was a step ahead, cutting a deal with Mitchell--when Klebe's KISP moves out of the market to be sold to Waitt Radio's interests in Sioux City, Iowa, KBLR 97.3 would take over the KISP tower near Herman, Nebraska running 25-thousand watts from 302 feet.

The battle to get a lasting FM station on the air from Blair finally concluded in the new millennium. KBLR 97.3 signed on September 10, 2001, the day before 9-11.

With that, KISP was gone, its license moving out of the market and signing back on the following month as KKYY 101.3 in Whiting, Iowa. It was just a 40 mile move north for the transmitter site but close enough to be a new Sioux City move-in with a rimshot signal. The changeover was seamless. The only difference Blair listeners noticed was the new dial position.

97.3 EPILOGUE

KBLR 97.3 launched with a syndicated Adult Contemporary music format from ABC and called itself, *Blair Radio*. In early 2002 the station was fully taken over by Waitt Media when the group bought out Mitchell's group of stations for \$36.6 million.

Not surprisingly, KBLR failed to make a profit for Waitt. The station flipped to an Urban Format in January 2003 in another run at serving North Omaha's African-American audience from Blair.

Music Director DJ Bizzy B focused the format on all R&B and hip-hop music ranging from New Edition to current crossover hits like Nelly and Jay-Z and new artists such as Jill Scott, Nas, and Erykah Badu.

To fill in the spotty metro coverage, Waitt's translator on 107.7 was eyed. The translator, K299AK, was airing Waitt's 101.9 programming, running 107 watts from atop the old KMTV channel 3 tower downtown. The problem was an FCC ruling that a station's translator is to be used for filling in spotty areas *within* the main station's primary coverage area. K299AK was outside of KBLR's service contour.

To get around the rule, Waitt sold the translator to an outsider, Baer Communications. When the sale was completed later in 2003, KBLR 97.3 could be clearly heard on a second channel in Omaha.

The days of translator K299AK on 107.7 were growing short, however. Primary stations began seeking the frequency. An application for 107.7 in Pacific Junction, Iowa, just 25 miles SSE of Omaha was sought by Connoisseur Broadcasting in 2006.

The Connoisseur application was denied when Offutt Air Base determined the station would interfere with communications at the base. In a rare concession by the FCC, the application fee was refunded to Connoisseur. But, the 107.7 translator was turned off for good.

KBLR's Hip-Hop/R&B format was moved in December 2006 to NRG's Plattsmouth station on 106.9, by this time a move-in with 100 thousand watts. KBLR 97.3 flipped to Country, becoming *Country 97.3 KBLR*.

KBLR offices moved to Fremont to be housed with NRG's KHUB 1340 and KFMT 105.5. Programming now originated from the NRG Radio Network studios in Omaha featuring John Glenn in mornings. (NRG's network was formerly Waitt Radio Network and would soon be swallowed up by Dial Global.)

In June 2012 Fremont stations KHUB AM, KFMT FM, and Blair station KBLR FM were sold by NRG Media to Community First Broadcasting led by Dean Sorenson. The format remained unchanged.

97.7 KNCY-FM KNBQ KOSJ KESY KQCH Nebraska City

The 97.7 Nebraska City move-in story begins in July 1990, when Joerge Klebe purchased KNCY 97.7, a 26 thousand watt FM. With it came the sister AM, KNCY 1600, a 500-watt station that cuts back to 31 watts at night. Both were purchased for \$675 thousand.

Klebe owned CVC Capital which in turn held Sunrise Broadcasting. Sunrise's flagship station is WGNY Newburgh, New York.

CVC was in the business of loaning money to minority station owners. Klebe entered radio in the Midwest when foreclosing on client KBWH 106.3 Blair in 1989, a Black-owned station attempting to serve the North Omaha audience.

KNCY 97.7 had signed on thirteen years earlier from atop a Nebraska City water tower along Old NE-2 at North 55th Road, 2.5 miles west of the city limits. It was running three thousand watts and simulcasting the programming from the AM side. Owners were Carl Adams, president, and Dave Messing, VP, GM, and the Chief engineer behind the FM construction.

KNCY FM was upgraded to sell in 1990, increasing to 26-thousand watts at 298 feet from its water tower west of town. The construction permit was granted in January. Klebe's purchase was filed in April; the deal closed in July. David Messing was kept on as VP, GM, and Chief engineer.

Klebe, an international lawyer, was an investor as much as a broadcaster. He was a master at maneuvering station properties for higher returns through FCC filings and engineering upgrades all the while having an understanding of programming and positioning.

Klebe was already running KBWH 106.3 Blair that he had recently taken over in a foreclosure. Now he would also focus on a further upgrade for his Nebraska City FM to 100 thousand watts that would place its contour over Omaha and Lincoln as well as the community of license, Nebraska City.

To do this, a more centrally located tower site was needed, one that could provide a primary signal to these three locations. A site on NE-50, about six miles NNW of Otoe, Nebraska was found.

A year later the Otoe site was dismissed in favor of a better site ten miles north near Weeping Water in western Cass County. More precisely, it was 1.3 miles east of NE-50 and about 1.5 miles north of Weeping Water. The tower would be two counties south of the Omaha metro but equidistant from Omaha and Lincoln. It was about 20 miles from Nebraska City but 29 miles to the downtowns of the other two cities. Class C1 operation allowing 100 thousand watts from this site was granted in August 1993.

Meanwhile, a replacement FM for Nebraska City was sought and a class A just 20 miles south in Auburn, Nebraska appeared suitable to fill the bill. Sunrise purchased KCOE 105.5 Auburn, Nebraska in late 1994 from Judy Coe, owner of Coe-Coe Broadcasters. KCOE had signed on in 1981 as KAUB until Coe purchased the station in 1989.

The purchase from Coe was for \$67.5 thousand, filed on October 3 and granted on January 17, 1995.

The following month Klebe filed for the three thousand watt station at 154 feet to upgrade to six thousand watts at 328 feet with a community of license move to Nebraska City. The transmitter presumably would be taking over the old KNCY FM spot on the water tower west of town. Calls were to be changed to KNCY FM and 105.5's local programming would replace that lost from 97.7 in the local market.

The original KNCY FM 97.7 lit up its 100 thousand watts from its new 981-foot tower near Weeping Water in December 1994 with new calls, KNBQ. It launched with programming separate from the AM, picking up the Westwood One Classic Rock format via satellite.

Klebe quickly found a buyer for KNBQ. Henry Broadcasting offered \$3.5 million and prepared room for the station at its KFAB/KGOR studios at 50th and Underwood Streets. The deal fell through in February 1995 with Klebe saying Henry couldn't come up with the cash.

Klebe's Sunrise Broadcasting now had to continue with its move-in plan. KNBQ programming still operated from Nebraska City while new studios were built in the historic First National Bank building (constructed in 1917) at 1600 Farnam Street in downtown Omaha.

A satellite dish was installed on the roof of the 14 story building. Offices and studios were constructed on the ground floor with the reception office looking out on 16th Street. Engineering was overseen by operations director Bob Maines brought in from Klebe's just-sold Alabama station, WQLS Ozark.

Upon completion of the Omaha studio in September 1995, commercial jazz returned to Omaha's airwaves. KNBQ changed calls to KOSJ, *Omaha's Smooth Jazz*, a purer jazz format than that abandoned five years earlier by KKCD 105.9.

Smooth Jazz emerged in the 1980's gaining prominence with artists such as Sade, Al Jarreau, Anita Baker, and Earl Klugh. The format was what industry trade *Radio & Records* labeled "New Adult Contemporary," characterized as beautiful music for yuppies, almost an upscale Muzak service.

The programming came from a new satellite music service, Sony's syndicated SW Network with New York City studios in Manhattan. The network's colorful watercolor logo of a saxophone was cloned for the KOSJ letterhead.



The computer system was Audisk with the music library on the hard drive and live DJ's from New York sending voice tracks.

The playlist was heavy on instrumental music, from artists as Dave Grusin, David Benoit, Acoustic Alchemy, David Sanborn, and Kenny G. Klebe freely signed with satellite services keeping local staff expenses low.

At night Klebe chose to break from the SW Network and run an easy rhythm and blues format from Westwood One. It featured more pop mainstream soul artists like Vanessa Williams, Mariah Carey, and Whitney Houston.



Smooth fm
97.7

Smooth fm

Playlist for week of August 5, 1996

Title	Artist	CD	Label
1. Change The World	Eric Clapton	Phenomenon Lost	Reprise
2. Crazy Love	Aaron Neville	Phenomenon Lost	Reprise
3. Take Your Time	Brian Culbertson	When Night Calls	Mesa/BM
4. Sunday Mornin'	Doc Powell	Laid Back	Discovery
5. Katherine	Jeff Lorber	State of Grace	Verve
6. The First Time	Rippingtons	Brave New World	GRP
7. Happy Song	Earl Klugh	Sudden Burst	WB
8. Erase	Vanessa Williams	Eraser ST	Mercury
9. Ordinary Girl	Lionel Richie	Louder Than Words	Mercury
10. The Thinker	George Benson	That's Right	GRP
11. Castine	Pamela Williams	Saxtress	Heads Up
12. Cat Food	Bryan Savage	Cat Good	Elation
13. Les Fleur	Ramsey Lewis	Between The Keys	GRP
14. I Showed Them	Pancho Sanchez	Soul Sauce	Concord
15. Erotika	Freddie Ravel	Soul To Soul	Verve/FCT

New this week :

Flamingo	Herb Alpert	Second Wind	Almo
Move On	George Michael	Older	Dreamwork



Smooth FM 97.7 KOSJ
304 S. Sixteenth Street, Omaha, NE 68102 P/402•345•0977 F/402•345•4874

The KOSJ morning show was local with PD John Buck, and later Joe Blood of KEZO 92.3 fame.

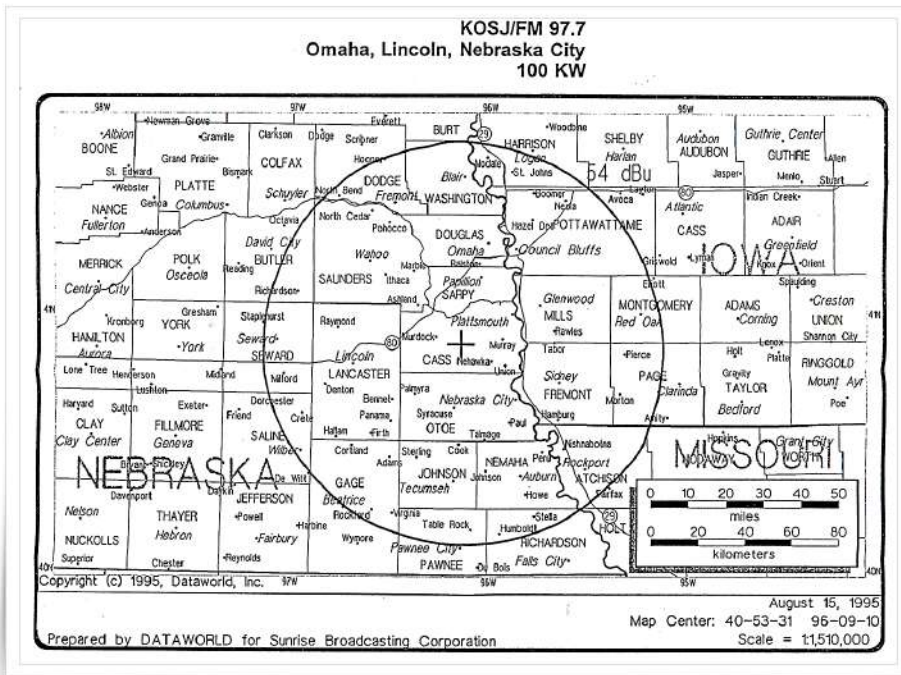
For midday and afternoons, live announcers in New York inserted a few breaks via the satellite. SW Network's unique twist was that the NYC announcers would provide hourly localized weather forecasts and identifiers. The PD would fax copy to New York and the personalities would voice their reads for recording each hour during when local spot breaks ran.

The Internet was just blooming and yet too primitive to handle such communications and return-feed chores to replace Fax and satellite. The only nod to the Internet at the time was

KOSJ's simple website, one of the early stations to do so, although Klebe was reluctant and said he saw no benefit to it.

Klebe was an international lawyer and naturalized citizen, but his German business culture was that of a martinet. The genius side of Klebe was evident with his keen, detailed focus and acceptance of new ideas, but his temper was short and unforgiving.

Even though professing a company culture of having his employees take ownership of their jobs, Klebe kept everyone on a short leash. Station Manager Lyle Nelson left after a short stint noting he was not allowed to make purchases over 300 dollars without checking first with Klebe.



KOSJ's construction suffered some glitches, primarily a wind-blown satellite dish on the roof that kept moving off its proper azimuth, creating outages.

Bob Maines was stretched thin, already working on developing Sunrise's other station in the market, KISP 101.5 in Blair.

Maines, like Klebe, was quite computer savvy for the day, but his management style was similar to that of Klebe, enough so that some employees who got fed up with him would simply walk out with no notice.

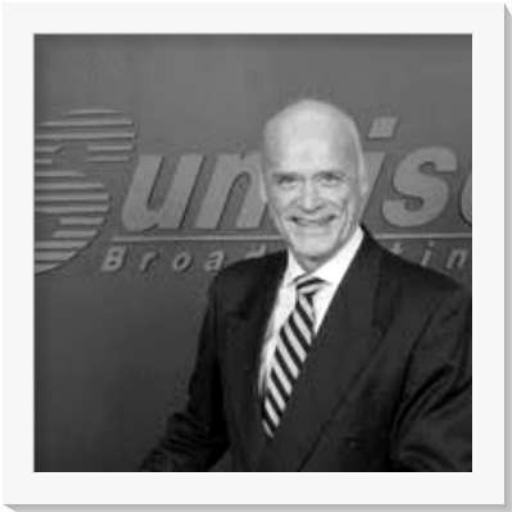
The *Smooth Jazz* format found a following, primarily upscale professionals and African-American listeners. Omaha mayor Hal Daub's office staff called in a birthday request for their boss one evening, noting he was an avid listener.

Even though flipping facilities and reselling at a profit was Klebe's real business, he maintained adequate programming and promotion so that his station's value would be more than just stick value.

Klebe's promotions mostly were concerts. KOSJ excelled in bringing live acts to town with its "Listener Appreciation Concerts" series in 1996.

Artists brought in to perform at Joslyn's Witherspoon Concert Hall included Warren Hill, Bobby Caldwell, and Boney James. Tickets were \$9.70 (the station's dial position) and all concerts enjoyed a full house. The station also promoted a highly successful riverboat buffet dinner cruise on the Missouri with live music from local jazz band Luigi Waite.

After a year Sunrise found another buyer. The Milwaukee Journal Group, owners of KEZO, KKCD, and KOSR, came along to expand its Omaha cluster. Journal approached in October 1996 offering \$5 million.



*Joerge Klebe, president of
Sunrise Broadcasting.*

Not a bad deal for a station originally bought for \$675 thousand. Even after legal expenses plus a new tower and transmitter and possibly operating losses, the deal had to be profitable, plus Sunrise kept the AM for a separate sale.

After the deal closed in early 1997, the downtown studios were gutted and KOSJ 97.7 was moved to join new sister stations KEZO 92.3, KKCD 105.9, and KOSR 1490 on John Galt Boulevard in January.

At about the same time the New York-based SW Network phased out its Smooth Jazz syndication after less than two years of operation. KOSJ's new owners kept the format with new in-house automation and voice file inserts allowing live walk-way jock production.

Journal gave KOSJ four more rating periods in which to improve, particularly in the 25 to 54 age group, but the numbers remained in the area of a two-share.

A format change came in January 1998. It happened after Journal Broadcasting further expanded with the purchase of KESY FM 104.5 and its sister KBBX AM 1420 in late 1997.

Journal made plans to flip KESY 104.5 from Soft Rock to Modern Rock. The Soft Rock format would then be switched over to 97.7, silencing Omaha's commercial jazz once again, leaving the genre to the non-comms.

After three days of simulcasting Soft Rock on 104.5 and 97.7, the KOSJ 97.7 calls were discarded and the KESY calls were moved over to 97.7 while 104.5 became KSRZ *The Star*.



(On a national level, Smooth Jazz on commercial outlets would survive another decade or so but only in major markets, such as WNUA Chicago and KTWV Los Angeles *The Wave*. As for syndication, after SW Network phased out its Smooth Jazz format, Jones Radio Networks launched an even purer form of Smooth Jazz that succeeded until purchased by Dial Global in 2008.)

The new staff on KESY 97.7 had KEZO veteran Rick Setchell taking over mornings, with Chuck Ashby in middays, and Joe Blood afternoons. *Delilah*, a satellite music/call-in show from Seattle, aired during evenings. Her show fit numerous non-rock formats and was especially popular with women listeners.

It wasn't long before even Soft Rock was gone from Omaha's FM dial. In 1999, KESY 97.7 flipped its format to *Channel 97-7*, a rhythmic-based (meaning dance) CHR format on May 21. Barry Manilow, Barbra Streisand, and Neil Diamond gave way for the likes of TLC, Busta Rhymes, Ricky Martin, Britney Spears, and Janet Jackson.

The format was launched fully automated and nearly jockless. Days later in June the calls were changed to KQCH, the sixth set of calls for this facility in the past ten years. The station promoted itself as *Omaha's New Channel, 97.7-- Move To It*.



Journal Broadcasting was now in direct competition with Mitchell's KQKQ 98.5 *Sweet 98*. Speculation abounded that the call letter similarity may have been revenge for Mitchell's 1998 challenge to Journal's Great Empire purchase, delaying that deal for months. Also noted, 97.7 can appear to be 98 on non-digital receiver dials.

KQKQ felt the heat. From number three in the market, it dropped precipitously, soon flipping to Modern AC. Journal's bold move worked, toppling what was once the market's contemporary leader.

Meanwhile, Joerge Klebe sold off his KNCY AM 1600 and KNCY FM 105.5 Nebraska City properties in February 1999 for \$710 thousand. The new FM replacing the 97.7 move was still just three kilowatts at 154 feet and the community of license had been successfully changed from Auburn to Nebraska City.

97.7 EPILOGUE

The spring 2000 ratings showed CHR/Dance KQCH shooting to #1 from seemingly nowhere, even beating former leader Country KXKT *The Cat*. A year later KXKT 103.7 regained the lead while a still-strong KQCH dropped to third, behind KFAB 1110.

In May 2002, The Rhythmic Hits format of *Channel 97-7* was moved to 94.1 when KMXM *Max Country*, the former WOW FM, gave up its Country format, The switchover began with both frequencies simulcasting the CHR Rhythm for a few days, then 97.7 taking over the Spanish format of sister station KBBX 1420, becoming *La Maquina Musical 97.7*. The KQCH calls followed the format to 94.1 becoming the *New Channel 94-1.*, while 97.7 took the KBBX calls.

In 2006, KBBX 97.7 Nebraska City, by this time with the *Radio Lobo* monicker, was sold to Connoisseur Media for 7.5 million, 2.5 million over Journal's original purchase price. The sale was the result of Journal Broadcasting's purchase of KMTV channel 3 requiring the group the divest itself of a station.

Connoisseur at the time also held the construction permit for KGGG, a new station on 107.7 licensed to Pacific Junction, Iowa that would serve the Omaha market. The construction permit was later deleted when Offutt Air Base objected to the station, citing interference to its communications and navigation systems. In a rare FCC move, the auction purchasing price was returned to Connoisseur.

Ownership of 97.7 again changed hands when Connoisseur Media in 2014 sold KBBX 97.7 for \$4.7 million. The new owner was Michael Flood of Flood Broadcasting of Omaha. Ironically, Flood was also the owner of KNCY AM and FM in Nebraska City and KBIE 103.1, a new station licensed to Auburn.

101.5 KISP Blair

Joerge Klebe proved a mastermind at upgrades and move-ins. He would upgrade his properties at no small expense and sell at a profit. His biggest challenge was likely in Blair, Nebraska, a bedroom community on the north edge of Omaha. Klebe began working his magic the best he could with the existing Blair station from the 1980s, KBWH 106.3.

Klebe's CVC Capital had loaned the KBWH owners cash to buy the station in early 1983. But the station, with its less-than-desirable signal, endured money and management problems before defaulting on its loan.

After foreclosing on the station in 1989, Klebe silenced the station in late May 1990 to move the studios from North 60th Street in Omaha back to Blair. The station returned to the air October 3 and, with a staff of four and Unistar-provided satellite automation, worked at becoming a local station for communities to the immediate north of Omaha, of which Blair was the largest.

But in less than two years KBWH was again silenced, in 1992. Klebe's Sunrise Broadcasting sought ways to bring the station back in a new incarnation. He found a C3 opportunity for Blair on 101.5

Just weeks after applying for 101.5, another C3 opened up in Blair on 97.3. Does Blair need two FM stations? In the long run, it gave Sunrise some wiggle room as it no longer was obligated to stay in Blair if another station signs on in the community.

Klebe was granted a construction permit for 25 thousand watts at 391 feet on 101.5 on October 26, 1993. The KISP calls were granted at this time.

The new KISP tower would be about eight miles north of Blair and about three miles south of Herman, Nebraska. The improved signal was further north and would still be a poor contender for any part of Omaha's listenership.

It was a slow process. The new frequency and power were set, but it would still be a few years before a Blair station would return to the air while details were being worked out.

Klebe was also busy with his newly-purchased 97.7 FM licensed to Nebraska City with designs to move its signal into Omaha and Lincoln. He imported Bob Maines, a holdover after Sunrise sold its WQLS Ozark, Alabama station, to oversee the construction of both stations.

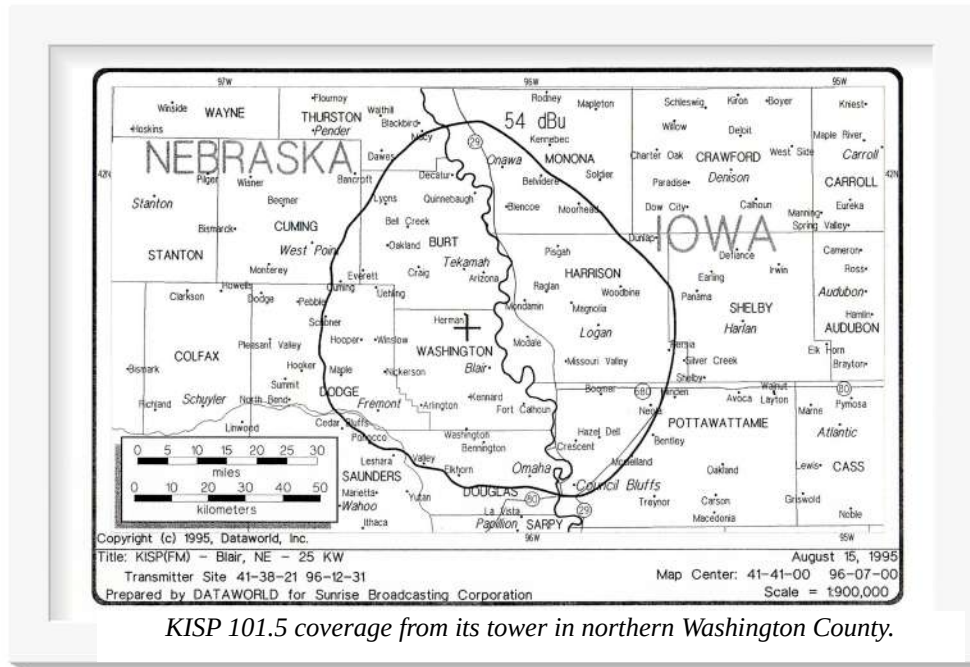
Though KOSJ had numerous bugs to work out, Maines turned much of his attention to the Blair facility. He announced Sunrise planned to launch the new station and return an Urban format to the air in April 1997, a date that kept getting pushed back.

Numerous tests were run when 101.5 lit up from its new transmitter site, and for a while tested with a simulcast of KOSJ programming.

In September 1997, KISP 101.5 launched on its own with a country format, airing Westwood One's satellite-delivered programming. The morning show was local with Maines co-hosting from the new studios at 757 Washington Street in Blair.

Klebe, meanwhile, was still figuring what to do with the station. He even considered donating it to Dana College for the write-off. But, he came up with a better scheme. Since Blair would have another FM, he was free to try moving his license to another community.

The Sioux City market was the closest, 67 air miles north of Blair. Klebe found a tower site just north of Whiting, Iowa about 20 miles southeast of Sioux City. The tower move itself would only be about 40 miles. Klebe was granted a construction permit for this new station on 101.5 running 25 thousand watts at 200 feet.



Meanwhile, Cathie Fife took over the KISP morning show in July 1998. She had gained fame in the late 1980s on WOW AM and FM then worked at two Lincoln stations as well as brief interludes at KESY 1420 and KOIL 1290, and even at KOTD 1020 Plattsmouth.

Upon moving to Blair, she opened Cathie Fife's House, a collectibles store, saying "I have this ideal life that has nothing to do with horrors of radio." Fife added, "Now radio is a hobby. Now I'm doing it for the good of the community, and I don't care that much about the competitiveness. I think that will make it more fun" (OWH July 25, 1998)

In August, Fife invited George Woods, her former co-host during her years at WOW, to join her on the KISP morning show for his 50th birthday.

It was a long journey for the old KBWH as the decade drew to a close, and it wasn't over yet. Klebe's Blair station would be back on the air but wouldn't be staying in town.

101.5 EPILOGUE

In spring 2000 Joerge Klebe engineered a deal to sell KISP 101.5 to Waitt Media for \$950 thousand. The deal was contingent upon FCC approval to change the community of license to Whiting, Iowa, about 16 miles south of Sioux City, and a signal upgrade from Class C3 to C2. The station would then become part of the Sioux City market where Waitt owned KZSR FM.

Meanwhile, Klebe cut a deal with the other Blair station construction permit owners to take over the KISP tower. It was Mitchell Broadcasting, now being LMA'ed by Waitt Broadcasting, that had won the battle for Blair's 97.3.

In May 2001 KISP applied for the move to Whiting, Iowa to become part of the Sioux City market with the new calls KKYY and to upgrade from a C3 to a class C2 on a new frequency of 101.3. This would allow an increase in power to 50-thousand watts at 492 feet from its tower site north of Whiting near Hornick, Iowa. Klebe's sale to Waitt closed on July 17.

KBLR signed on September 10, 2001 from the former KISP 101.5 tower. Blair listeners never noticed the elaborate change except for the new dial position.

KKYY on 101.3 signed on one month later, a Sioux City move-in joining its co-owned Hot AC FM KZSR in a combo.

Joerge Klebe, having already sold KOSJ and the Nebraska City and Auburn properties left the market likely a richer man, even with costly legal fees, equipment purchases, and operating costs over the preceding years. He did the same with his Topeka station, KQTP Saint Marys, Kansas, selling it for \$3 million.

After that, Klebe focused station ownership primarily on his flagships WGNY AM and FM in Newburgh, New York. Klebe's right-hand man Robert Maines stayed with him, moving to Newburgh to become WGNY chief engineer, and eventually general manager.

101.9 KFMQ KYNN KGDE KZFX Lincoln

KFMQ, Lincoln's pioneer FM station during the late 1950s renaissance for the new band, signed on June 22, 1958. Just 320 watts on 95.3, the power was boosted to 1275 watts in 1960. The station's studios were at 10th and O Streets in Lincoln. Its founder, Herbert Burton, was a classical music enthusiast. The station would grow in the 1960s with the usual classical and Middle-of-the-Road FM fare of the day.



The station was sold for \$80 thousand to Steve Agnew in 1966. Agnew soon sought changes, filing for 100 thousand watts seeking 107.3 in 1967 then winning 101.9 in 1968. Meanwhile, programming consisted of contemporary MOR music during the day and progressive rock at night.

When Agnew found the station's nighttime programming of progressive rock was generating more revenue than the daytime MOR format, he took the station to all Progressive Rock on September 21, 1970. After KFMQ finally got its 100 thousand watt signal on 101.9 in 1973, it rode high with its Rock format as *Q102* for the next 20 years.

Omaha was on the very fringe of the 101.9 signal, just strong enough so that Omaha rock fans were aware of it but not strong enough to build a following.



Midwest Communications purchased the station from Roger Agnew in July 1988 for \$2.8 million with an eye on upgrading to cover Omaha. A transmitter site in the direction of Omaha was found near Eagle, Nebraska that year, at a point 15 miles west of Lincoln but still some 40 miles SW of downtown Omaha. A tall tower went up and KFMQ's antenna found a new home at 1132 feet.

The new site launched in late June 1988. "The signal comes in just like gangbusters in Omaha now," said KFMQ general manager Dennis Ryan. The new extended coverage went north to Hooper, east into Council Bluffs, west toward Exeter and Fairmont, and south nearly to the Kansas stateline. Ryan noted the station eventually wants to take advantage of its increased coverage. "We want to make some inroads into Omaha," Ryan said.

Ryan also said that KFMQ has been getting "very positive listener response" from Omaha, and several Omaha businesses have been advertising on the Lincoln station. "However, we didn't spend a million bucks just to throw the signal out there," he said. "We want to do business in Omaha." (OWH July 2, 1988)

Despite being Omaha's second rimshot signal just weeks after KOMJ 103.7 launched its move-in signal from Atlantic, Iowa, little was done by KFMQ to work the Omaha market. Studios remained in Lincoln.

"FM" was added to the KFMQ calls in 1990 when its sister AM station in Lincoln on 1480 changed from KLMS to KFMQ-AM.

After 21 years of playing album-oriented rock music in Lincoln, KFMQ FM 101.9 shocked its rock fans by flipping to Country. The genre was the hottest format in the early 1990s and competitors were wanting a slice of it. With that, KFMQ-FM began aggressively going after the Omaha audience.



General manager Peter Tanz noted that tastes have diversified and that Country is now among the favorites of the younger crowd whereas years before it could be polarizing. He also detailed that KFMQ was one of Lincoln's highest-rated radio stations, but the ratings had shown "slow deterioration," (OWH Oct 10, 1992)

The flip came on October 3, 1992, calling itself *Omaha's Young Country*, and *The Hit Kicker*. It was joined three days later by KXKT 103.7 that had been in the planning stages for a flip to Country and was blindsided by the 101.9 switch.

Suddenly, Omaha listeners had three Country FM stations, the first being long-time Country leader WOW 94.1 that had been riding high on the country music popularity crest that began developing as early as 1987 with artists such as Randy Travis.

Once the new format was launched, KFMQ-FM applied to change calls to the old KYNN calls that had entertained country listeners in Omaha on 94.1 in the late 1970s. The delay in applying likely was to avoid tipping off the competition. The new KYNN calls were granted on October 30.

The Lincoln studios were joined by a new one in Omaha. The station settled in on the SW edge of the Omaha metro within a two-story office building at 143rd and Y Streets in Millard.

KYNN 101.9's plan was to focus on newer country artists, mainly those who hit after 1989. The playlist included the likes of Garth Brooks, Clint Black, and Alan Jackson. The modern image was visually enhanced with colorful contemporary artwork on billboards and bumper stickers. Bill Jackson from KFAB was hired for mornings.

With the increase in Country signals, a shake-out was inevitable after a period of time. It came with a change in ownership in 1995. Mitchell Broadcasting, the owner of top-rated KQKQ 98.5, bought KYNN 101.9 from KLMS/KFMQ Broadcasting for \$1.7 million in February.

It was the end for *Hit-Kicker Country* on 101.9. "We feel that country has peaked in the United States," said Mitchell Broadcasting Executive Vice President and General Manager Marty Reiminschneider. "The format is already fragmenting into Traditional Country, New Country, Country Rock, Hot Country." (*OWH* Feb 25, 1995)

Mitchell dropped the Country format in favor of Alternative Rock leaving KXKT 103.7 and WOW 590 and 94.1 to battle it out. KYNN 101.9 became *The Edge*. Speculation was that Mitchell was protecting his top-rated KQKQ 98.5 CHR station from inroads being made by Modern Rock.

Alternative Rock was emerging as a new format for the young, mostly male, rock and roll audience. Jacobs Media was considered a leader in the format and was hired as a consultant. The consultant also owned the copyright on *The Edge* moniker, the rights contracted out to Mitchell.

Studios were moved to join those of KQKQ/KKAR in the LeDioyt Landmark Building at 10th and Farnam. A computer-voiced countdown led to the new sound's launch on February 21, 1995, followed by two weeks of nearly non-stop music by modern acts like Pearl Jam, the Cranberries, and Green Day.



Commercials restarted days later when live DJs returned. The calls were changed to KGDE 101.9 on April 1. Michael Steele, former music director at Mitchell's KQKQ *Sweet 98*, returned from a gig in Charlotte, NC to become the KGDE PD.

Steele, working afternoon drive on launch day, called himself Matt Markel the entire shift. Markel was the owner of direct competitor 93 K-Rock, KRRK 93.3, which had been modern rock since 1991. KEZO 92.3 was also playing some modern rock but was more mainstream with its playlist.

What rankled the competition was KGDE calling itself *Omaha's Modern Rock Station* while licensed to its own market of Lincoln. KGDE 101.9 justified this saying plans were in the works in the following weeks to place its 107.7 translator K299AK into service on the WOWT Ch 6 downtown tower at 35th and Farnam.

The translator's rebroadcast on 107.7 would fill in the weaker spots in the man-made canyons of downtown Omaha and in the signal's shadows in the Papillion Creek valleys. The repeater's ERP was calculated to keep the pattern of the translator legal, staying within the primary contours of the parent station.

The Edge debuted with a respectable 6 share. Concerts followed. A summer outdoor concert was planned for September at Aksarben's infield. Ten bands were booked for a ten-hour all-day event to be called EdgeFest.

The daylong concert on September 11 drew over 16 thousand young people, the biggest music-only rock show since the Beach Boys performed at Rosenblatt Stadium in 1979 for nearly 25 thousand. The closing act was Omaha's own 311, paid \$25 thousand for their 90-minute set.

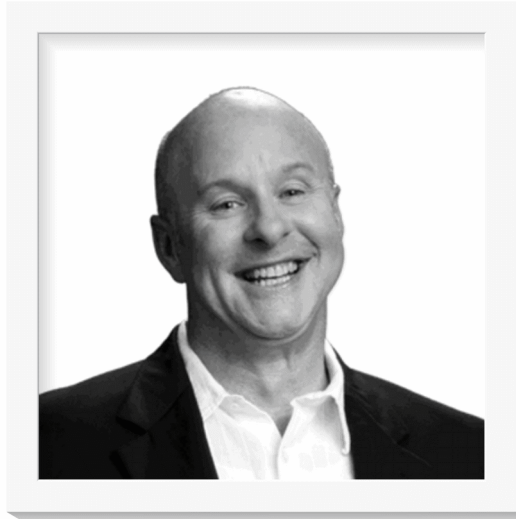
As the following year got underway, four main players left *The Edge*, including PD Michael Steele. Staci Kelly from Middays went to Cincinnati. Morning man Dave Osel resigned, and night jocks Kristi Kosach and Tim Virgin took jobs in St. Louis. The new morning team would be Nicki Boulay and Ernie Mills.

Michael Steele said he was fired despite having an 18-month contract. He blamed it on a personality conflict with the new Ops Manager, ironically named Mike Steele, saying, "I don't know where it went wrong or why it went wrong. I just had a lot of problems with the way he did things." (*OWH* Jan 20, 1996)

Manager Marty Riemenschneider confessed firing Steele, saying only it was "for business reasons." Steele was replaced by Lyn Barstow from KNNC Austin.



At the same time, Mitchell Broadcasting in a major coup won the rights to Husker Football for KKAR 1290 and KGDE 101.9 in April 1996. Though the AM signal was inferior to that of longtime Husker outlet KFAB 1110, the addition of FM is thought by many to have been the tipping point in gaining the rights. KFAB had long resisted simulcasting Husker sports on its FM, KGOR 99.9



KGDE morning personality Chris Baker, who later became a talk show host on KFAB 1110.

By August KGDE ratings had doubled in morning drive for the 12-24 group. But, that was the cutoff; the 25 to 54 audience remained flat. Overall in the market, *The Edge* was up to about 8th just ahead of KKCD.

Edgefest '96 set a new record for a rock concert in Omaha with well over 25 thousand attendees, mostly teens. Six thousand EdgeFest T-shirts were sold at ten dollars each. A tattoo and body piercing tent proved the most popular “distraction.” Crowd surfing over outstretched arms was nearly a constant occurrence. The most dangerous ride was the “blanket toss” but no serious injuries were reported.

The *OWH* reviewer gave Los Angeles-based band Goldfinger the nod for liveliest performance and Omaha’s Blue Moon Ghetto was credited with a solid set “as usual” (*OWH* Sept 16 1996), The Omaha band had performed at EdgeFest '95 as well

In October, KGDE was voted by *Billboard* magazine as Modern Rock Station of the Year in the small market category.

More staff changes came in 1997. A new morning personality began on February 24 replacing Boulay and PD Lynn Barstow. It was talk show host Chris Baker, moving from sister KKAR 1290 to take over mornings on KGDE in the same building at 10th and Farnam. Boulay was moved to middays replacing Ian McCain who was moved to produce and co-host the morning show.

Baker was a standup comic and a bit of a rabble-rouser as a talk show host and he pushed the boundaries even further while on KGDE. By summer, Scott Voorhees would be his morning show producer.

In March 1997, music director John Stewart was fired, the last of the original *Edge* air staff remaining. He was told it was due to budget cuts.

Stewart was replaced in June by Omaha native Scott Papek who had been co-hosting evenings with Pat Safford since October 1996. Their evening show was number one with the younger demos.

Chris Baker's first ratings that spring since taking over mornings was promising—fifth in the market among 18 to 34s, and up in a few other demos as well.

The summer's EdgeFest '97 after two years at Aksarben was moved to WestFair in Council Bluffs. Over 20 thousand tickets were sold at 12.50 each for the September 6th event that saw thirteen acts beginning at 11:15 a.m. They included Matthew Sweet, the Nixons for their third consecutive year, and Smash Mouth. Despite the sweltering 90+ degree heat, the mosh dancing and crowd surfing went on, though dozens were treated for heat exhaustion.



1997 proved to be a banner year for live music in Omaha. EdgeFest '97 was one of three such daylong events.

KEZO 92.3 Z-92 drew about 20 thousand for its Birthday Bash that featured ZZ Topp, The Allman Brothers, the Romantics, and Omaha's Ivory Star at Levi Carter Park on the north shore of Carter Lake just weeks earlier.

Also, non-comm KIWR 89.7's Riverfest was a regular summer event at Westfair since a 1995 fundraiser there with similar bands.

Topping off a great music year for Omaha was Matt Markel's Ranch Bowl venue, booking acts such as Bare Naked Ladies from Toronto, Memphis-based Todd Snider, and Veruca Salt from Chicago.

A setback that summer for KGDE came with a lightning strike taking out the main transmitter. *The Edge* ran for six weeks on a feeble auxiliary transmitter while repairs costing nearly \$100 thousand were being made (*OWH* July 26, 1997). The inferior signal is believed to have contributed to what came to be a disappointing rating period.

Rumors of a format adjustment toward mainstream rock began circulating in October. Popular with 16-24 males but not enough to attract advertisers, true Modern Rock as a whole was suffering, and much of it was becoming mainstream anyway.

Mitchell's general manager Marty Riemenschneider denied that changes were imminent. "Why would I want to change a radio station that just drew 25,000 to an event?" he asked, referring to the station's Edgefest '97. "I'm going to give this format every chance of succeeding before I go and do anything different." (OWH Oct 18, 1997)

The ratings had placed *The Edge* 12th in the market, fueling the rumors. The low ratings were rightfully blamed on the six weeks, about half the latest Arbitron ratings period June 26 to Sept. 17, when the high-power main transmitter was out of service.

Sales were also a problem. The station did well with beers, bars, and tattoo parlors, but the traditional advertisers were reluctant to embrace the format. Similar formats nationally were tanking and were changing over to what was being called "Active Rock."

When *The Edge* joined CHR stations such as *Sweet 98* in playing Chumbawamba's "Tubthumping" in November, the writing was on the wall. Though the song ranked on Modern Rock charts nationally, the commercialized sound of the song was the ultimate indication that *The Edge* was losing its edge.

Nicki Boulay bailed in February 1998, moving to an Alternative Rock station in Denver. In April, *The Edge* gave up Modern Rock.

The overnight jock, Ian McCain, reportedly had a party during his swan song shift that got out of hand. Some said over 40 people were in the studio smoking and drinking beer and tequila while McCain played his own music choices instead of sticking to the playlist. One report said beer spilled on a console causing 500 dollars damage. Ops Manager Mike Steele broke up the party around 2 a.m.

The end came on April 10. For four hours the station aired "It's the End of the World as We Know It," by R.E.M., a mainstream rock band that had been considered Alternative Rock ten years earlier. That was followed by a simulcast of KQKQ *Sweet 98*'s programming for a full weekend.

The new format that emerged at 5:30 on the morning of April 13, 1998, was Classic Hits, positioning itself between KEZO 92.3 and KKCD 105.9.

The new calls and image followed on April 24-- KZFX, *The Fox*. The "Z" in the call letters may have been a play at listener confusion with competitor Z-92. It raised a few eyebrows, but no objections were filed.

The music was still hard rock but from much more mainstream artists such as Ozzy Osbourne, Aerosmith, Led Zeppelin, and AC/DC. Some modern rock from newer artists was mixed in, making it sound more like KEZO 92.3 which was at number two in the market.



Riemenschneider described the new direction. "We found that there was a hole between CD-105 (KKCD) and Z-92 (KEZO). Our new format is designed to fill it. The new format will have a rock vein to it, but I don't think it will be as hard as Z92 or as soft as CD-105." (OWH April 11, 1998) Mike Steele, following a contentious fallout with the departing Rockett Phillips, was reassigned from KQKQ operations to program *The Fox*.

Staff shuffling to accommodate *The Fox* and its, what some deridingly called "Oldies Rock," followed. Morning man Chris Baker and producer Scott Voorhees were moved to KOIL 1180 that had just flipped to sports talk. Baker later went to Kansas City where he switched roles back to talk radio. (Baker returned to Omaha in 2013 joining KFAB along with his former producer Scott Voorhees, both getting their own talk shows on the Omaha 1110 "Blowtorch.")

"Big Party" went to overnights on *Sweet 98*. The Sunday night "Left of the Dial/Basement Tapes" with Kelly Powell also went to *Sweet 98*.

With KZFX watering down its rock, Omaha now had a plethora of rock stations playing similar music. KEZO 92.3 Z-92 was similar to *The Edge* but was still a 20-year old mainstream rock station residing near the top of the ratings. Non-comm station KIWR 89.7 *The River* was running a pop-rock playlist. KSRZ 104.5 *The Star* and KTNP 93.3 *The Point* were already hit-driven and only added modern rock when the artist became mainstream.

The old *Edge* audience was still out there, proven by a 13 thousand turnout at Rockfest, the new name for what was once Edgefest. The daylong Memorial Day concert managed by Matt Markel was held at the renovated Westfair Amphitheater east of Council Bluffs just off I-80.

Mornings were changed in August 1998 with the hiring of Dennis Andersen who had begun his career on KOIL 1290 in 1977. Shari Stone joined the station for the midday shift after her Country stint on the morning show at WOW was ended. In December, another seasoned personality was added with the hiring of Chuck Denver from an eight-year stint on Oldies KGOR 99.9.

KEZO veteran Joe Blood joined the lineup for evenings in March 1999. Blood had been on Omaha radio since 1976 when he helped launch Z-92. He was one of Z-92's more popular personalities for about 10 years.

Blood was a true music aficionado who voraciously consumed liner notes giving him an encyclopedic knowledge of the artists and their band members. His musical knowledge was broad, extending from rock to jazz. After Z-92, he handled mornings on *Smooth Jazz* KOSJ 97.7 and later on *Soft-Rock* KESY.

The Fox trailed its most direct competitor Classic Rock KKCD 105.9 closely at first, but KKCD's lead widened in the following months. While KKCD remained in 10th place, *The Fox* went from 11th to 13th between spring 1998 and spring 1999.

More changes for 101.9 were to come in the new millennium.

101.9 EPILOGUE

Waitt Media took over operations of Mitchell Broadcasting's 16 stations under a time brokerage and local marketing agreement in April 2000.

By the end of the following year, Waitt moved to purchase the Mitchell stations for \$36.6 million. Norman Waitt was the sole shareholder, and John Mitchell remained as a director but with no ownership.

2001 saw some maneuvering to get the 101.9 transmitter closer to Omaha. With KISP 101.5 moving out of the market to Whiting, Iowa, the only obstacle remaining would be KAYL 101.7 in Storm Lake, Iowa needing to downgrade power from 100kw to 50kw. Since Waitt bought KAYL AM and FM in July 1999, this would be no problem.

At the start of 2002, the FCC granted KZFX 101.9 Lincoln a construction permit to move its transmitter to the KGBI 100.7 tower in Sarpy County, which was 21 miles closer to Omaha. This actually put KZFX closer to Omaha than to Lincoln.

As this was happening, KZFX's days as *The Fox* were numbered. On February 4, 2002 after a weekend of stunting, 101.9 became KLTQ *Lite Rock 101.9* playing light Adult Contemporary music. Before the end of the month, the city grade signal from the new tower site came on.

The translator K299AK on 107.7 was no longer needed for 101.9 but would soon be in service for another Waitt station, KBLR 97.3 Blair. The translator was sold to Baer Communications to get around the rule that station-owned rebroadcasting must operate within the parent station's primary coverage contour. Baer could legally operate 107.7 from downtown Omaha which lay outside Blair's 97.3 primary.

Lite Rock 101.9 stunted with all-Christmas music for the holidays on November 19, 2003. The attention-getting trend nationally had proven popular in building an audience that can be readily introduced to a station's regular format the day after Christmas.

The stunt is particularly useful for format flips. KLTQ 101.9 repeated the stunt in 2007 emerging with a new format on December 28 calling itself *The Big O*. Calls were changed to KOOO, a set of calls last heard in Omaha on 1420 in 1984.

Program Director Billy Shears described the *Big O* music as a hybrid of Classic Rock and Hot AC that included such artists as Bruce Springsteen, the Police, Eric Clapton, and Tom Petty as well as more current artists like Coldplay and Matchbox 20.

The image liners were distinctive, voiced by John O. Hurley who was famous for his Mr. Peterman character in the TV Series, *Seinfeld*.

Also in 2007 KGBI moved its transmitter to the TV Tower Farm on Crown Point Road in North Omaha leaving KOOO alone on KGBI's former tower in southwest Sarpy County. With that, John Mitchell purchased the tower from Grace Bible Institute.

In February 2012, KOOO was granted a change for its community of license from Lincoln to La Vista, a suburb on the south edge of Omaha. Facilities remained unchanged. Veteran personality Dave Wingert was added to morning drive.

In August 2014 music was adjusted to an 80's-based Classic Rock format and KOOO re-branded itself as *The Keg*. The music included Guns N' Roses, Journey, Aerosmith, Bon Jovi, Pat Benatar, and Def Leopard, targeting the 25 to 34 listeners with songs supposedly reminding them of their "keg days."

The format and branding were similar to that run earlier on KQBW 96.1 when it was *The Brew*. also focusing on 80s rock. *The Brew* aired on 96.1 from September 2005 to August 2012.

105.9 KKVU KKCD

The full weight of Docket 80-90 hit in 1987 opening up two new local frequencies for the Omaha area. The new “drop-ins” were 106.5 taken by Plattsmouth, about 16 miles south of Omaha, and 105.9 in Omaha.

Omaha’s new Class A was assigned 105.9 with three thousand watts. The battle for the channel began with multiple applicants seeking the slot.

Two applicants dropped out after being paid a sum of money. One was Cielo Communications, headed by Josephine Rodriguez, business manager at Bob Dean’s KOMJ and KOIL. She was paid 38 thousand dollars to “go away.”

The other was Omaha Metro Broadcasting headed by Brenda Constance, KESY sales manager, getting 27 thousand dollars to drop out.

Two major contenders that remained were Edward "Buddy" King of Freedom Broadcasting Network, and Diane “Diny” Landen, whose husband James Landen was a vice president of Security National Bank of Omaha. Diny was active in the community, a member of various arts and charity organizations.

King had some broadcast experience, having been operations manager and announcer for KOWH 94.1 in the early 1970s. He also was working part-time at WOW.

King’s goal was to serve the minority community in north Omaha, an audience without a station since the demise of KOWH. KBWH 106.3 was trying to serve the African-American community from Blair but lacked a sufficient signal reach.

King filed for the frequency in September 1987. His financial qualifications were then brought into question by another applicant. Under FCC rules, applicants are not required to provide proof of financial qualifications until they are so challenged.

There had been an explosion of applications since 1982 when Congress removed the limit on how much could be paid to settle cases. King said it was the Cielo group that raised the question about whether Freedom had adequate financial resources to build a station when it filed its application.

King asserted he had the funds even before merging Freedom Broadcasting with an earlier applicant, a company run by Alan Baer, former owner of the Brandeis department stores. King already had plans for studios at 34th and Avenue and Bedford Street with a transmitter site picked out at 92nd and J Streets. He also wanted to return the KOWH call letters to his station, the calls from the 1970s when 660 and 94.1 were Black-owned.

Attorneys for the two applicants made offers and counteroffers to end the contest. It was finally decided in August 1989 when King reluctantly accepted 55 thousand dollars to drop out. King said the amount wouldn't cover the expenses he incurred, but financial requirements coupled with a battle that could drag on and run up more costs were his deciding factors.

Diane "Diny" Landen was the last one standing. As the station's president and general manager/owner, she named her new firm Vantage Communications. Omaha's new Class A on 105.9 was granted six-thousand watts from the North Omaha TV Antenna Farm at Crown Point in March 1990. Calls were granted as KUKF in May but later were changed to KKVU well before the station's August sign-on. Also, the power was further defined as 5.2 thousand watts at 347 feet just before signing on, though it may have still been in the construction permit stage at the time.

Studios were constructed on the third floor of the Overland Wolf Building at 6910 Pacific next to the popular Venice Inn steak house. A teaser campaign began with billboards promoting, "The View is coming,"

At launch, the station began stunt programming with the sounds of birds singing and waves crashing, with mixed-in comments by locals about the type of radio station they would like to hear.

On August 11, 1990, KKVU 105.9 *The View* emerged with what Diane Landon described as a Progressive Adult Contemporary format. It was a unique mix of contemporary jazz, non-mainstream pop AC vocals, light rock, and contemporary instrumentals.



The morning personality was Sandy Palmer, former co-host with Otis Twelve on KEZO. She had been hired some weeks earlier, relaxing and playing golf while on the payroll waiting for the station to sign on. Other former KEZO staffers included Fred Ramsey, Steve Sleeper, and Joe Blood.

The View debuted to an enthusiastic audience and registered a 3.9 in its first rating period that fall, beating out KOIL and KKAR. Its closest competitor was non-comm KVNO 90.7 with a nightly program of light jazz. Programmers at both stations were aware of the rising popularity of light jazz and new-age music that were turning into mellow mood formats in their own right.

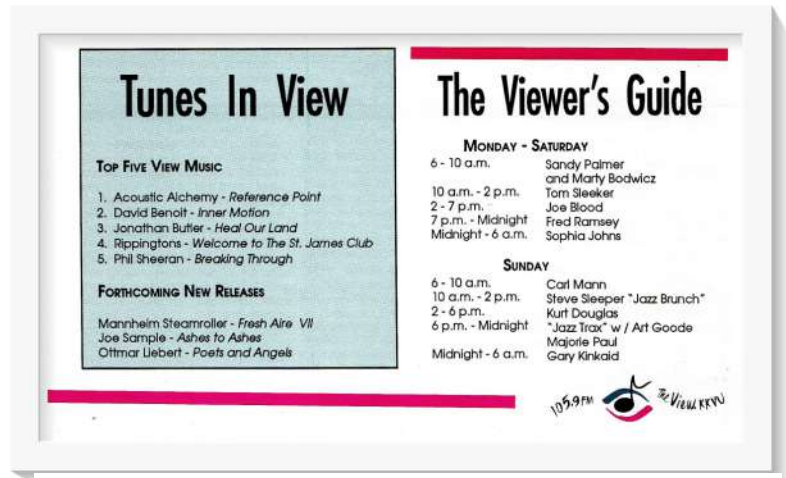
KTWV *The Wave* in Los Angeles launched such a format in 1987, evolving into Smooth Jazz in the early 1990s. It was popular with adults 25 to 54, and KKCD took note that the format's largest group was 30-plus. Aging baby boomers who were looking for more mature styles of music found it here.

The resurgence of jazz in Omaha coincides with a jazz renaissance on a national scale. After years of heavily electronic, fusion styles, jazz was returning to its traditional roots under the leadership of such young stars as trumpeter Wynton Marsalis.

In the 1950s, Omaha had at least five downtown clubs that offered live music five nights a week. In the '60s, the clubs moved west and changed their formats as listeners became more interested in other musical forms such as rock 'n' roll.

Joslyn Art Museum had been sponsoring its outdoor summer jazz concerts since 1985, and later added its Thursday Night live series featuring several local jazz groups. The Cathedral Arts Project offered a summer jazz series on the lawn of St. Cecilia's Cathedral.

Live jazz had more recently been increasing at Omaha venues, from the New Showcase Lounge, 24th and Lake Streets to Cleopatra's, 6553 Ames Avenue and Butsy LeDoux's, 1014 Howard Street. Those venues joined longtime jazz joints such as Julio's West, 130th and Arbor Streets; Tuesday night jazz jams at Kilgore's, 3225 1/2 California Street, and vibraphonist Luigi Waites at Mr. Toad, 1002 Howard Street. Some musicians credited KKVU as helping boost the live jazz following.



1990 KKVU 105.9 Program Guide.

The View's acceptance was notable in early 1991. Landon established a Listener Network that provided feedback on music and programming and formed a listener advisory board focus group from those who responded in the network. She also did auditorium music testing with focus groups responding to hooks of songs, rating each one individually. The test results were tabulated on the moderator's laptop computer and were delivered immediately.

KKVU also reached out to listeners with "After Work Escapes" at Tokyo Grill in the Old Market hosted by Sandy Palmer playing "relaxing View music."

In November KKVU aired the exclusive world premiere of Mannheim Steamroller's "Fresh Aire VII" produced locally by Omaha's own Chip Davis.

* ARTIST	DISC/CASSETTE	LEAD TRACK	LABEL
AH ACOUSTIC ALCHEMY	REFERENCE POINT	HOMECOMING	GRP
C ANGELO BADALAMENTI	TWIN PEAKS SOUNDTRK.	TWIN PEAKS THEME	WARNER BROS.
AH DAVID BENDIT	INNER MOTION	EVERY CORNER	GRP
B MARY BLACK	NO FRONTIERS	COLUMBUS	GIFTHORSE
B BREATHE	PEACE OF MIND	WHERE ANGELS FEAR	ARM
B SPENCER BREWER	NARADA WILDERNESS	WONDERLAND	NARADA
C CHARLES M. BROTMAN	MANGO COOLER	MANGO COOLER	GLOBAL PACIFIC
AH JONATHAN BUTLER	HEAL OUR LAND	HEAL OUR LAND	JIVE
B BOBBY CALDWELL	HEART OF MINE	HEART OF MINE	SIN-DROME
B BETH N. CHAPMAN	BETH N. CHAPMAN	WALK MY WAY	REPRISE
B TOM COSTER	FROM ME TO YOU	FLIGHT #448	HEADFIRST
C JULEE CRUISE	TWIN PEAKS SOUNDTRK.	FALLING	WARNER BROS.
B FATBURGER	COME & GET IT	COME & GET IT	ENIGMA
C STEVE EROUIAGA	ERKIOLOGY	NIGHT LIGHT	WINDHAM HILL
C RIC FLAUDING	LETTERS	TIME AWAY	SPINLETOP
C LEO GARDELMAN	SOLAR	SOLAR	VERVE FORECAST
C MIKE GARSON	THE MYSTERY MAN	ILLUMINATION	CHASE MUSIC
B LALAH HATHAWAY	LALAH HATHAWAY	SOMETHIN'	VIRGIN
CN IMAGES	GOIN' UPTOWN	LAUGHING MAN	CAPITOL
CN DAVID LANZ	SKYLINE FIRE DANCE	NIGHTS IN WHITE...	NARADA
C MAX LASSER'S ARK	TIMEJUMP	TROPICAL DREAM	SONA GATA
CN MARION MEADOWS	FOR LOVERS ONLY	I FOUND A NEW LOVE	NOVUS
B NEVILLE BROTHERS	BROTHER'S KEEPER	FEARLESS	AM
B PERRI	TRADE WINDS	SOMEONE LIKE YOU	MCA
C EMILY REMLER	THIS IS ME	U KNOW WHAT I'M SAYING	JUSTICE
AH RIPPINGTONS	...ST. JAMES CLUB	VICTORIA'S SECRET	GRP
C THOM ROTELLA	WITHOUT WORDS	SINCE I MET YOU	DMP
C BERNARDO RUBAJA	NEW LAND	AMERICANA	NARADA EQUINOX
AH PHIL SHEERAN	BREAKING THROUGH	BREAKING THROUGH	SONIC EDGE
B RICARDO SILVEIRA	AMAZON SECRETS	LET'S MOVE ON	VERVE FORECAST
C RICHARD SOUTHER	TWELVE TRIBES	SIMPLE JOYS	NARADA EQUINOX
B SUNNY SOUTON	FALLING THRU A CLOUD	DON'T HOLD BACK	VIRGIN
C STRUNZ & FARAH	PRIMAL MAGIC	BOLA	MESA/BLUEMOON
SN KRISTEN VIGARD	KRISTEN VIGARD	WAITING FOR YOU	PRIVATE MUSIC
B KIM WATERS	ALL BECAUSE OF YOU	TITLE TRACK	WARLOCK

* A - RECEIVING EMPHASIS PLAY
 B - RECEIVING MODERATE PLAY
 C - RECEIVING OCCASIONAL PLAY
 N - NEW ADD
 H - TOP 5 HOT

Even with all of this increased attention, bringing in nationally known jazz figures remained a risky venture. Matt Markel, the owner of the Ranch Bowl, said the club lost about \$1,500 with its recent presentation of saxophonist Stanley Turrentine and his band.

But, as with Beautiful Music stations of the 1970s, the format was difficult to make viable. The sponsor's messages were lost in the background. Additionally, listenership was made up of many active, upwardly mobile people, many who were just too busy to fill out rating diaries whenever they got one. By the end of 1991, *The View* was becoming foggy.

Things went south before the year was out. Ratings fell from the 3.9 debut to 2.0 by the following summer. In November 1991 Sandy Palmer was released from mornings. Also out were Fred Ramsey and Sophia John.

Palmer was replaced by KEZO veteran Joe Blood, who himself was a jazz fan as well as a rocker. Blood had a mind that would absorb background information off of album and CD liner notes, becoming an authority on all the artists and session musicians who were on the playlist.

Then, *The View* vanished. November 9, 1991 listeners awoke to the tunes of Chicago and other pop-rock artists. Phone lines that Saturday morning were switched over ahead of time to answering machines to protect jocks from angry jazz fan callers, their recorded remarks almost melting the phone lines.

The new format was described by Landon as soft or adult Classic Rock, including artists like James Taylor, Fleetwood Mac, Crosby Stills & Nash, The Rolling Stones, and the Eagles. PD Tom Sleeper oddly mixed in pop artists as well, such as Three Dog Night.



The call letters were changed to KKCD, a nod to the new compact disc audio technology taking over recorded music.

All that remained of *The View* was "Jazz Brunch" on Sunday mornings from 9 to noon with Steve Sleeper. In late 1992 Sleeper started a quarterly magazine called *Jazz View*. The publication was sent to the 10,000 members of what was once the View Listener Network.

Another weekend locally-produced program that survived was a contemporary blues show, *Pacific Street Blues*, hosted by Rick Galusha and John Drause, Sunday nights at 10 p.m.

The spring 1992 ratings showed KKCD back up to a 3.9, matching the debut numbers for *The View*.

Joe Blood was released in April 1992. The new morning team was Dean Floback and Kurt Owens. Floback joined the station from Champps Americana, an eatery/club where he handled promotions and music. Previously he was part of a morning team at Classic Rock station KLXK in Minneapolis.

Floback was suspended for several days for letting a guest comedian from the Funny Bone Comedy Club go too far with some jokes about Dolly Parton's physical attributes. The incident was a callback to Blood's departure some weeks earlier that was prompted by a Funny Bone guest's risqué humor that went too far.

In June 1992 Bruce McGregor, former PD of KEZO 92.3 and later station manager at KRRK 93.3 joined KKCD as PD. McGregor's strong track record at KEZO with rock and Classic Rock made him a good choice. He set out to repeat his success story.

By August 1993 "Flo and O," the morning team at KKCD FM, was history. Dean Floback moved to the Virgin Islands. Kurt Owens was moved to middays. Former KEZO morning co-host Diver Dan Doomey was the "fill in" morning personality.

By November McGregor hired Otis Twelve away from his short, ill-fated stint at KFAB and reunited him with Diver Dan. With Classic Rock and the reuniting of two legends from earlier years, the morning show was renamed *the Classic Morning Show*

By this time applications for upgrades had been underway. With KBWH 106.3 Blair going silent and planning to move out of the way to another frequency, KKCD saw an opportunity to upgrade its signal on 105.9.

In 1993 Vantage Communications applied for Class C2, first seeking 40 thousand watts at 544 feet from a site selected about four miles WSW of Bellevue on Capehart Road. Later that year in November, Vantage instead sought 50 thousand watts at 479 feet from a South Omaha tower to be built at 27th and T Streets. The upgrade was granted in July 1994.

In December 1994 with the promised upgrade, Diny Landon sold KKCD for \$3.55 million to WTMJ/Milwaukee Journal. At the same time, Journal also bought KEZO 92.3 for \$9 million forming the market's second duopoly. After closing in February 1995, Studios were moved from the Overland Wolf Building at 69th and Pacific to join those of KEZO on John Galt Blvd.

Steve Sleeper celebrated the 10th anniversary of his "Jazz Brunch" program with a Sunday midday broadcast from the French Café in the Old Market in October 1995.

Some changes In early 1997 saw Brandy Summers on middays replaced by Chuck Yates who had been working nights at KEZO since 1978. Also, Diver Dan Doomey was fired March 10, 1997, ending the longtime on and off again duo of Otis and Diver Dan.



Journal Operations Manager for the Omaha cluster Jim McKernan said the morning show was lacking audience interaction. Channel 7 co-news anchor Carol Schrader sat in with Otis several mornings after that, but in the end, Liz Adams returned to Journal as news co-host to replace Diver Dan.

When the spring ratings were released in August, KKCD had reached number two in the 25 to 54 demo, but as always, were trailing the Todd and Tyler duo at KEZO. In the summer ratings released in October, Otis' morning show was third in that demo, behind TnT at KEZO and the Country team at KXKT 103.7, TJ and Roger Olson.

Also in August, McKernan canceled "Pacific Street Blues" from the station where it was born, the show hosted by Rick Galusha for five years without a salary. Galusha said KKCD wanted him to pay 175 dollars a week to air the program.

Galusha's show was an eclectic mix of old and new blues that included "Americana, classic rock and local artists." He immediately moved his show to non-comm KIWR 89.7 where it continued its run for over three decades more.

Competition arrived for KKCD in April 1998 when 101.9 flipped its format from Alternative Rock to Classic Rock. With it came an identity change from KDGE *The Edge* to KFKX *The Fox*. A month later Bruce McGregor exited KKCD, moving to a PD position in Orlando, Florida.

The Fox cut into KKCD's ratings that summer, the two stations ranking 10 and 12, with KKCD keeping the lead.

By December 1998, Otis Twelve was out when his high-priced five-year contract was not renewed. Insiders said he made over \$100 thousand a year. His last ratings showed a nearly 60 percent drop in listeners (*OWH* Dec 19, 1998).

Otis was offered afternoons on KKCD by McKernan but he refused, citing the racy content of the *Bob and Tom Show* that would be replacing him on mornings. Otis said he wouldn't work at a station his kids couldn't listen to.

Otis returned to the airwaves afternoons on KKAR 1290, then retired in 2001 to become a writer, but later found a more lasting job at Classical KVNO 90.7. Liz Adams was released along with Otis, later going to Oldies KGOR middays replacing Chuck Denver who went to *The Fox*.



Rick Galusha, host of "Pacific Street Blues" in the KIWR studios. The show took its name from the street address of KKVU/KKCD where it was first produced. (2020 photo.)

Overall, 1998 was a tumultuous year for on-air talent. Besides Otis' departure, Rockett in the Morning was out at KQKQ 98.5, never recovering from his disastrous stint at KESY 104.5. The legendary personality Roger W. Morgan's contract at KGOR 99.9 was not renewed and he was out after four years doing mornings there. And in television, Gary Kerr, news anchor at Channel 6 was removed from his position and retired after 34 years with the station.

After the December debut of the syndicated *Bob and Tom Show* out of Indianapolis, ratings released in spring 1999 saw the new morning show bring in the lowest ratings for KKCD in five years. Jim McKernan, who headed up the Journal Omaha cluster had said when firing Otis that he wanted to get Bob and Tom on the air here before another station did, calling it "a big winner" (*OWH* Dec 19, 1998 and May 15, 1999). McKernan's misfires were few but huge.

105.9 EPILOGUE

In January 2001, Jim McKernan departed from Journal Broadcasting "by mutual agreement." It was following a spectacular miscalculation in overhauling the Journal's country station identity on 94.1 into KSSO *Kiss Country*. It was learned, after heavy promotion and a call letters change, that the "Kiss" image was copyrighted by Clear Channel Broadcasting. Steve Wexler, who was vice president and general manager of Journal's stations in Tucson, returned to Omaha to replace McKernan.

KKCD stuck with its Classic Rock format facing competition from time to time. As the format aged and Classic Rock further fragmented, an 80s-based Classic Rock format on KOOO 101.9 launched in August 2015 falling musically between KKCD and the latter's sister station KEZO 92.3.

Journal Communications and The E.W. Scripps Company announced on July 30, 2014 that the two companies would merge to create a new broadcast company. It will be under the E.W. Scripps Company name and continue to own the Omaha broadcast properties including KEZO and KKCD.

In early 2015 the University of Nebraska entered into a five-year radio partnership with E.W. Scripps grabbing all Husker radio broadcasts from KFAB 1110 and moving them to 590 AM KXSP and KEZO 92.3 starting July 1. The contract also called for KKCD 105.9 to feature Nebraska sports content airing the more peripheral Husker sports, such as women's basketball and volleyball.

106.9 KOTD-FM KCTY Plattsmouth

Plattsmouth's FM station didn't move into the Omaha market until it was about six years old, though before that it still had enough of a fringe signal to occasionally register in the Omaha ratings. Plattsmouth is about 16 miles south of Omaha.

The Warga family, owners of Platte Broadcasting Company and AM sister station KOTD 1000 in Plattsmouth, were granted a construction permit for 106.5 in December 1990. It was a class A with 3000 watts at 328 feet.

The call letters KZPG were assigned in February 1991 but were changed to KOTD-FM the following August.

The frequency of 106.5 was modified to 106.9 for 6000 watts in August 1992. A transmitter site was selected on the Iowa side of the Missouri River nearly five miles northwest of Glenwood. Owners Platte Broadcasting Company received its construction permit in January 1993.

KOTD FM 106.9 signed on July 10. Initial programming was a simulcast of KOTD-AM's Nostalgia *Stardust* format from the Satellite Music Network along with high school sports and University of Nebraska Freshman games. KOTD-FM showed up with a one share in the Omaha ratings.

Little more was done with the FM while owners worked on upgrading the AM side moving KOTD from 1000 to 1020 kHz to gain a power increase.

The Warga family sold their FM to Waitt Broadcasting for \$1.05 million in early 1998. Waitt was on a buying spree, also buying stations in Onawa, Iowa, and Panama City, Florida. Adding KOTD FM to its Omaha cluster obviously meant an upgrade would be sought to provide a city-grade signal over the market.

The upgrade to 25 thousand watts came in July 1999 nicely covering Omaha. The new tower site was nine miles north of Glenwood, Iowa, across the Missouri River from Bellevue. Studios were moved in with the Waitt/Mitchell cluster at 51st and Dodge in Omaha.

The new signal covered the metro but Blair and the western reaches of Douglas and Sarpy counties were in the secondary contour. The Nostalgia format was still running but speculation was that a Rock format would soon be launched.

Rumors solidified with the hiring of the staff. The new program director would be Allison Steele of KEZO fame. On mornings, it was Courtney Vacanti-McCaig, formerly a sidekick on KEZO's Todd and Tyler show, joined by Marv Pratt, the producer of Otis XII's talk show on KKAR 1290. Mike Steele took middays, followed by Brian Eckleberry, afternoons, Scott Barnett, evenings, and Brother Cliff, overnights.

The format flip to Adult-Alternative Rock in October 1999 came as a shock to the older, Nostalgia listeners. KOTD-FM 106.9 became KCTY *The City*, with a free-form music format and a library of over two thousand songs. It would be the first of several formats for Omaha's newest move-in, seeking to gain its footing in the market.

106.9 EPILOGUE

The Adult-Alternative Rock format was dropped in 2004 in favor of 80s Oldies as *Retro 106.9*. This left KIWR 89.7 *The River* as the sole choice for former fans of *The City*.

The new format was introduced with a 24-hour countdown in March using the slogan, "Re-live the fun." The change came just days after GM Michael Payne was asked to step aside at the Waitt cluster and Ken Fearnow took over.

Another change came a year later in May 2005 when the station, now owned by NRG Media, switched to the *Bob* format. "Bob plays anything" was the mantra of this new automated format born in Canada. It was a mix of Classic Rock and Hot AC punctuated by clever but canned "Bob" liners.

About a year and a half later in December 2006, *Bob* gave way to *Power 106.9*, a Hip Hop format that was moved over from NRG's Blair station, KBLR 97.3. Calls were changed to KOPW in January 2007. With the change, KBLR adopted a Country format.

SIDEBARS

DEREGULATION- AN OVERVIEW

The loosening of ownership rules slowly developed leading up to the ownership frenzy that began in 1996. Since 1953, licensees were limited to a total of 7 television licenses, 7 AM radio licenses, and 7 FM radio licenses nationwide known as the 7-7-7 rule. 1985 the 7-7-7 rule was upgraded to the 12-12-12 rule. 1992 saw the rules relaxed even further to the 12-18-18 rule.

The 1992 ownership rules also permitted multiple ownership, or duopolies, within a single market. Until then only one AM and one FM and one TV could be owned by one company in a market, a ruling set in 1944 that sought to keep the airwaves open to a variety of interests and individuals.

The number of stations permitted was dependent upon market size. Paul Aaron at KFAB noted how this could help a company increase its market share, saying, "If you don't control about 25 percent of the audience, you're not going to be able to play the national advertising game in the future." National advertising dollars, he said, are crucial to a station's financial picture. (*OWH* Apr 24, 1993).

Omaha's first duopoly under the new ruling was in 1993 with Mitchell Broadcasting's purchase of KOIL 1290 to join his KKAR 1180. Interestingly, KOIL was Omaha's only station in the 1940's that was part of a duopoly and had to be sold off when duopolies were outlawed.

The growth of radio in numbers was quickly outpacing its demand among sponsors. In 1980 there were about 8700 stations, nearly even between AM and FM. By 1996 there were over 12 thousand stations, mostly FM. Nearly half of all radio stations in the United States were unprofitable.

With the Telecommunications Act of 1996, nationwide consolidation was allowed so that economies of scale could cut expenses and station clusters could reach a broader audience like single stations once did in earlier years.

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 opened the floodgates for duopoly ownerships. The Act changed regulation so that a single company could own up to eight radio stations in a given market depending on its size, however, there was no limit on the number of radio stations one company could own nationwide.

Clustering stations in a single market saved costs; fewer staff and programmers would handle a heavier workload consisting of multiple stations.

A buying frenzy followed. Financing was fairly easy and stations began selling at inflated prices. It wasn't long before the smaller groups were swallowed up by the bigger groups. Some staffers found themselves under new owners multiple times in the space of just months. In the first year, more than 2,500 of the nation's 10,000 radio stations changed hands.

By 1997 Omaha had just three major companies owning most of the market's radio stations:

Mitchell Broadcasting was Omaha's lone group owner. Mitchell owned KKAR 1290, KOIL 1180, KQKQ 98.5, and KGDE 101.9 Lincoln and its Omaha translator on 107.7.. Additionally, Mitchell owned AM and FM combos in Kearney and North Platte and added KHUB 1340 and KFMT in Fremont to his stable in July.

Journal Broadcast Group based in Milwaukee owned KEZO 92.3, KKCD 105.9, KOSJ 97.7 and KOSR 1490, with an agreement in hand to purchase KESY 104.5 and KBBX 1420.

Triathlon Broadcasting Co. based in San Diego owned KXKT 103.7, KTNP 93.3, KFAB 1110, and KGOR 99.9, plus Pinnacle Sports Productions that owned the radio rights to Cornhusker sports. Triathlon also owned other stations in the region including four in the Lincoln market: KZKX, KTGL, KIBZ, and KKNB.

Then the big fish began swallowing the little fish.

In 1998 Capstar Broadcasting Corp. of Austin, Texas bought Triathlon Broadcasting's 31 stations including those in Omaha and Lincoln for \$190 million.

Just a month later and before the deal even closed, Capstar was gobbled up by Chancellor Media Corporation for \$4.1 billion.

Chancellor Media soon became AMFM Inc., which in turn was acquired by Clear Channel in October 1999.

The remaining Omaha holdouts were Great Empire's WOW FM 94.1 and WOW AM 590, and John Webster's KEFM 96.1.

The WOW stations sold out to a corporate buyer in 1998. Journal Broadcasting bought Mike Lynch and Mike Oatman's entire Great Empire chain that included the WOW stations for \$95.9 million. The deal closed in 1999 after overcoming objections from Mitchell Broadcasting.

By 1999 three major owners controlled two-thirds of the Omaha audience. The winter 1999 ratings showed Journal stations with 24.6 percent of the market, Capstar owning 24.3 percent, and Mitchell Broadcasting with 17.2 percent.

NEW STATIONS TO THE OMAHA MARKET IN THE 1990s

- 1990 105.9 KKVU Omaha (New Class A station.)
- 1991 93.3 KRRK Bennington (New Class A station in Omaha suburb.)
- 1994 97.7 KOSJ Nebraska City (Upgraded move-in with Omaha studios.)
- 1996 103.7 KXKT Glenwood, IA, (The Community of License moved from Atlantic.)
- 1997 88.9 KNOS Omaha (New Non-Commercial station.)
- 1997 101.5 KISP Blair (KBWH replacement, license moved to Sioux City in 2001.)
- 1999 1620 KZAP Bellevue (New station on Expanded AM band, Omaha studios.)
- 1999 106.9 KOTD-FM Plattsmouth (Upgraded move-in with Omaha studios.)

THE JOHN MITCHELL LEGACY

What Todd Storz was to Omaha radio in the Fifties and Don Burden in the Sixties and the early Seventies, John Mitchell was Omaha radio's towering figure in the late Seventies and Eighties. An Omaha attorney with roots in Kearney, Mitchell's radio empire was one of the few that not only endured the tumultuous Nineties but continued to grow.

Mitchell got an early start in radio while in college in the 1940s. He was hired as a newsreader and sportscaster at KGFW radio in Kearney. After getting his J.D. degree with honors from Georgetown Law School in 1950, he returned to Nebraska and made KGFW his first radio station purchase three years later. In the coming years, he moved his law practice to Omaha where he acquired KRCB AM and FM in Council Bluffs, Iowa in 1973.



John Mitchell.

A driven achiever with strong attention to detail, John Mitchell in the mid-1980s won the rights to construct a new station in Omaha, the city's first new AM station in nearly 30 years. With it, he set his sights on market leader KFAB 1110. Despite a strong programming effort with new equipment and seasoned talent, his KKAR 1180 was never a match for KFAB's entrenched reputation and powerhouse signal.

Undaunted, Mitchell fearlessly pursued rights to Nebraska Cornhusker Football broadcasts that had been held for decades by KFAB. Through the expansion of his station cluster and numerous legal challenges, he won an exclusive five-year contract making KKAR 1290 (the former KOIL facilities by then) the new flagship station for Husker football.

Perhaps the crown jewel in his radio cluster was KQQQ 98.5, a contemporary hits station that owned much of the Omaha market from the late 1970s into the 1990s. Primarily handling the financing and legal work, he confidently left the particulars of running his stations to his hand-picked management team.

Mitchell also went into property ownership, acquiring the historic LeDioyt Landmark building in Omaha's Old Market District to house his Omaha stations. After retirement, he even owned the building at 50th and Dodge Streets where his stations moved after they were sold.

Mary Mitchell was very much part of John's operation. She was profiled in *Omaha Magazine* stating her responsibilities, "John had acquired 16 radio stations in Nebraska, and I started working full time as vice president at our Omaha office, where I handled all the advertising and designed logos, newspaper layouts, billboards, and bus ads. During this time, we also got involved in ownership of two restaurants, Le Versailles and The Golden Apple." (*Omaha Magazine* January/February 2018).

Mitchell's legal expertise easily extended into the restaurant business. He was a partner in Le Versaille at 6311 Center Street in 1970. Shortly afterward he was the driving force behind another French-style restaurant in West Omaha, the Golden Apple, at 90th and West Dodge Road. It opened in May 1972 with a beautiful atmosphere created by his wife, Mary. Ironically, the Apple's lounge was a secondary hangout for some of the KOIL staff, the station simply a block away.

Mary Mitchell put her interior design skills to work at the Golden Apple designing the room with a primarily bricks and wood motif and filling it with abstract art, Tiffany lamps, and a water fountain in the center.

While his partners ran the restaurant particulars, Mitchell monitored finances and accounting. Mitchell was wise to the downfalls of the restaurant business, citing primarily pilfering by employees who knew a myriad of ways to take home free steaks or under-report a friend's dining check.



*John Mitchell at work at KGF
W Hastings during his college days.
(Courtesy: Mary Mitchell).*

Mary Mitchell was also behind the design for the studios and offices of KQKQ and KKAR in the LeDioyt Landmark building. Old brick walls remained intact surrounded by a beautiful atrium and fronted by futuristic-looking studios showcased in a street-level window. It was the kind of broadcasting environment one would expect to see in a Hollywood film.

Other interests keeping John Mitchell busy included being a partner in the Mitchell & Young Advertising Agency, eventually divested as his broadcast holdings grew. He was also the chairman of the Nebraska Democratic Party from 1964 to 1972. In later years he faced pressure from his fellow Democrats for keeping Rush Limbaugh on KKAR.

When Mitchell finally decided to LMA his holdings to Waitt Radio with their option to purchase in 2002, he retired to the Keys. At the time he owned KQKQ, KKAR, KZFX-FM, KAZP, and KOIL in Omaha; KHUB and KFMT in Fremont; KGFW, KQKY and KRNY-FM in Kearney; KODY and KXNP in North Platte; and KUVR and KMTY in Holdrege. Mitchell also had construction permits at the time for a 100,000-watt FM station in Hastings and a 25,000-watt FM station in Blair.

John Mitchell was the mastermind behind Omaha's last locally-built radio empire, in a city with a long and proud radio heritage.

RATING SERVICES IN THE 1980s AND 1990s

Arbitron was the major rating service for measuring radio markets. While ARB's methodology was the diary recall method over seven days, the other services utilized telephone call-out.

Phone call-out had been used in earlier years by C. E. Hooper and Pulse, generally just asking if the radio was on and to what station. The use of call-outs returned in the 1970s primarily for music research by individual stations, a practice refined notably by Buzz Bennet and Lee Abrams. The respondents were played brief snippets of a song's most familiar hook and would rate each song from "Like" to "Burned-out."

In 1977 Tom Birch began in-house call-out music research while at KOMA, the Storz station in Oklahoma City. He hired a computer programmer to write the software for him. When KOMA saw ratings increase, Storz quickly moved him to program WQAM Miami. In 1979 Birch left WQAM to begin his own radio rating service. Tom Birch Ratings grew but ended when bought out by Arbitron in 1992.

AccuRatings was launched by Strategic Radio Research that year filling the void left by Birch. It was a weekly phone interview asking people to name the station they most listen to, differing from Birch which asked the respondent's listening over the previous day.

In Omaha during the 1995 survey period, six stations were subscribing to AccuRatings while Arbitron had nine stations. AccuRatings was less expensive at \$25 thousand per year compared to \$75 thousand for Arbitron.

The basic difference in methodology is that AccuRatings is a six-minute phone call while Arbitron is a seven-day round-the-clock diary.

AccuRatings's results differed from Arbitron's measurements. As an example, In Omaha's spring 1997 survey period Arbitron found Album Rock KEZO 92.3 and Classic Hits KKCD 105.9 tied for the top spot in the overall 12-plus demographic. AccuRatings rated CHR station KQKQ 98.5 as number one with KEZO at number five and KKCD at number eight.

ARB's sample size for the market was 1200 diaries to household families in the four-county area, while AccuRatings phoned 2000 households in the five-county region, but limiting respondents to one per household. (OWH Aug 9, 1997)

AccuRatings changed its name to AccuTrack in 1997. A year later it was ended as its owner Strategic Radio Research began focusing on projects for individual stations. Arbitron had the rating field to itself once again and solidified its position with the purchase of RADAR, a service that measures network radio listening.

CHAPTER THREE- THE NEW MILLENIUM

I miss the days of having one station in one building with one general manager and our own sales staff. That was a very special time of taking pride in building a radio station . . . You could go talk to your clients and do remotes from the tire store. . . . Now you have cluster managers and sometimes your boss is in a different city and you have to make an appointment to see him. –DJ and Programmer Scott Shannon (Inside Radio interview, January 8, 2016).

CONSOLIDATION – THE NEW PLAYING FIELD

As the Telecomm Act of 1996 took hold, consolidation began to reshape radio's battleground. No single station dominated a significant portion of the day as did market leaders of the past. This can be seen in Omaha's 1997 12+ ratings. Mornings were topped by KFAB 1110 News/Talk, middays saw KEZO's Rick Setchell at the top with Rock, afternoon drive was led by Chuck Denver on Oldies KGOR, and evenings were dominated by Gordy Larson at Country KXKT.

Formats and associated imaging and call letters were fast-changing. Music genres began to be sliced razor thin, the narrow differences defined by the specific grouping of core artists selected from a pool of hit music that accumulated over recent decades. Air talent kept on the move too, some in and out from other markets, others having made Omaha their home hopping and ricocheting from station to station.

Unforeseen was that small stations may have been saved, but now the over-leveraged groups themselves now began a fight to survive.

Groups had gone heavily into debt paying inflated prices for properties during the buying sprees. This led to restructuring and corporate cuts becoming the norm.

Staff cuts soon reached severe proportions that even swept up popular but no-longer-affordable top air talent. Surviving personnel in all departments were given the extra workload and responsibilities covering multiple stations.

Centralized programming and management resulted in a homogeneous sound for radio around the country. With automation systems, syndication, satellite delivery and computer voice tracking via the Internet, announcers in any city could work air shifts at multiple stations around the country, losing the station's local connection to the listeners.

On the flip side, the 1996 Telecomm Act may have come just in time. Unforeseen in the Act was the explosion of new electronic media. In 1996, Sirius XM was not yet orbiting the earth to offer subscriptions for commercial-free music of any genre. Internet development allowing smooth audio and video streaming was at best awkward and unwieldy. Social media was not yet on the horizon. Napster file-sharing threatened the music business, later replaced by legal streaming platforms like Pandora, Spotify, and YouTube.

In Omaha, the remaining privately-owned holdouts succumbed to corporate ownership soon after the turn of the century. In 2003 Clear Channel bought the lone commercial holdout, KEFM 96.1.

By this time Mitchell Broadcasting had sold out to Waitt Media, which later became NRG Media in a merger. NRG (New Radio Group) headquartered in Cedar Rapids, Iowa and led by Mary Quass remained a spunky regional group. Like the John Mitchell earlier cluster of regional stations, it carried on successfully in the face of the national big guys like Cumulus and I-Heart.

The religious broadcasters were the last to go. RadiOmaha's KCRO 660, a daytime-only operation, and Grace Bible Institute's KGBI 100.7, a non-comm on a commercial frequency relying on declining listener donations and school enrollment, sold out to the Salem Broadcasting Group in 2005.

It was the new radio model, starkly different from any earlier incarnations, but one that allowed it to survive for decades more.

SIDEBARS

NEBRASKA PUBLIC RADIO NETWORK

With Public Radio already in the Omaha market, plans began to take shape for the rest of Nebraska. After thirteen years of pressure by supporters, the Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Commission embarked on an ambitious plan in 1986 to cover the state with a network of ten radio stations.

Through a legislative mandate, the state offered no money for construction but would contribute toward operating costs once on the air, amounting to \$350 thousand a year at the start. Over a million dollars in federal funding could be obtained but only after a privately raised amount was met. After that, annual tax support from the Legislature would be needed to operate the network.

Network General Manager Jack McBride credited private donations as the true catalyst in getting the network on the air. To save money, existing Nebraska Educational Television facilities were used where possible. Programming would be relayed over the same signal as the already-existing TV network.

The flagship would be KUCV 90.9 in Lincoln. KUCV, *Union College Voice*, was one of only two Nebraska stations airing National Public Radio, the other being KIOS in Omaha. KUCV was transferred by Union College to the Commission in June 1989 becoming Nebraska's first state-run station.



*Major stations of the Nebraska Public Radio Network.
Low power translators not shown.*

KUCV's coverage was greatly increased in 1989 when KTGL Beatrice permitted KUCV to use its tower located south of Lincoln near Hallam. This raised the antenna from 130 feet at its old location, to 600 feet. Power was reduced from 18 thousand watts to 16 thousand watts compensating for the additional height to bring it in line with its authorized coverage. KUCV also relaunched from new studios on October 10, 1989.

The remaining network stations would be located in Chadron, Alliance, Merriman, Bassett, Norfolk, North Platte, Lexington, Hastings, plus a low power transmitter in Falls City, using Nebraska Educational TV towers already in place. Construction on the first four stations serving the areas of Hastings-Grand Island, Lexington-Kearney, Norfolk-Columbus, and Alliance-Scottsbluff began in late 1989.

The network would offer national programming through National Public Radio and American Public Radio, state programming from Lincoln, and some local programming from the University of Nebraska and the state colleges in Chadron, Wayne, Kearney, and Peru.

By 1991 five stations were on the air broadcasting classical music, folk, jazz, national news and statewide public affairs programming from Lincoln. They were KTNE 91.1 Alliance, KHNE 89.1 Hastings, KLNE 88.7 Lexington, KXNE 89.3 Norfolk, and the flagship KUCV 90.9 Lincoln.

KPNE 91.7 North Platte and KMNE 90.3 Bassett went on in July, followed later in the year by KCNE 91.9 Chadron and KRNE 91.5 Merriman.

From the panhandle to the the Missouri River, the state was covered. In Omaha, KIOS and KVNO were not formal members of the Nebraska Public Radio Network, although would participate in the production and distribution of some of its programming.

In 2001, KUCV moved from 90.9 FM where it had been since its sign-on to 91.1. The old 90.9 signal had suffered adjacent-channel interference from KVNO 90.7 in the Omaha area.

The frequency shift and power upgrade intensified the signal in Lincoln and allowed the Nebraska Public Radio Network flagship to be heard on better radios in Omaha, where the Nebraska Public Radio Network had no outlet.

OMAHA MARKET- TECHNICAL CHANGES 2000-2015

2000 KMLV 88.1 Ralston (New station, Omaha suburb, religious, satellite-delivered programming.)

2001 KLNG 1560 Council Bluffs (Power increase from one to ten thousand watts. Remains daytime only, dropping to 2.1 thousand watts during Critical Hours.)

2001 KBLR 97.3 Blair (New station from the community on north edge of Omaha.)

2001 KISP 101.5 Blair leaves the market. (Station was permitted to move to Whiting, Iowa in the Sioux City market upon KBLR sign on in 2001.)

2002 KOTD 1020 Plattsmouth (Daytimer gets full time operation with power increase from one- to 50-thousand watts daytime and 1.4-thousand watts at night.)

2003 660 KCRO (A daytime-only station since 1922, at last gets night time operation with 54 watts.)

2009 KVSS 102.7 Papillion (Omaha suburb. After moving to the KPTM 43 tower near Gretna, the community of license was changed from Lincoln.)

2010 KZLW 90.1 Gretna (New station, Omaha suburb. Religious, satellite-delivered programming with 100 thousand watts from short tower west of Wahoo, NE.

2012 KOOO 101.9 La Vista (Community of License changed from Lincoln after moving from its tower in Eagle, Nebraska to KGBI's tower in Sarpy County in 2002. Mitchell Broadcasting later bought the tower from KGBI when the latter moved its transmitter to the Antenna Farm on North 72nd Street.)

RADIO AND THE INTERNET

Internet growth began taking hold as commercial use restrictions were being lifted in 1995. With newly-developed graphic browsers, it emerged in a primitive, introductory state for the fast-growing percentage of the population using home computers. It's use as a promotional device for products and services was seen as a potential tool for the curious public who began surfing for entertainment and information.

The Internet held promises that were years off. Still, media outlets jumped aboard. Newspapers foresaw using its immediacy for news and its ability to provide sound and video, though both were still in crude developmental stages. The *Omaha World-Herald* forged an alliance with KPTM Channel 42 early on for this very reason. It didn't last as there was inevitable resentment between the competing newsrooms.

Additionally, it was foreseen that listeners could get information on songs being played, find links to artists' websites, see advertiser products, and communicate via email with the station staff and management. But station websites were still few and seen as a novelty.

In 1998 KFAB's website offered Husker play by play picked up from a downloadable program marketed by Pinnacle Sports. KKAR, the Husker outlet, curiously declined to pick up the first option webcast rights when offered and got shut out. The Huskers, in this fashion, returned to KFAB, though not on-air.

By 1999 Arbitron reported that one-third of Americans were on line and 20 percent had access to the Internet at work. The majority of radio listeners on line were in the 25 to 44 group, and 13 percent of all listeners said they spent less time with radio.

In 2002 after selling his radio station empire, Omaha's John Mitchell focused on his Internet company that developed web software for radio stations. His MediaWebWorks.com got underway the year before with Marty Riemenschneider leaving his management position in Mitchell's broadcast properties to take over sales.

Mitchell Broadcasting Company Web Radio found that software development was expensive and the market still underdeveloped as radio and TV stations were just beginning to go on line. Except for his streaming high school sports on OmahaPlayByPlay.com, it proved too soon for such a venture and Mitchell sold the company to an outside interest.

Websites for stations at first were a novelty, offering little outside of basic info such as schedules, pictures, and in some cases, contest rules. As audio streaming improved, radio stations would stream programming that could be heard anywhere, gaining access to hard-to-penetrate downtown office buildings as well as to any Internet-accessible point around the world. Initially, a legal issue over the rights regarding a station's commercials playing online was problematic and a way was found to block them out.

In 2000 Arbitron began recording Internet usage of radio streaming and would credit on-line listeners to the station the same as if it were radio listening. Eventually the Internet offered clean streaming audio, video, live streaming, and podcasts that listeners could download and enjoy anytime.

NATIONAL RADIO NETWORKS BASED IN OMAHA

National satellite programming became a reality in the late 1970s. Used by the major networks at first, soon there blossomed numerous boutique networks. Omaha was home to two national networks in the early 2000s that provided 24/7 music programming to affiliates all around the country.

The first was a short-lived Oldies Network begun by Roger W. Morgan in September 2000. Morgan launched his 24/7 satellite Oldies network called *Retro Rock* from studios in the Old Mill area at 10855 West Dodge Road.

Oldies was a natural for Morgan who drew heavily on his experiences with artists and promotions during his AM rock radio years. In Omaha he was well known for his morning show on KOIL1290 during the 1960s.

Before the network, Morgan produced *Financial Focus*, a syndicated advice show for Ron Carson and Todd Feltz. Starting with 30 stations, Morgan expanded it to nearly 100.

He then launched a syndicated Oldies show, *Rock N Roll Rewind*. It was a three-hour show produced by Tony Wike, marketed by Chuck Denver, and voiced by Morgan. It was produced at Piasaurus Productions in Omaha and at its peak reached 505 stations in 13 countries before dying from a lack of advertiser support.

Morgan followed up by taking a big step with a live Oldies radio network. Operating 24/7, Morgan worked the morning show. He hired an old friend, Dick Sainte formerly of WLS in Chicago, for afternoons. Other personalities were Tony Wike, Dennis James, Chuck Denver, and Mike Ryan. Mary O'Keefe, recently let go by KFAB, was on late nights.

Morgan charged no affiliate fees instead taking four minutes commercial time each hour. Again, advertiser support failed to develop. *Retro Rock* went broke.

The second national network to come to Omaha was *Waitt Radio Networks*. Norman Waitt, Jr., co-founder of Gateway Computers, bought a Colorado-based network called *Radio One* in November 2001.

In May 2002 the network made plans to move operations to Omaha to become *Waitt Radio Networks*. At the time the net was feeding five format options to over 100 affiliates, none in Omaha.

A group of small studios were constructed on the ground floor of the Exec Center at 90th and Western Streets (1000 North 90th). Former WOW AM/FM manager Ken Fearnow returned to Omaha to become president of the network. Mark Todd was hired as VP of programming.

WRN's unique delivery system was based on automation software that evolved from the old Audisk system. Waitt's version of the software was called *Storq*.

The system provided continuous programming complete with DJ breaks that could be localized for the client for an extra affiliate fee. Good localization, however, depended heavily on the client station having a PD who could act as producer and feed timely promotional and local info to the WRN studios.

Two hourly localized breaks plus a local weather forecast were provided during the three daytime dayparts, the other two breaks in the hour being generic. Stations not opting for localization would receive generic content throughout.

Localization was achieved by interfacing via the Internet. The local PD's input, which only required perhaps less than an hour a day to prepare, would pop up on the DJ's computer screen when that station's voice file was activated for recording that break. The lack of affiliate interest in supplying this information turned out to be the system's biggest weak point as most station owners were automating to get away from hiring a qualified local staff.

Local weather was easier, programmed to pop up from WeatherUnderground.com for each individual client market in the proper break window.

Storq was a clever and seamless system. The music library, image liners, and local spots were all stored on the affiliate station's hard drive. What remained to be sent in a timely fashion to each station computer via satellite were the hourly logs telling what to play and when, and DJ audio files for insertion at the proper points. If the satellite went out, *Storq* would continue to program the basics on its own from previous information while waiting for updated information.

Non-localized DJ break files at night and overnight could be recorded and sent to the hard drives via satellite up to a week in advance. Localized breaks during the day were handled by the studio DJ handling numerous affiliates, sometimes sending out as many as 55 breaks to multiple stations per hour. This meant nearly constant mic work with perhaps ten minutes break time each hour.

Another *Storq* advance was allowing songs at each hour's conclusion to play out rather than be cut off for the top-of-hour ID and newscast. The top-of-hour command following the last song of the hour would not be activated until at least ten seconds past the actual :00 point on the clock. Then the next hour's log would take over at the song's conclusion.

If the hour was to begin with a network newscast, the software would be recording it and holding it for playback immediately at the conclusion of the legal ID. All of this was computer controlled with no board operator at the stations.

Music library and image liner maintenance was sent via satellite at any time during the workday. To keep music libraries in sync, the *Storq* system would automatically synchronize with each station's entire library each overnight to ensure it matched that at the network, sending a report for each affiliate to the network PD each morning.

Storq was also useful for live-assist programming, and many affiliates used the system on their own local morning show. KQKQ and KKAR in Omaha used *Storq* in their studios.

Waitt Radio Network programming did air on some Omaha stations. KOIL 1180 and KBLR 97.3 both carried the Country format at some points. In 2007 WRN developed an adult standards and soft AC format for 40+ demos called *The Lounge* to air locally on KOMJ 1490 and soon was made available nationwide..

Waitt Radio merged with a Cedar Rapids-based media group in 2005 to form New Radio Group (NRG). Dial Global bought the network in April 2008 and moved operations out of Omaha to Denver in late 2010. Dial Global later merged with Westwood One eventually dropping the Dial Global moniker in favor of the better known Westwood One marquee.

THE CROWN POINT TOWER FARM- UPDATE

As of 2007 the tall towers on the north edge of Omaha were home to over a dozen local FM stations. KETV, the middle of the original three towers, had the newest tower, replacing its old one that collapsed one night in 2003 during DTV antenna installation efforts.

Journal Broadcasting added a fourth tower to the skyline in the late 1980s, adding studio operations at the site by the early 1990s.

As of 2007:

- WOWT Channel 6, the northernmost tower held 88.1, 89.7, and 100.7.
- The middle tower, KETV Channel 7, held 96.1 and 103.7, using a combiner for a single antenna.
- The southern tower, KMTV Channel 3, had 99.9, 98.5, 90.7 that had moved from KETV's tower after its collapse, and 100.7 that originally was on the channel 6 tower, plus the auxiliary backup for 103.7
- The Journal Tower held its cluster of stations, 92.3, 94.1, and 104.5, plus Clear Channel's 93.3,

ABBREVIATIONS GUIDE and GLOSSARY

ABC	American Broadcasting Company, network.
AC	Adult Contemporary, radio music format consisting of popular non-rock music.
AOR	Album Oriented Rock. Music format focusing on album tracks by rock artists.
APR	American Public Radio. Non-profit network, produces and distributes public radio programs to affiliated stations, founded in 1983.
ARB	American Research Bureau, the radio ratings service also known as Arbitron..
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System, network.
CH	Critical Hours- The hours around sunrise and sunset during which a station may have to reduce power to avoid interfering with the distant primary station on the frequency when the latter is in darkness.
CHR	Contemporary Hit Radio. Music format term replacing Top 40 in the 1980s describing a format that plays current hits from more than one music genre.
CP	Construction Permit. FCC authorization to proceed construction of the particulars in an applicants filed request. Construction begun before a CP is granted could result in fines or license denial.
CPI	Consumer Price Index, used for tracking the basic cost of living.
CPB	Corporation for Public Broadcasting, formed by the Congressional passage of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 to promote and help support public broadcasting.
ERP	Effective Radiated Power. The energy of a radio signal determined by multiplying the transmitter power output with the antenna gain, used for FM stations power ratings.
FCC	Federal Communications Commission (Government regulatory agency)
GM	General Manager
GSM	General Sales Manager
HAAT	Height Above Average Terrain. A measurement of FM antenna height on its tower.
kHz	KiloHertz (the measurement of frequency in kilocycles, one thousand cycles. Used for denoting AM stations dial positions.)
Legal ID	Station identification required by the FCC as appearing at or near the top of each hour and delivered with call letters immediately followed by the city of license. The station ownership may be inserted in between if desired, but is seldom practiced.
LJS	<i>Lincoln Journal Star</i> , newspaper daily
LMA	Local Marketing Agreement. Contract in which one company agrees to operate a radio station owned by another party. A sort of lease and time buy agreement.
MBS	Mutual Broadcasting System, network.
MHz	MegaHertz (the measurement of frequency in cycles; one million cycles. Used for denoting short wave and FM dial positions.)
MOR	Middle Of the Road. Radio music format mixing non-offensive pop songs from various genres. Format later was called soft adult contemporary.
NBC	National Broadcasting Company, network.
NCE	Non-Commercial Educational station.
NPR	National Public Radio. Non-profit network, produces and distributes public radio programs to affiliated stations, created in 1970 following congressional passage of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967.
NRG	New Radio Group- Media Company, founded 2005, Headquartered in Cedar Rapids, IA

Non-Comm	Non-commercial station, primarily an educational or religious broadcaster that is financially supported by institutions, grants, or public donations but commercial air time sales is disallowed. The 88 to 92 mHz portion of the FM band is reserved for non-comms, though they can operate elsewhere on AM and FM.
Ops Manager	Operations Manager. A step up from program director, the ops manager oversees the overall station or station cluster's performance and well-being.
OWH	<i>Omaha World-Herald</i> , newspaper daily
PD	Program Director
Prod Dir	Production Director, responsible for the timely production and recording of local spots and for the proper placement of all spots in the studio or on the station's hard drive for on-air availability and presentation.
PSRA	Pre-Sunrise Authority, permission for a daytime station to operate at a lower power before sunrise.
PSSA	Post-Sunset Authority, permission for a daytime station to operate at a lower power an additional two hours after sunset.
R&B	Rhythm and Blues, music genre of African-American origin rising from blues and jazz.
Stick Value	A station's fair market value when viewed as a start-up, derived simply by the station's basic ability to serve its market based on its signal coverage. Stick is broadcaster slang for "tower," the symbol representing the station facilities.
STL	Studio Transmitter Link. Microwave gear feeding programming from the studio to the transmitter site.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carl Mann spent the majority of his working career in radio broadcasting. He began in technical work obtaining his FCC First-Class Radiophone License before entering announcing and Top 40 air personality work. His air work included stints at KATI Casper, KOOK Billings, KOMA Oklahoma City, KOIL Omaha, and KCRG and KQCR FM Cedar Rapids. His credits include Music Director and Operations Manager at KOIL and Program Director at KCRG and KQCR. Carl also worked in radio and television news at WOW Radio and at KPTM Fox 42 television, both in Omaha. Carl now resides in Cedar Rapids, Iowa with his wife Sharie, dog Andy, and three cats. He may be reached at catmann03@yahoo.com.



The author in 1975 at KOIL, Omaha (courtesy Larry R. Jansky).