

Local radio buffs take a step back into yesteryear

BY ROGER MILLER

"Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear..." The phrase evokes a time when people depended on their radios for entertainment as well as information.

Two Des Moines men are making sure that the history of that magic medium in the Des Moines area stays alive.

George Davison and Ray Dennis are passionate about radio. Both have extensive radio experience, though one is an attorney and the other is a Realtor.

In their off-hours, both men bring Des Moines radio listeners both news and music via AM radio. Both men worked at KRNT, and Dennis now does a Saturday evening air shift on KIOA, while Davison still provides occasional reports and other material for radio station WHO.

In addition to AM radio experience, both men are ham radio operators. And both are passionately committed to keeping the history of radio in Des Moines and central Iowa alive. So much so that Davison is writing a book on the history of WHO, and Dennis devotes several hours after a hard day's work serving as webmaster for www.DesMoinesBroadcasting.com, a website devoted to the history of radio in the area.

The website came about when Mark Campbell, another radio buddy, engaged them to make a presentation to the local Ham Operator's radio club. Material from the presentation is now a part of the Web site, and can be accessed by anyone who can use the internet.

The multi-layered Web site, hosted by Captain Jack Communications, has links to other radio sites, historical articles, pictures and audio clips which will bring back memories of summers at the beach or the swimming pool and songs dedicated to a Special Someone.

As the Web site project has gathered steam, Dennis says several radio personalities and technical people have jumped on board.

"I talked with Dick Vance, who has been most gracious,"



George Davison (left) and Ray Dennis check on an item of radio history from their webpage, www.DesMoinesBroadcasting.com. While Davison is an attorney, he can still be heard on Sunday Newscasts on WHO. Dennis is a Realtor, but does an air shift on Saturday evenings on KIOA.

Dennis said. Vance was a radio air personality on KSO back in the 60's.

Though the pair are committed to preserving radio history, they are adamant that radio itself is not dying.

"WHO is #1," Davison said. "Now, as an old programmer, Ray can tell you that you can do just about anything you want with ratings. You can show where you are strong with a certain demographic and in a certain area. But overall, WHO con-

PHOTO BY ROGER MILLER

tinues to be #1, which is unusual in today's world where FM radio dominates." Also on the horizon is XM radio, which made it appearance in the consumer market last year, which bounces radio signals off a satellite. What it does is enable the listener to drive from New York to Los Angeles while listening to the same radio station, and never

having to change the dial.

"For a long time in Des Moines," said Davison, "I think it's safe to say that for a long period of time, there were probably three stations that mattered here, WHO, KRNT, and KIOA. KSO would nip at the ratings every so often."

"Is this Web site an attempt to sing a swansong to AM radio?" Davison asked. "No, our intent is to try to preserve the history of a market that is often overlooked and a market that has seen a tremendous amount of talent pass through it."

The pair said they chose to focus on AM radio for two important reasons. "AM Radio is the foundation on which everything else is built," said Davison. And, it is slipping away slowly according to Dennis. "People are dying off and stuff is getting lost. We want to preserve this stuff while we can."

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