

# The greatest station never heard

BY LESLIE SOLE

When asked to contribute to this terrific publication, I thought ... current issues like 49th Media, or maybe the expanding role of diversity or digital channels, maybe a look back at the 25th anniversary of CFMT-TV Toronto, or 30 years of simulcast and how cable built our TV industry.

Then inspiration struck when someone said "do a radio story, you'll feel better". Okay, so...

It was the '80s, a new decade. The bumpy ride had become permanent on AM's dominant roll. FM was steamrolling when a group of people got together to revitalize 1430 (CKFH Toronto). It was a goofy signal but we built the greatest station never heard.

It was total music, talk and sports—no format unturned. It was to be an urban, full-service downtown station. We played *Mule Train* by Frankie Lane and *Roxanne* by The Police. Connie Sinclair did the music. We did the Jays' and the Leafs' games, and news was at 15 minutes after the hour and 15 minutes before the hour.

The talent was beyond description. There was Jim Brady and Larry Silver in the morning. Robert Holiday ran the news department. Then came the Andy Barrie show, with Barbara Amiel. Paul Rogers was doing news, Scott Walker was there. The great Dave Patrick did his own brand of radio. Alan Davis had come from the Maritimes, John Oakley was interviewing Phil Silvers overnight. Mike Marshall did afternoons. Marina Mirabella actually did traffic reports. Scott Ferguson was one of sports' up-and-comers, and a young Scott Metcalfe sounded like Keith Morrison.

We had John Donabie waxing poetic about his conversations with Dylan, The Band, Joni, etc. The late Tom Fulton's pipes were booming over the 1430 signal that went 40km straight up Yonge Street and 1km on either side. Great distribution!

A young Joe Bowen was doing Leaf games. It wasn't the Golden Age of Leaf talent either. But Joe rocked, it was the beginning of the style that he created.

Rookie Jerry Howarth was the new guy with the Blue Jays replacing Early Wynn as Tom Cheek's partner and doing sports-casts in the winter. A young Mark Hebscher took over for broadcast icon Bob McCowan, who left with what was CKFH's biggest audience.

There was journalist Earl McCrae, the notorious Gerry Forbes did weekends as did rising star Daniel Richler. All at one station, at the corner of Yonge & Grenville across from the Old Maple Leaf Gardens. I bought blue awnings for all the windows. We bought new equipment.

We had a strategy that AM radio had to connect with everyone, be useful and be fun. We spent big money on promotion. It was Metro 1430. A station for the city. It was going to set a new standard. Clint Nickerson was there. We would, through pure talent, save AM radio. Content was queen! We were crazier than the CBC with a budget increase.

Then interest rates went to 18%. We couldn't get our signal



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fixed on Toronto Island because it would kill exotic plants created by poor grounding and U of T botanists wouldn't hear of us cutting down the mutant plants. Owner Foster Hewitt had given up on grounding years before because the copper kept getting stolen. So about 25,000 watts was going straight into the earth.

When the ratings came out we had actually lost audience. That was that—shortly after the second bad rating period it became CJCL: The Music of Your Life. In a short time all this talent scattered across the continent. No more Metro 1430. Shazzam!

I sat with an old pal recently and we figured out it would cost millions to put that line-up of talent together today. They all did very well. Some of them are resting peacefully after moving from this life.

I did set some kind of record for the most expensive audience loss of my generation. I have been out of radio almost 20 years but I'll always remember "The Greatest Station Never Heard"...I just forget what it used to sound like.

It's a feeling I guess, a good feeling. So thanks to each and every one of you people, wherever you are.

(\*For fun, trace what these people are doing now.)