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*Good
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Good Moorrrning, West Michigan!

WGRD's Rick, Darla & Scott (RDS) at 'RDS Plaza'!

You probably don't need to be a cinema buff to know where that sound came from: Robin Williams in the movie classic *Good Morning, Vietnam*. His long, drawn-out scream was the eagerly-awaited, early morning wake-up call for the troops stationed in that part of the world. It was their lighthearted introduction to yet another day in a war zone. It reeked of brashness, arrogance, humor, and a love of life—qualities not exactly prevalent in their war-torn surroundings.

Well, there's a war going on every day in West Michigan. There's no blood; no surgery; no loss of life. Just a simple battle for listeners. It's between the local radio stations—more specifically, the competing morning shows.

Most wars have an ending. At some point, one side claims the final victory and the other side admits defeat. Life then, supposedly, returns to normal.

Not so in radioland. It's just a never-ending series of battles. The war is never won. It's a story of 'who has the most listeners?' and it is told at the end of each quarter.

The tale this quarter is that Rick Beckett, Darla Jaye and Scott Winters (pictured above and on the cover) are still number one in the West Michigan market. They have held this position since the late 80s, first with WKLQ and now, since last fall, with their arch-rival WGRD.

Careers in morning radio are unsettled at best, which makes it quite remarkable that WGRD's Rick, Darla and Scott (aka RDS) have stayed on top of this market for so long. They are competing in the truly competitive arena of morning radio, vying for the younger, less loyal, and more traditionally male listener. This is the rock music audience.

With Rick's irreverence, Darla's upbeat style and signature laugh,

and Scott's quickness and organizational skills, they have built a formidable team together. Their defection from WKLQ—for a substantially-improved compensation package and 'other considerations'—has not hurt them one bit. In fact they seem to be as strong as ever.

"We were scared at first," said Darla, "but radio was fun again. We found out we trust each other, we rely on each other and our instincts are good."

Scott added: "You don't know if it's going to work or not. . . Will the listeners come with you?" The latest Arbitron rankings have given them their answer.

"We found out how competitive we are," said a serious Darla Jaye. "Once we were number one, we found we didn't want to lose that position."

". . . And still don't," added Rick Beckett.

While they are not known for subtlety, and complaints have been made about their language and style of humor, they have definitely arrived at a formula that works. They provide an on-the-edge irreverence their listeners are looking for.

The old adage 'what goes up

must come down' does not seem to apply here. There is often a certain gravitational effect which pulls radio personalities downward at some point, but that does not appear to be in the offing. They continue to deliver a consistent product which is what this market obviously wants.

For many in radioland, the early morning introduction to the day is the symbol of, and the ultimate measure of success in the ultra-competitive world of radio. Whether it's on the AM or the FM dial; whether it's a talk, music or combined format; radio consultants are paid millions of dollars to develop the magic formulas designed to attract the desired listening audience.

Why? Because listeners translate into dollars. The more listeners a station has, the more likelihood the sales department will increase advertising revenue.

And that's what it's all about. It's the game of business and the stakes are high, which is why there's not a lot of job security in the world of radio.

Every quarter, The Arbitron Company releases its *Arbitrends* trend reports which inform its subscribers—the radio stations—how they are faring in their particular market. For example, it tells them where they rank in each age category and compares the latest quarter's performance with that of the two previous quarters.

This is serious stuff. Many radio salespeople live and die by these numbers. Many rely heavily on, and base their sales presentations on, the latest morning show standings. . . because, ratings success in that time slot often translates into more listenership at other times. Many people, consciously or subconsciously, determine their choice of radio station by whom they listen to in the morning.

In these days of duopoly, when multiple radio 'properties' in the same market may now be owned by the same people, there has been a stepped-up pace of consolidation. A good example of this is the previous acquisition of country

station WBCT (B-93) by WOOD Radio and the recent addition of rival country station WCUZ to its fold. When this happens, formats change, heads roll, consultants are replaced, salespeople get nervous, and everybody waits for the next Arbitrons to appear so they can see if it is 'working' or not.

The most recent changes have just happened. Not only did WKLQ replace Rick, Darla and Scott's replacements (Michelle McKormick and Mark McCollum) with the syndicated Howard Stern show, but on Tuesday, May 28, the day after the Memorial Day holiday weekend, Andy Rent and Dennis Sutton returned to their old, early-morning time slot on WCUZ FM.

Sutton was pretty happy and enthusiastic about the move but he did have some mixed feelings. "I'm not so sure I'm crazy about waking up at four o'clock in the morning again," he joked.

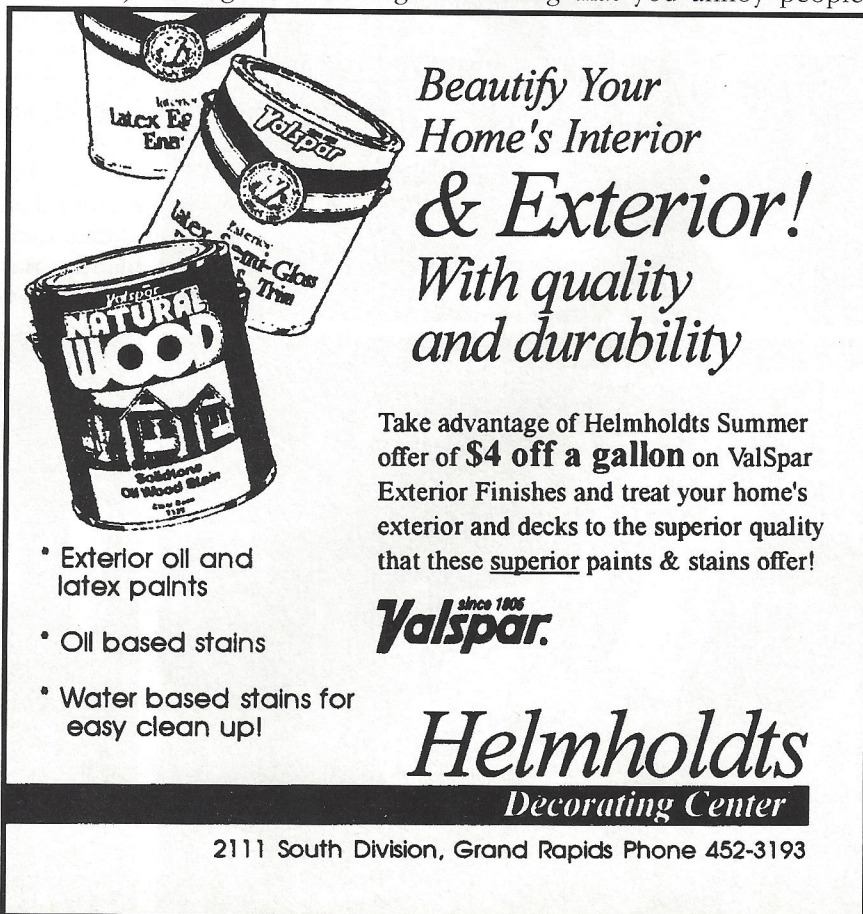
Some of the other morning shows are so stable in terms of their audience, that major habits would have to be broken for there to be major swings in the ratings.

The tendency is for the older and more female listening audiences to be more stable and loyal. This is considered to be true also in country music, but since July 1992, WBCT (B-93)'s decimation of WCUZ's seemingly unbeatable market position proved that to be incorrect.

When Neal and Reese moved here from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, they brought with them a missionary zeal to compete, and a professional intensity focusing on building a family-oriented audience at their (then) newly formatted radio station.

"We wanted the opportunity of a start-up. That's a dream," said Neal Dionne, the 'quarterback' of their highly successful morning show. They also brought with them their sense of humor, their already-proven program formatting, and their understanding of what country music fans want to hear. They achieved their goals in the first six months of being on the air in West Michigan.

"You're not so cheerful in the morning that you annoy people,



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and you play the best music," said one of their call-in listeners. "We have never had bad ratings," added Reese Rickards.

One of the things that makes their show more 'family-friendly' is their attention to such things as their warm but firm advice to callers not to swear when they are 'on the air.' They related the time a female listener was broken down on the expressway and a fellow listener stopped to help, simple because he saw the B-93 bumper sticker on her car

On the other side of the dial—the AM side—is the WOOD Good Morning Show with Gary Allen and Ray Bentley, on WOOD AM 1300. They are definitely a team of opposites.

Allen is 5'5" and 140 lbs and former NFL linebacker Bentley towers over him at 6' 3" and 240 lbs. Allen's super-high energy level contrasts with Bentley's more laid-back and casual style. Gary's fifteen years with WOOD—making him the 'dean' of the station—and Ray's 'newcomer' status as the sports guy-turned-morning-personality, prompt a constant interchange of good-natured teasing.

"Here's an old man who wants me to prop him up through the final years," joked the younger Bentley. "I'm happy to help an old man out!"

Allen just laughed.

Their long-term success has been built with a steady, consistent focus on providing the "first source of news, weather, sports, traffic tie-ups and school closings" to their loyal listeners. Their enthusiastic following enjoys starting their day with this relaxed and upbeat duo, knowing the latest-breaking happenings in West Michigan will be reported on the air as soon as the stories develop.

There seem to be very few morning shows that are solo acts. Even if one of the personalities is more solo-oriented, there is usually a 'sidekick' providing balance to the program.

A case in point is Sunny FM (104.5) whose show 'McGill in the Morning' includes Sabrina Fairchild as Mark McGill's softer and more balanced partner and news director. Fairchild often adds a more serious perspective to McGill's off-the-wall topic of the moment.

"Mark's just a guy. He reacts like a kid," she laughed. "You don't expect him to admit. . . you know. . . male reactions. I'm the typical feminine person." This mixture plays well to their younger, more female audience.

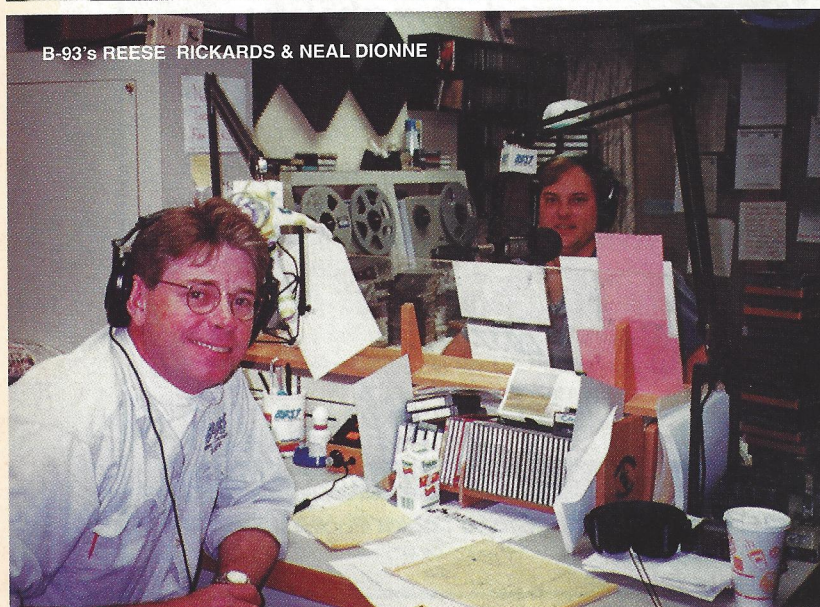
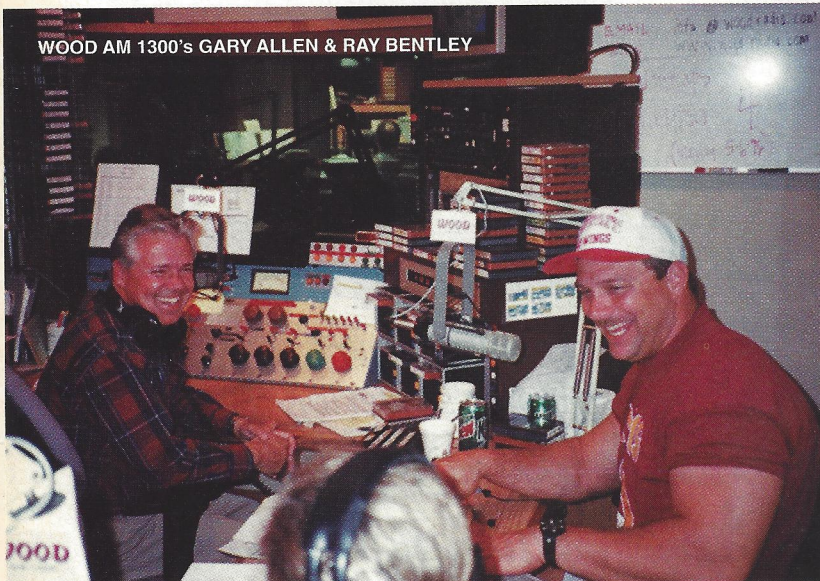
The challenge for them is to keep their show fresh. "People try to be funny," said McGill. "That's a mistake. Not everything is funny in life, but it needs to be relatable."

Judging by the faxes and phone calls, they seem to have an active group of listeners to their Top 40, CHR (Contemporary Hits Radio) station.

Fairchild summed up their attitude: "We'd like to think of ourselves as hipper than Dave and Gerry, cleaner than Beckett and Stern, and smarter than the average bear!"

One thing's for sure: Life is never dull in radioland. Stay tuned for further developments as the battles continue.

WMM



SUNNY FM'S SABRINA FAIRCHILD & MARK MCGILL