I t isn't Capra, don't do it! That's what radio pioneer Gordon McClendon preached and it was the mantra of my first radio mentor. KVIL/Dallas morning arrow Ron Chapman. (and who knows how much money Ron made me a partner in Capra with an updated mogul, Steven Spielberg.) KVIL is the creator of a term that is widely used today: the "Fun & Games Department" or promotion department, if you will. KVIL developed a reputation for huge promotional budgets, and contest after contest was bigger and better than the last one. This week, in part one of a two-part series, I'll take a look back over the last 25 years at some of radio's most creative promotions.

KVIL originated many promotional staples, such as the Prize Catalog and the easiest contest to win — the "People's Choice" cash total (just know it and win). Ron Chapman had built such a close relationship between KVIL and the listeners that they would do just about anything he asked them to do. The true power of this was demonstrated with a very ethical promotion, the $20 check. A promo ran on the air, telling listeners they should send in $20 to the station and that they would be part of something special. Chapman had thought that maybe a few hundred or maybe even a thousand or so individuals might send in something, and for that $20, they would be placed on a special station mailing list and given some station goodies, tickets, etc.

What happened next soared past anyone's expectations. Day One produced an estimated $200,000 in checks; Day Two was just as strong, and on Day Three, Chapman had to go on the air and tell the listeners to stop sending in the money, at the end of the third day. KVIL and Chapman had amassed $750,000! Besides the national coverage on ABC-TV's World News Tonight, the point was proven once again that a well-branded station creates a powerful bond with its audience.

"Ramblin' Raft Race" The WQXJ/Atlanta Ramblin' Raft Race was probably one of the longest-running yearly promotions. It became an Atlanta milestone. VP/GM Jerry Blum recounts the events:

"The raft race took place for the benefit of a very important matter as a challenge from a Georgia Tech fraternity to the WQXJ jocks. There was no big meeting between PD Bill Sherrard and myself to make this the biggest promotion of all time. The first year, 1968, we had a grand total of about 300 people show up. The next year, about 800 attended. By the third year, over 30,000 came to watch and participate. At that point, we decided to package the promotion. Coca-Cola, Budweiser, Aztec Suntan Lotion, and Rich's department store became the sponsors. "Visitors came from all over the world to watch hundreds of rafts of every size, shape, and design hit the water and, some raft race. The state legislature eventually outlawed it. It was so ridiculous. The raft representation anywhere from $2 million to $5 million in yearly revenues and taxes. On the first radio mentor, KVIL.\n
"The Cutting Edge" — WAOR/South Bend, IN morning host Woody recently staged "Balding For Dollars," in the tradition of a vintage game show, to raise over $20,000 for charity while losing his locks.

"Promo Of The Week"