1993

It’s A Bird, It’s A Plane, It’s Gary Owens!

In 1993 Los Angeles radio legend Gary Owens was holding down mornings at KJQY/Los Angeles following a 20-year career at crosstown KMPC.

Plankenton, SD, Gary Owens’ hometown, is 25 miles west of Mitchell, which is 75 miles west of Sioux Falls, a hop, skip and a jump north of the Iowa state line. “We told my folks we were going to Iowa for the weekend,” says Owens.

Instead, he and his best friend, both 15, crossed the Rockies and drove to California. “I said to myself, ‘This is where I’ve got to be.’” Owens recalls. “I didn’t know whether I was going to be a carni or go into radio and television.”

A year or so after the trip to California, the radio bug hit. Owens didn’t give up carnies though. They would become a big part of his life, but not in the way he imagined.

At 16, with a voice that had changed from a prepubescent squeak to an announcer’s mellifluous tenor, he joined KORN/Mitchell as a “hypertrophied teenaged newsman-dance band remote announcer,” he says. “The only way you could hear yourself on those remote was to put your hand up to your ear.”

Owens arrived at KOJ/Los Angeles in ‘57 — as a newsmen, not a jock. He was teamed with a morning man with a head full of steam. One morning the jock exploded, shot an expulsive at owner Don Burden and walked off the air. The phone rang: “Gary, you’ve got to take over.” Owens couldn’t run a board and spent half the show apologizing for his mistakes, but he got better. In fact, he was a natural.

Todd Storz and Bill Stewart, across town at KHOW, conspired to get him out of Omaha. He moved to KIMN/Denver. Radio in the morning and a kids’ TV show in the afternoon, immediately followed by a local newscast. For the kiddie show, he wore a bad chicken suit and had only a few minutes to shock it before the news.

One day he ran into a friend and lost track of the time. The stage manager panicked. Time for a quick change, but the zipper broke. “So, I’m doing a newscast with a beer over my head,” Owens says. He kissed news anchoring goodbye but kept the kids’ show. Shortly thereafter the McLendon boys called.

Don Keyes was Gordon McLendon’s National PD. Keyes called about KILT/Houston. “I was a troubleshooter for McLendon,” says Owens. “We’d get the ratings up, and I’d go somewhere else. McLendon had it down to a science.”

In 1958 Owens left McLendon for WLS. St. Louis. In 1959 Chuck Boone called with an offer to go to KFWB/San Francisco. “You’re probably making more in St. Louis,” said Boone. Owens was tempted. He still dreamed of California. That night a tornado hit St. Louis. Owens accepted the job and headed west.

From there it was a short trip to Los Angeles and KFWB. Owens hit his stride on KFWB, but he wanted more. Despite the risk, in 1962 he left his No. 1 morning show and moved over to KMPC. It was different there: no rock ‘n’ roll. KMPC was about Sinatra and Ella, but the real deal was that it had the ears of Hollywood’s movers and shakers.

Step back and look at Owens’ career: Top 40 pioneer; voice of television networks; thousands of commercials; tons of cartoon work; movies; and, no, we’ll never forget Laugh-In and beautiful downtown Burbank.

Gary Owens

J.D. Freeman

RADIO

J.D. Freeman VP/GM at KLAC & KLV/Los Angeles ... Eddie Esserman VP/GM at KABL, KNEW & KSSN/San Francisco ... Dave Shakes KME/KSan Francisco PD ... Todd Cavannah WWBM/Chicago PD ... Mary Catherine Land Dietrich KXJZ & KMFW/Minneapolis PD ... Frank Cody CEO, Brian Stone COO at Broadcast Architecture ... Paul Marszalek KFOG/San Francisco PD ... Steve Smith WQHT/New York PD ... Clancy Woods WFOX/Atlanta GM ... Scott Herman VP/GM of WINS/New York ... Greg Solky WLUP/AM-Chicago VP Programming ... Andy Bloom Greater Media VP Programming ... Robert Hall Sr. VP Programming at ABC Radio nets ... Bruce Reese Bonneville International President ... Charlie Seraphin KRLD/Dallas VP/GM ... Allan Hotten KOI/San Francisco PD ... Kevin Stapleton VP/Programming at XTRA-FM-San Diego ... Mike Halloran PD/MD ... Mark Chernoff WAFN/New York PD ... Garrett Michaels WPLY/Philadelphia PD ... Ricky Tatum President/GM, Mary White VP/Sales, Lawrence Tanner VP/VP, as KCBR/Sacramento goes WAC ... Ted Ugel WLIF/Philadelphia VP/GM ... Mike Summers KXKX/Salt Lake City VP/Operations & Programming ... Brian Phillips WINX (96X)/Atlanta PD ... Tom Joyner joins ABC Radio nets ... KMLE/San Francisco ups Dick Kelley to VP/GM ... Keith Nathaly now Evgren VP/Programming ... Gregg Steels OGM at KRXX & KMZQ/Minneapolis ... Dave Ervold KBIG/Los Angeles PD ... Greg Stevens KXLO/San Diego PD ... Dan Mason Group W Radio President ... Dave Beasing KKEZ/Los Angeles PD ... Steve Streit WASH/Washington PD ... WLW/New York promotes Rono Landay to VP/GM ... Dan Seeman KFR/KMinneapolis Station Manager ... Al Peterson VP Operations, PAR Broadcasting ... Tom Poleman PD at KRBE-Houston.

Bruce Reese

J.D. Freeman

Mike Halloran

ROCKIN’ THE OUTDOORS

When you’re going to use a billboard to promote the station, you want an image that stays in the mind, such as these by KISW-FM/Seattle (top) and WKLQ-FM/Grand Rapids.

Records

Tony Brown

Jon Leshay Elektra Sr. VP/Promo ... Ralph Simon Capitol Exec. ... Fred Davis Exec. VP ... Ken Lane Sr. VP/Promo at FMI ... Bob Catania Geffen/DGC promo ... Ron Gregory VP/Promotion at Elektra ... Sheila Shipley Decca Sr. VP/GM ... Rick Blackburn Atlantic/Nashville President ... Phil Costello, Bruce Reiner Capital VP/Promo, Nat’l Pop Promo, respectively ... Ron Urban Sony Sr. VP ... Atlanta sets jazz division; Michelle Taylor Sr.

Records

Jon Riccielli

Dir. ... Bill Pindroshoo Zoo VP/Promo ... Harvey Leeds, Barbara Selzer Epic VPs/Promo ... John Bartis PLG Exec. VP ... Bruce Hinton Chairman, Tony Brown President at MCA Nashville ... Arif Marden Atlantic Sr. VP ... Vicki Leben, Joe Riccielli PLG VPs/CHR ... Kyle Lehnig Asylum President ... Dave Loncar RCA VP/Album Rock Promo ... Clarence Avant Motown Chairman ... Phil Quartararo President/CEO of Virgin Records America ... Val Azzoli Atlantic VP/GM ... Thomas Motola President/COO Sony Music Entertainment ... Jerry Greenberg MAJ President ... Gary Gersh Capital President/CEO ... Tim DuBois Arista/Nashville President.

85