

Stations Stung By Tragic Losses Managers Cope With Employee Deaths

BY CHARLENE ORR

DALLAS Although radio managers don't like to think about it, sooner or later many of them will have to deal with the death of an employee. No one is ever prepared for a tragedy, but when it happens, a radio station still has to function.

Over the last year, radio has mourned an unusual number of broadcasters—many of them young. Among them, WGTR Miami MD Patty Murray; WRXB Tampa, Fla., MD Jim Murray; WHTZ "Z100" New York overnigher Spanky McFarland; WCXR Washington, D.C., PD Bob Kagan; KRTH Los Angeles veteran John Rydgren; KBTS "B93" Austin, Texas, MD Kevin Davenport; and KRBE Houston night jock Casi Love. And, as they must, station managers and staffs have found various ways to cope with these devastating losses.

When B93's Davenport was killed in a car crash on Jan. 27, PD Lisa Tonacci recalls, "There wasn't a person at the station that didn't fall apart. We lived through a major nightmare and managed to stay sincere on the air." She says the experience taught her to try and think ahead, anticipate the next move and the needs of the station and staff.

"Our GM came over to my house to comfort me. I needed to get my emotions out immediately in order to comfort others and that's what I did. A PD will have to keep the team together—they have to be strong but understanding."

On the air, Tonacci says, "We were as sincere as possible; we felt we had to inform the audience. Kevin was a very popular announcer. Mike Butts, our morning jock, did Kevin's midday show [1-3 p.m.]. He played Kevin's favorite songs and also took phone calls. It was a very difficult show."

"The hardest part of dealing with it is that we're all family at the station, sometimes closer than family," says AC KVIL-AM-FM Dallas promotions director Tricia Crisp. "We just never dreamed Sandi wouldn't be there one day."

In March 1986, KVIL morning show producer Sandi Hopkins did

not come to work one Monday morning—something very unusual for her. By 6 a.m., Hopkins' sister, alerted by concerned station staffers, and her neighbor found Hopkins just as she had laid down the previous Friday evening. She had apparently died quietly of the same hereditary heart defect that claimed her mother—also at age 37.

"By the time we told OM/morning man Ron Chapman when he got off the air at 9 a.m., I had just decided to take over," Crisp said. "Her family lives in Alabama and couldn't get here in time, so I made the funeral arrangements. It was the way I coped. The next morning, Ron announced Sandi's death. The phones immediately started to ring with our listeners calling up in shock; everyone felt close to Sandi."

Crisp says the station staff coped with the loss much the same way as she did, by keeping on the move. "Ron's philosophy is to always have someone ready to step into any position at the station and that's what happened," she says. "We didn't skip a beat on the air. KVIL is an upbeat station and we kept it that way even though the staff was experiencing extreme sorrow."

"We set up a fund at a local bank to build a library at the Dallas Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals because Sandi had a weakness for animals. Our listeners helped us build a memorial to our friend and we gave them a contributors' party at the Loews Anatole. That library is a positive side of something so tragic. That's what you need to look for—that positive element."

Crisp says Hopkins' desk is basically the same as she left it, although Jody Dean, the new morning show producer, has taken over. Her family took some of her desk items, but her animal posters and cork board are still on her wall.

"I still expect to see her come back any time," Crisp says, "but for the station staff, it was best to confront the grief. We appreciate our little family a lot more and have learned to say something nice to each other every day. My advice to anyone [in this situation] is to face it head-on and keep moving; never forget them."

At Z100, late-nighter McFarland's death of pneumonia last year came as a shock to PD Steve Kingston and his staff because McFarland never let on about the seriousness of his condition, and because he had gone to a different hospital a week earlier and been sent home.

"Spanky was one of the few individuals in this business where you could see in his eyes how much affection he had for the marketplace and the attitude that helped put Z100 in the position of dominance it has held for five years," Kingston
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Rolling Rock Conquers Boston. Charles Trainer of suburban Boston poses with his winning entry in the Show Off Your WBCN contest—a Volkswagen Bug converted into a giant mobile rock. Trainer's efforts won him \$25,000 from the album rocker.

WGCI PD Smith: 'Stunt Rivals' Growth' Denver Trio: St. John, McClure, Gordon

AFTER 15 MONTHS as MD of urban KKDA-FM "K104" Dallas, **Jimmy Smith** is the new PD of urban WGCI-FM Chicago, replacing **Sonny Taylor**. Smith previously programmed **WLUM** Milwaukee and spent six years at **WHRK "K97"** Memphis, which included two MD stints. Smith's appointment comes as WGCI-FM—which is now consulted by **Don Kelly**—faces its stiffest competition in years from urban/AC **WVAZ**. While WGCI-FM mellowed considerably last fall, Smith now says: "We don't have to change our game plan and go more adult. We don't need to wipe **WVAZ** off the face of the earth, but we can try to stunt their growth. I've also got [urban-leaning] top 40 **WBBM-FM "B96"** to deal with, so I won't just be looking in one direction." Smith's assistant, **Sloane Anderson**, is the new MD at K104.

THREE DENVER stations get new PDs this week as country **KPKF** Kansas City, Mo., loses 1 1/2 years PD **John St. John** to similarly formatted **KYGO-FM**, which is now consulted by **Rusty Walker**. St. John, who was with **KPKF** for four years, replaces PD/morning man **Rick Jackson**, who comes off the air and becomes PD of "Classic Country" **KYGO-AM**. Classic rock **KRFX** OM **Tony Galluzzo** hands PD/midday duties to **Mark McClure**, currently OM of AC/top 40 **WROK/WZOK** Rockford, Ill. McClure will be replaced by assistant OM **Greg Strassell**. And **Ira Gordon**—late-nighter at album **KBCO** for four years—is now PD at All-Pro's **KDHT**. That station was set to sign off its adult alternative format March 31 and hopes to return June 1 with a yet-unannounced variant of album rock.

PROGRAMMING: After 17 months as APD of Group W's **WBZ** Boston, **Chuck Dickemann** is the new program manager of its full-service AC **KDKA** Pittsburgh; his previous stints include APD at **WWRC** Washington and PD of **WWYZ** Hartford, Conn. . . . MD **Cat Thomas** is now officially PD at top 40 **WPHR** Cleveland, replacing **Steve Kelly**, who can be reached at 216-238-1232. "Downtown" **Ed Brown** becomes MD . . . **Clark West** is named PD of religious **WBMD** Baltimore, replacing former owner **Carl Brenner**. West was religious director of **WBMD** and sister **WQSR**.

Mike Kelly is the new OM of Satellite Music Network Heart & Soul outlet **WCPT** Washington; he'll also do nights on classics sister **WCXR**, where he previously handled overnights. And Salt Lake City gets a new H&S station as **KMGR-AM** stops simulcasting its AC FM.

Country **KUKQ** Phoenix switches to modern rock under PD **Ernesto Gladden** and MD/p.m. driver **Jonathan L. Rosen**, who handles the "Virgin Vinyl" show on **KUKQ's** FM **KUPD**, also programmed Phoenix's last modern rocker, **KEYX** (now **KGRX**). **Rob Trygg** joins from **KUPD** for mornings . . . Modern **WBRU** Provi-

dence, R.I., MD **Ted McEnroe** becomes PD June 1 when current PD **Neil Bernstein's** one-year term expires; local MD **Karyn Bryant** is now MD.

Urban **WPZZ "Hot 97"** Indianapolis snags **Eric "Butter" Blakey** from mornings at rival **WTLC** for PD/afternoons; he replaces **Harmony Hines**, who takes an administrative post with owner **Willis Broadcasting** . . . Top 40 **WAPE-AM-FM** Jacksonville, Fla., PD **Tracy Johnson** is out, along with late-nighter **Jeff Kelly** and production director **Andy Spinozza**. Johnson can be reached at 904-223-1931 . . . **Brian Chase** is the new PD/mornings at **AC WQMX** Akron, Ohio; he was previously OM of oldies **KLDE** Houston.

Top 40 **WXYU** Roanoke, Va., switches to **Transtar's Niche 29** format; so does **KKOS** North San Diego, Calif., which stays local until 7 p.m. . . . After **WEZC** Charlotte, N.C.'s call switch to **WMXC**, cross-town easy listening outlet **WRLX** has picked up the **WEZC**

moniker . . . **Harvey Sheldon's** America's Rock Network gets its first client as **KDON-AM** Monterey, Calif., drops its top 40 simulcast to become hard-rocking **KZZR** . . . Crossover **KMYX** Oxnard, Calif., goes country under OM/PD **Bob Richards**; **Ron Christian** joins for mornings.

ATTACK OF THE NAME GAME (PTS. 11-14): Crossover **WIOQ "Q102"** Philadelphia is now calling itself "Pirate Radio." Although **Westwood One** apparently has the term servicemarked and is trying to stop album **KGON** Portland, Ore., from using it for a night-time new music show, **WIOQ's** PD is **Mark Driscoll**, who will also be the voice of **WW1's KQLZ** Los Angeles. Meanwhile, in Atlanta, as top 40 **WQXI-FM "94Q"** moved its longtime "Jazz Flavors" program to weekends only, easy **WPCH** was debuting its new nightly jazz show, "Peach Flavors." **94Q** GM **Jerry Blum** claims **WPCH** "will hear from our attorneys." And while L.A.'s **KOST**, **KBIG**, and **KJOI** have all been courting former **KIQQ "K-Lite"** listeners by using the word "light," suburban **AC KGIL-FM** has gone a step further, taking the "K-Lite" name.

ARBITRON HAS ASKED consultants who do diary reviews at its Laurel, Md., offices to sign a confidentiality agreement that, if violated, would allow Arbitron to sue for breach of contract. While Arbitron says the agreement is just "a reassurance that consultants who do diary reviews will only share that information with Arbitron subscribers or client stations," some of the consultants who had received the letter—and not all had—were uneasy about signing it. One consultant/owner was afraid his stations might not be able to quote Arbitron information; another said, "I don't need to sign an

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newsline...

RANDY BONGARTEN has been promoted from regional VP to senior VP/operations at **Emmis Broadcasting**. He will work with executive VP/operations **Doyle Rose** on the day-to-day operations of the company.

STATION SALES: **KNBR** San Francisco from **NBC** to **Susquehanna Broadcasting** for a reported \$20 million which, upon approval, will take **NBC** out of the radio business; and **KWTO-AM-FM** Springfield, Mo., from **Summit Communications** to **Cole Media** for \$5.2 million.

MIKE STEINHILPER has been transferred from **Keymarket's** recently sold **WTCB** Columbia, S.C., to its newly acquired **WYOM/WKRZ** Scranton, Pa. He replaces **Henry Strong**, who will stay with previous owner **Osborn Communications** in an undisclosed capacity.

TOM MOODY is named research director for **Drake-Chenault**. Moody has been a consultant for two years, since his **Marketing Prescriptions** company became part of **Equicor** in 1987.