

INSIDE RADIO®

Monday, July 27, 2009

“Personalities INSIDE RADIO”

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COPIOUS CREDENTIALS ARE IN BLOOM

by Mike Kinoshian, Special Features Editor

Siren-like lure of fantasy baseball is rooted in the unrealistic prospect of structuring a team with crème de la crème all stars literally enveloped around the diamond.

Approximately two years ago (November 2007), CBS Radio/Philadelphia went on an unprecedented spending spree by all at once hiring a world-class programmer; first-rate music research analyst; highly respected programming consultant; General Manager with international experience; and onetime political Communications Director.

This clearly represents an eye-popping set of work experience however the scope of the hiring decision utterly leaps off the chart since only one W-2 form is required to compensate this accumulated talent.

Sage Suggestion

Seemingly innocuous attempt of roots ascertainment just might be the most difficult query anyone can pose to WIP/Philadelphia Program Director **Andy Bloom** since he and his family moved virtually every year. “We spent most of our summers in Minneapolis and I graduated from high school there,” he points out. “It’s the closest I can say is home but it’s not like I spent most of my life there.”

One early-1970s prize possession was a fluorescent orange transistor radio. “Late at night, after my parents thought I was asleep, I’d try to hear the most distant signal I could pick up,” Bloom fondly recalls. “I was fascinated by hearing news, sports, weather and [different] accents. The medium just captured my imagination.”

Indianapolis fourth-grader Bloom set up his bedroom to mimic a radio studio, something immediately drawing classmate Scott Larson’s interest. “I told him I wanted to go into radio when I grew up,” Bloom explains. “It turns out his stepfather was [WIFE/Indianapolis air personality] Don Burton and I was able to walk into [that station] for my first taste of radio. It got into my blood and never went away.”

Simultaneous with Bloom’s arrival at his new suburban Minneapolis high school, the St. Louis Park institution signed on ten-watt KDXL and Bloom became its PD in his senior year.

Advice obtained from one of his mentors at the Radio Programming Conference in Chicago led to Bloom’s first programming claim-

to-fame. “[John Sebastian] just left as KDWB/Minneapolis’ PD and was kind enough to talk to a high school kid [Bloom] who wanted to know how to get an audience. He suggested I put ‘non-commercial’ in front of the call letters of a tight, Top 40 format. We showed up with a .1 in the Minneapolis Birch report.”

Crushing Defeat

Liberal Arts preceding Law School was Bloom’s college plan but that notion was sidetracked when he landed a callout job at WOKY/Milwaukee. “I worked in the basement,” he recounts. “I got an idea how [research] worked and met some great people along the way.”

By second semester of Bloom’s freshman year at Milwaukee’s Marquette University, he was Music Director/night talent at suburban Racine’s WRKR. “I was on until Midnight and it took its toll,” he confides. “I wouldn’t get back to the dorm until 1:30am.”

Committed to concentrate on his studies, Bloom left WRKR although not long thereafter he became a WQFM part-timer, ascending to PD three years later.

By racking up the strongest ratings in the dial position’s history Bloom had his ticket punched to Philadelphia and on May 13, 1985 started at Infinity-owned (now CBS Radio) WYSP, which had completed its “Rock Hits” phase. “WMMR drifted to ‘classic rock in drag,’” Bloom states. “It was basically gold-based and [morning man John] DeBella had just started to take off. WMMR was in the low-sevens and on its way to the eights [12+ while] WYSP was in the high-twos/low-threes.”

Conclusions of a WYSP-ordered research project indicated the station should be the best possible hard rocker although as Bloom hastens to add, “What the [research company didn’t] say was, as a hard rock station, we’d never do better than a three-share. That little detail was left out.”

On-air talents sporting monikers like “Scruff,” “Animal” and “Killer” were hired and Metallica’s “Fade to Black” was WYSP’s number one song (1985). “We were getting crushed – it was just ugly,” Bloom painfully remembers. “We could have thrown \$100 bills from the city’s highest building [but] the next day’s headline would be: ‘WYSP Kills Listener in Freak Paper Cut Accident’ – WMMR On-Site to Save the Day.’ We couldn’t do anything right.”

An Illuminating Project

Just prior to Thanksgiving of that year, WYSP General Manager Ken Stevens and Bloom boarded a train to New York to provide a status report to Infinity boss Mel Karmazin. "I'm thinking the baby is stillborn and I'm on my way back to mom's basement," Bloom deadpans. "There was just no way around it."

Somehow the trip jogged Bloom's memory to the notoriety WQFM gained when it simulcast Steve Dahl from Chicago's "Loop" (WLUP).

Perhaps WYSP could get on the map, Bloom theorized, by doing the same thing with Howard Stern, whose riotous wakeup program then aired solely on Infinity's WXRK/New York.

Rather than having Bloom advance the notion of a Stern simulcast, Stevens advised his programmer to "go with the flow" however Bloom couldn't intimate WYSP was on the right road. "After lunch we were in Mel's office and Howard walked down the hallway. Mel invited him in and that's the first time I met him. I told him I'd heard about his comparisons to Steve Dahl."

Mere mention of Dahl's name infuriated Stern who cut Bloom off and insisted the Chicago air talent had pilfered his act. "When Howard goes into that rage, it's genuine," asserts Bloom. "I looked at him and said maybe [Stern] could [accomplish] something [Dahl] couldn't – be #1 in two markets at the same time. I don't want to say someone wasn't already working on it but I swear you could see the cartoon light bulb go off over his head. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Ken putting his head into his hands. From that point forward, we referred to it as 'Project X.' I didn't know when – or if – it was going to happen."

An appearance Stern made on David Letterman's "Late Show" forerunner "Late Night" is quite succinctly, something Bloom will never forget. "[Stern] said he had a big announcement regarding the expansion of his empire that was about to grow like a fungus. He said he was taking a vacation and when he returned he'd be on WYSP in Philadelphia. I remember trying to sleep and not being able to."

Suicide Survivor

So roughly nine months after the infamous New York City confab,

Stern debuted in Philly and Bloom proclaims, "Unleashing [him] into that market was like dropping a nuclear bomb. There was nothing else like it. Everyone wrote our obituary saying it was the dumbest thing ever. Radio has to be local and there was no way this was going to work."

Understandably lost in the shuffle, owing to the Stern fixation, was the fact WYSP also transitioned to Classic Rock that day 23 years ago (8-18-1986) but for the ensuing two months, Bloom's fulltime job was to manage a complaint department.

Incessant industry input was that Bloom had committed career suicide. "Literally no one said we were smart [yet] we were getting a huge amount of publicity," he recounts. "It was a slugfest and we grew. I took a year [1987-1988] to be a consultant with Jacobs Media which was a huge growing experience. I left [WYSP as] a good Program Director but came back as a great [one]. It wasn't because I was so smart as much as I listened to [excellent] stations and could steal every great idea."

Just short of the fifth anniversary of debuting Stern in Philadelphia, Bloom repeated history on the opposite coast when the facility he was then programming (KLSX) introduced "The King of All Media" to Los Angeles (7-21-1991). "It was an absolute rocket ride," enthusiastically states Bloom who fashioned a three-year City of Angels run. "Howard was [#1] within 18 months. Everything that happened in Philadelphia also took place in Los Angeles – only in triple time and [more] magnified. We'd call plays and predict what was going to happen. It was comical because we looked to be visionaries."

Email enables Stern and Bloom to remain connected however they haven't seen or spoken to each other in several years. "He's been a hugely important part of my career," Bloom acknowledges. "I had the good fortunate to hook my wagon to his engine at an early juncture of my career. I provided him with material so he could turn his guns to DeBella [in Philadelphia] and [KLOS/Los Angeles'] Mark & Brian but he did all the heavy lifting. I knew how to throw my body on the tracks in front of the train. He invited me to the 'Private Parts' premiere and has been incredibly good to me, as has [Stern's agent] Don Buchwald. I can't say enough good things [about them]."

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Over and above his day-to-day WYSP and KLSX programming triumphs and Jacobs Media consulting stint, Bloom by the late-1990s could also incorporate on his resume being Greater Media's Vice President/Programming; Executive Vice President for Coleman Research; and Operations Manager for Minneapolis' KTCZ & WRQC.

The Hits Keep On Coming

Seeking something different, he undoubtedly discovered it when Emmis selected him to be an international General Manager.

Already possessing an established station in Hungary, the company completed the transaction for a Buenos Aires AM & FM and Bloom racked up air miles by typically spending two of every four weeks a month in Minneapolis; one in Budapest; and the other in Buenos Aires. "Budapest is phenomenal and the people there are terrific. CBS Radio was kind enough to let me continue consulting that one station [where the morning drive talent has a 35-share]. Buenos Aires was my first [experience] as a General Manager. I can't say we made a lot of money, but we managed not to lose [any]. It's not something I felt I could do indefinitely and we parted under very good terms. Emmis is a class organization and [Chairman/CEO] Jeff Smulyan is a terrific guy."

Within eight months of coming onboard as PD of Sports WIP, Bloom was given oversight responsibilities of Talk WPHT and (his familiar) WYSP, where Danny Bonaduce does mornings. "This is a tremendous company and it makes the wisest possible decisions," he declares of CBS Radio. "Having a [former] programmer [Dan Mason as CEO] is a great experience. He has a fundamental understanding of what we, as programmers, are trying to do."

Notwithstanding a celebrated music radio linkage, responsibility for leading the endeavors of spoken-word stations such as WIP and WPHT is anything but a novel concept to Bloom. "Really great [PDs] can program any format," he opines. "Hits are hits – and you have to play the hits – [whether] they're [the Eagles'] 'Hotel California' or [Philadelphia Eagles QB] Donovan McNabb. You also have to build compelling promotions and give reasons for people to come back."

One Simple Inquiry

Stories about working for Mel Karmazin have become as colorful as the executive himself but Bloom's experience with the current Sirius XM Radio CEO was positive.

Shortly after WYSP had garnered acclaim, Karmazin scheduled a visit and as Bloom recalls, "We gave the place the white-glove treatment. I got to work at 8:30am and Mel's red, Mercedes convertible was already there. The GM's door was shut. Lunch was delivered but [no station employee] came out all day."

It got to be 6pm and Bloom, who by that time had loosened his tie, was on the phone when Karmazin popped his head in the programmer's office. "I straightened up to look [busy]. Mel wanted to know WYSP's latest Monday-Sunday 12+ share. It had to be a trick question but I thought carefully and, with confidence, said it was 4.7. He said, 'Fine, don't go below 4.6 and all our meetings will be this short.' That was it. He was great to me – we never had any problems. Had [that 'Project X' conversation] not happened, I don't know what would have followed. Everything that has transpired since then was an offshoot of that one statement."

Unlike some programmers who have a penchant to continually hot-line talent, Bloom will generally do so if he thinks someone is doing something that will put the license in jeopardy. "I'll also do it if someone clearly doesn't understand a contest and will cost us a lot of money," he explains. "Another reason would be when someone does something so amazing I can't wait until the next day to say how fabulous it was."

Despite possessing an impressively diverse list of industry accomplishments, Bloom perhaps had the most fun working in the halls of Congress (2003-2007) as Ohio Representative Michael Turner's Communications Director. "I've been in the Oval Office and at the rostrum where the president delivers the state of the union," points out Bloom who for many years thought he might seek elective office. "This gave me an up-close chance to see what it's like. It's a very difficult life and I concluded it was time to go back to what I know best."

Gadget freak and workaholic Bloom rarely gets home before 8pm - 9:30pm is the norm. "I might get beaten because I'm not as smart or creative as someone but I'll never get beaten because I didn't work hard enough, care enough or try hard enough," he emphatically promises.

One therefore would be hard-pressed to find a more conscientious and intelligent programmer than this proud father of ten-month-old twins Harrison & Haylee. "For the first time in my life, I'm thinking about a family," explains Bloom who last week (7-19-2009) turned 48. "Until now, it's been about me and what I want to do. I think about the twins much more than I think about me. I have to stay in one place so they can grow up in one place. That's the most important thing to me right now."



WHO: Andy Bloom
WHAT: Program Director/
 Operations Director
WHERE: CBS Radio/Philadelphia
HOW LONG: Since November 2007