

# INSIDE RADIO®

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## COMPELLING EDGE - ROGER THAT

by Mike Kinosian, Special Features Editor

**P**ride in country often narrowly translates to specificity such as proclaiming one resides in the greatest corner, section, region or hamlet of this marvelously diverse nation.

Much like quarrelling about sports franchises though it's bound to elicit heated protestations from non-believing detractors who'll assert your preference is among other things too hot, too cold, too big or too small.

To borrow a passage from one particularly durable children's story, one infinitely pleasing USA metro – San Diego - always seems to be just right and in the mid-1980s, Roger Hedgecock served as its Mayor.

Ever since leaving office, Hedgecock has flourished as a talk host transitioning from local ranks to Radio America's national platform where his three-hour weekday program debuted this past January 5<sup>th</sup> on 60 stations.

Last Wednesday's (9-9-2009) stellar addition of CBS Radio News-to-Talk convert KFVB/Los Angeles propelled Hedgecock's show to the 100-affiliate threshold.

### Deal-Breaker

Negotiations for this national opportunity went on for the better part of last year when Hedgecock did a Saturday broadcast for another syndicator and hoped to expand to weekdays. "Radio America was ready to do that because Mike Reagan wanted to move on to other things," recalls Hedgecock a featured speaker at KXL/Portland's annual "Talk Fest" celebration. "Radio America was looking for someone and [I] was a natural fit."

Rumblings about Hedgecock going national surfaced in the early-1990s but that would've necessitated him to originate the show from New York or Los Angeles. "I said I'd do it if I could [remain] in San Diego. Until that could happen, I wasn't interested."

Such loyalty is thoroughly understandable for a locale proudly flaunting the "America's Finest City" handle which is rooted to predecessor Pete Wilson, who in 1972, was trying to lure the Republican National Convention to that city. "For a variety of insider reasons, it soured and we were left holding the bag," Hedgecock recounts. "We felt bad that the Republican Party jilted us. It was a big deal to be designated as one of America's finest cities. We picked up on the phrase and have used it ever since."

After an 11-year mayoral run Wilson was elected to the Senate and then became California's Governor, roads many assumed Hedgecock would also travel. "I don't regret not doing that," he emphasizes. "My kids were very young when I started in radio. I had a chance to be with them when I came home at night. Mayors aren't generally home on weekends or at night. I would go surfing Thursday mornings and spend Sunday afternoons with the kids. That's about as much as I could eek out. When I [transitioned] to radio, I had the chance to be a father and wouldn't have traded that for anything."

Approximately 95,000 uniformed military personnel are assigned to a variety of commands/units in greater San Diego. Dependents and families elevate San Diego County's total military population to about 175,000.

Many of those families were struggling, especially after 9-11 (2001) prompting Hedgecock to start "Home Front San Diego" which he declares is his greatest on-air achievement. "The last year I did the local show we helped 7,500 families," he boasts. "We did everything from having cars repaired to donating furniture. It was so gratifying. My audience loved it because it showed our support for the troops and did something that really made a difference in their lives."

### Hero Makes Him Happy

Compton-born Hedgecock later lived in Torrance; moved to the San Fernando Valley (all three are Los Angeles-area locales); and relocated to San Diego when his dad got a job at Convair. "I was thinking a lot about music when I was growing up," he remarks.

More precisely, the business of music occupied the mind of Hedgecock who although only in his teens put on dances/concerts; it also helped pay for his college tuition. "We did the first out-of-San Francisco concerts in California for Big Brother & The Holding Company with Janis Joplin; the Doors; Ray Charles; Cream; Grateful Dead; Ten Years After and just about everything else from Chuck Berry to Buffy Saint Marie. I was always interested in history and politics [so] I decided to go to law school rather than pursue the rock concert business."

Linked to that love of music was an equal radio interest and then-high school student Hedgecock did nothing but listen to 1960s' Top 40. "KCBQ/San Diego's 'Happy Hare' had a 25-share and was my hero," he declares. "I also listened to San Diego's other Top

40 station – KDEO – and to Wolfman Jack. My personal tastes in those days ran to rhythm and blues. Sam & Dave and Wilson Pickett were my favorites.”

Upon arrival as a University of California – Santa Barbara student (he graduated from UCSB in 1968), Hedgecock did a Sunday night KCSB radio program and played all his favorite rhythm and blues records.

On a trajectory to have a political career, the 1971 Hastings Law School alum was the youngest (30) County Supervisor ever elected in San Diego County in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and later became a KSDO-AM/San Diego talk show host, although he admits it’s something he didn’t anticipate. “I found my background in music, politics and being a trial lawyer really helped,” Hedgecock remarks. “Very few politicians have been able to become successful talk show hosts.”

### Princess Versus The Nun

Not only did Hedgecock make a strong hometown accounting for himself, he drew the attention of Rush Limbaugh’s “people.”

Even for Hedgecock, logistics are fuzzy but he was asked to substitute for the Premiere Radio personality one day during the week the world mourned Princess Diana’s death. “I was sick and tired of it and went on a complete rampage about how ridiculous it was,” he recounts of the 1997 coverage. “I’d been to Kensington Hall where she lived in a palace and had seen her in a chauffeured Jaguar. She’d come to the hospital for photo-ops and went back to the palace. I didn’t think she deserved any of this adulation whatsoever. We were spending a whole week in a global spasm of grief over Princess Diana for all her great work [but in my opinion] she was a dysfunctional wife and a dysfunctional mother.”

By way of contrast in Hedgecock’s estimation, Mother Theresa devoted her entire life to the poor and he rhetorically asked what kind of funeral treatment she’d be given. “About two hours into this [on September 5, 1997], CNN announces [Mother Theresa] had died. [The Limbaugh people] didn’t call me for three years after that.”

Shortly after Limbaugh encountered serious hearing problems, Hedgecock wound up being a frequent pinch-hitter and asserts,

“It was the most exciting thing I’ve ever done in radio. “It’s the toughest audience in the world. I’m trying to fill in for someone who’s at the pinnacle of my profession. You have to hold together his huge audience by making the show interesting, entertaining and exciting. I decided to forget about all those things; be myself; and do what I do. It turned out being exactly the right thing.”

### You Sound Just Like Yourself

Neither a screamer nor someone who labors on the negative, Hedgecock endeavors to disseminate more facts than any other talk talent. “I dig deeper into what’s really going on than what people will hear anywhere else,” he maintains. “I give listeners an honest chance to react. It’s the basic job of journalism which is to present information and then do it in a compelling and entertaining way.”

Three guests may be featured one day and none the next. “Callers can dominate the hour and other times it will just be me,” notes Hedgecock who avoids listening to other talk shows because he doesn’t want to be influenced by style issues. “One great reaction when people meet me is that I sound the same in person as I do on the air. I don’t want it to be an act – I want it to be me.”

That typically means refraining from yelling which isn’t in his wheelhouse. “I’m passionate on-air but it isn’t invective,” he states. “I’ll occasionally get unhappy with a caller because I’m emotional about what I believe in. That’s what makes the show work. I’m a normal guy and, every once in a while will lose my temper. Most of the time though, it is give-and-take and people enjoy it. Talk radio is the only media outlet where consumers can talk back and be heard.”

Listeners can express their views to Hedgecock by calling, emailing or entering chat rooms. “It’s a totally interactive experience - everything else is one-way media,” opines Hedgecock who authored three books in connection with last year’s election and most likely will return to writing by next year’s mid-term voting. “You can’t call Katie Couric or Brian Williams. They don’t really care what you think. They’re there to tell you what to think. My approach is to give information and have people develop their own thinking. I’m trying to enlarge the show into a multi-media presentation and am very happy with the progress.”

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Photogenic Hedgecock did some local television but didn't care for it. "It's a medium with a transmission of emotion, looks and feelings [whereas] radio [broadcasts] ideas and rational thinking," he stresses. "It does very well with theater-of-the-mind as well as concepts, philosophies and facts. I'm better at doing that."

Whether as San Diego's chief executive or as a talk host Hedgecock theoretically is non-partisan but acknowledges being a Republican and was in Youth for Goldwater. "A friend who later became a congressman roped me into it with the promise there would be parties and girls," Hedgecock jests of the 1964 experience. "I'm more of a Constitutionalist. I was opposed to a lot of big government stuff George [W.] Bush did and very critical of what he did on border, prescription drug, 'No Child Left Behind' and farm subsidy [policies]. It all built big government without big benefits. He opened the door on bank bailouts to [President] Obama who is, in effect, nationalizing banks."

### Ocean-View Table For Two

One of Hedgecock's favorite phrases is "holding their feet to the fire" and he even leads an annual Washington, DC event which uses that moniker. Conceding the GOP is acting like what it is - an out-of-power party - Hedgecock states, "I'm looking for leadership [who] will reinforce our constitutional liberties and issues like alternatives to state-run healthcare. I want people to be accountable for all this crazy borrowing and putting ourselves in debt to China. Republicans are doing as much of it as Democrats."

With a "Don't Touch My Dial" rallying cry Hedgecock chairs a coalition attempting to mobilize as many as 1,400 talk show hosts. "We want to make them realize [opposing Fairness Doctrine reinstatement] is the fight of our lives," he states. "More than that, it's a fight for the First Amendment. The government shouldn't decide what is - and isn't - appropriate for someone to listen to."

Radio is completely consensual, in that, someone can't be forced to listen and Hedgecock contends his relationship with listeners is much healthier than the one he had in public office with his constituents. "People laugh at your jokes - no matter how bad they are - but if you aren't in public office, the jokes better be good. This is the private sector relationship where people come together because they want to."

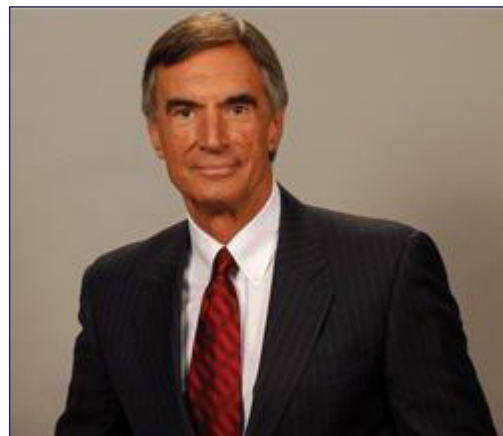
Byproduct of doing the radio show was Hedgecock losing contact with many he knew when he was in politics but that changed when he opened his own restaurant - Roger's on Fifth. "It was a lot of work for the money but also a lot of fun," the now former restaurateur comments. "I began the restaurant very publically and welcomed people I hadn't seen in a long time. I did that for three years and was there nearly every night. It got me back into the groove with many people I hadn't seen. Two [very demanding] jobs got to be enough however so I sold the restaurant."

### Perpetual Motion

Physical activity is important to Hedgecock who jogs four days a week and hits the gym with roughly the same frequency. "It's a lucky day if I get everything done in ten hours - it's usually more like 12," he explains. "All I do at work is sit [but] if I'm going to last very long, I have to keep moving around. When the water's warm in the summer, I hit the waves."

Especially in light of the fact he went to college in the area, it was agonizing for Hedgecock to watch Santa Barbara's May wildfires and equally as frustrating and demoralizing to witness a similar situation this month affecting his native Los Angeles. "[Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger] took the occasion to remind people if they didn't vote for new tax increases that perhaps their house would burn down. I'm on the warpath for things like that and liken that to the mafia. It's a shakedown, extortion scheme. When [the Santa Barbara situation] was a 50-acre fire, the California Department of Forestry had tankers located at Santa Maria Airport. Those tankers weren't mobilized - the fire wasn't put out when there was no wind. It then spread to thousands of acres and dozens of homes burned. I kept asking why the fire wasn't put out when it was small. It developed into a big conflagration and I charge the Governor with negligence."

Listeners can often get frustrated whenever they have information but don't know what they can do with it. "Most of my audience is opposed to amnesty for illegal aliens," Hedgecock remarks. "When everyone thought the Kennedy-McCain bill was going to pass in May 2007, we turned our talk into action and took 500 listeners who paid their own way. We lobbied Congress and stopped the bill. I want to expand that on a national [level]."



**WHO:** Roger Hedgecock  
**WHAT:** "The Roger Hedgecock Show"  
**WHERE:** Radio America  
**WHEN:** Monday-Friday, 6-9pm (Eastern)  
**HOW LONG:** Since January 5, 2009