

# INSIDE RADIO®

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“Personalities INSIDE RADIO”

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## SUSTAINING A TRADITION

by Mike Kinoshian, Personality Editor

In naming its Vice President/Spanish Language Radio Programming three months ago (March 2008), Border Media Partners obtained the services of a seasoned and extremely successful major market programmer as well as an individual with considerable radio heritage.

It's more than fair to say multicultural *Jose Santos*, the son of a Cuban father and a Mexican mother, literally grew up in a radio station since his dad has been in the business for over 40 years.

### Family Drama

Northern California is where the elder Santos began his career, but most of his industry experience came in Buck Owens country - Bakersfield. “He started there in 1975 and [stayed] until the late-1990s,” Jose explains. “He did morning drive and was pretty much in the role of an Assistant PD.”

After doing various odd jobs for Spanish-language KWAC/Bakersfield, the younger Santos officially began working on-air there 20 years ago (1988).

Peaking at the time Jose decided to get in the business, the father actually didn't want his son to follow in his footsteps. “He wanted me to be anything but a radio personality or to be in radio – period,” Jose points out. “My grandmother was a teacher [so my father] probably would have preferred I picked a more stable career like [that] or being a lawyer. He never mentioned [medicine] so I never had that syndrome. My brother is a teacher and my sister is in finance. They're very stable in their jobs and always ask me where I'm moving next. That's the life of a radio guy.”

Even though bilingual Jose primarily spoke English as a youngster, there were those who'd nitpick and find fault with any Anglo word he didn't perfectly pronounce. “This has always been a tough business,” he acknowledges. “It's very competitive and ego-driven. My father probably thought it would be tough for me to make it in radio.”

Mostly on the basis of a Utah Shakespearean festival he attended as a high school junior, Santos decided to enroll as a Drama major at Southern Utah University in 1991. “I thought I should get away for a year and a half and that's about how long I was there,” he recounts. “I continued my education at Cal State – Bakersfield. To say the least, Utah opened my eyes to many different views - it's beautiful country.”

### Turning The Tables

For a short time, Jose and his father worked together at KWAC and it proved to be a challenging experience for the former, who candidly labels his dad as his number one critic. “Whenever I did something wrong, he'd hotline me. [In fact], he did that more than the PD. He'd want me to say things a certain way and if I didn't, [he'd threaten] I wouldn't be on the air the next weekend.”

Several years later in an ironic radio twist of fate, Jose wound up managing KSUV/Bakersfield (now Lotus Regional Mexican KIWI) where his father was an on-air talent. “I had my sweet vindication of telling him to do it my way or I'd have to let him go.”

With the exception of his father perhaps Santos' greatest professional mentor is Univision Executive VP/Radio David Gleason, who in the early-1990s, was Spanish-language KKHJ/Los Angeles' VP/Operations. “I wondered if I was ready for Los Angeles,” remarks Santos who then performed MD/afternoon drive duties in Oxnard-Ventura (CA). “I applied for a job [at KKHJ] and got it. He showed me the ropes and we have always maintained communication.”

Previous to returning to Bakersfield for that KSUV management position, Santos programmed for American Radio Systems/Fresno; spent time at El Dorado/Houston; was PD of KESS/Dallas; and worked for Spanish Broadcasting Systems' KLAX/Los Angeles. “I moved everywhere,” he quips. “I was aware the owner [of KSUV] was eventually going to sell the station and I got a call to work [in Chicago]. For a Southern California guy, going to Chicago was almost like being out of the country.”

That point notwithstanding, he relocated to the Windy City to program WIND and WOJO.

### Winning In Vegas

Intrigued by both the Country and CHR formats Santos did a little bit of general market radio while attending college. “I really like country music but if you listen to it for a couple of hours, you become depressed,” he comments.”

Parallels exist between Country and Regional Mexican, which continues as the format of preference for many country men of Mexico. “It obviously depends on the number of Mexican immigrants you have inside a certain market,” Santos states. “It

might not be a ratings leader in a place like Miami but wherever there's a [need] for it, you give it to them. Some people think Regional Mexican is a format in a box but it's not the same in Los Angeles as it is in Houston. I have a lot of respect for [many other] formats and understand their formatics and concepts. More than ever, it's important to target a specific demo. It's a good thing to know how to program anything from Jazz to Hip-Hop."

After being summoned by Hispanic Broadcasting Corporation in 2001 to program Regional Mexican KISF/Las Vegas (and Spanish language siblings KQMR and KLSQ), Santos found himself pitted against Entravision which had just launched similarly-formatted KQRT. "Suddenly a city with three Spanish-language stations had five or six," he remembers. "I had a low-power AM and two FMs in this battle and we finished 1-2-3 [among Spanish-language stations]. It made me feel it couldn't get any better. In my last book [as the station's PD], KISF went to #1 in Las Vegas 12+. It's the only time a Spanish station has been #1 [there]. I never thought I could beat [some of Las Vegas'] legendary stations."

Still a Golden State resident Santos travels back and forth to his Border Media Partners office in Austin and on a given week, can be in any other BMP market - San Antonio, Waco, Laredo or Rio Grande Valley.

Moreover with today's technology, it's obviously easy to listen to the company's stations online. "I can help from wherever I am," Santos stresses. "My responsibilities are to assist and oversee all programming of [BMP] properties. I help keep them focused in format development, research and pretty much the works in the programming arena."

### Shared Vision

Listening and teaching are among Santos' greatest attributes. "It's nice to hear different perspectives and share the knowledge one has about certain radio wars," he comments. "I enjoy going to different markets and sitting with the PDs and hearing what they have to say. I like analyzing markets and helping them get ready for their battles."

Pitted against admirable competition, Santos nevertheless declares,

"It is fun to be able to [go up against a company like] Univision. It really makes you work and think about your next move. You want to beat them at their own game. When you go up against a radio station that [has a co-owned television property] it becomes more challenging."

It was after Santos began consulting BMP's San Antonio and Austin stations last fall and solidifying his relationship with Border Media Partners President/CEO Jeff Hinson he landed the corporate job. "One of the main reasons I decided to come here was Jeff's vision," Santos adamantly states. "We see eye-to-eye on many things in radio and where it's headed."

While BMP duties clearly occupy a great deal of time, Santos also maintains his Santos Latin Media consultancy. "I have some very good clients with Salem in Portland and Seattle and with Lotus in Bakersfield and Fresno," he points out.

Another client is Entravision's "Súper Estrella" (KSSE) but his arrangement covers only that Los Angeles property and not Entravision's network.

In advance of becoming a consultant, Santos programmed Los Angeles' "K-Love" (KLVE) and succinctly describes it as a "fabulous" four-year experience. "Without a doubt, some of my better programming years were with HBC back in the day and Univision. I have a lot of appreciation for Univision and its structure. There's no disrespect for them whatsoever."

### Bench Strength Needed

Comparisons can be drawn between female-targeted, family-friendly "K-Love" and Clear Channel/Los Angeles Adult Contemporary powerhouse KOST. "We wouldn't play around with high-profile personalities in that format," Santos remarks of KLVE. "It was really about the music."

Popular morning host "Piolin" (Sotero) is very careful of what he says on Univision/Los Angeles Regional Mexican KSCA although Santos declares, "He has a lot of fun with his content. It helps to have good people in the building to [keep a station] on the straight and narrow. You can get close to the line but don't cross [it]."

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Personalities wanting to steer clear of FCC run-ins should always remember the region they're in because as Santos notes, "A certain word in California could have a double entendre in another part of the country. As long as you have cultural issues, there may be some things you can't say on radio. You have to be very careful to know what your listeners want. It's important to understand their language and their slang."

Figures from Inside Radio's sister publication Radio Journal indicate 135 more Spanish-language stations were on-air in 2003 than in 1998 and a whopping 284 more popped up between 2003 – 2007.

Many increases in that stunning 58% growth (1998 – 2007) came in logical locales but there were also pick-ups in seemingly non-traditional markets. "Spanish isn't a format – it's a language," Santos reminds us. "I've always known there was a nice pocket of Latinos in Iowa. After I did some census studies, the first thing I suggested [to Salem/Portland 15 months ago, 3-28-2007] was Regional Mexican. It is just amazing that [KRYP] is #1 18-34."

More Spanish-language stations necessitate development of programmers and on-air talent and Santos concedes it's been a struggle. "We can't only focus on California, Texas and Arizona," he suggests. "The good PDs are taken – we're lacking [depth]. We have to find people who want to be leaders inside a radio station. They have to be given all the tools and taught what they need to know to really get them going."

### Triple Threats

Ratings and research are vital areas any programmer must master and now he or she has to be PPM-savvy. "I've seen the Houston data and have studied it [extensively]," Santos states. "Arbitron made a great decision to [use it as a PPM beta market but] not every [Spanish-language variation] is represented [there. For example], there aren't Tropical, Spanish AC or Tejano stations and there are signal-challenged Regional Mexican stations. PPM methodology however returns us to our core and the way we used to listen to radio. We learned the tricks of diary methodology but now it comes back to good content."

Sample-related issues exist for Spanish-language broadcasters although Santos is confident "Arbitron will get that fixed. Instead of the pager-like [device], the company might use cell phone methodology. It will all get better over time."

As long as terrestrial radio stays local and community-focused, it is Santos' contention the medium won't have much difficulty competing against satellite radio. "It's fun to have so many channels to listen to but if you're living off the Gulf and a hurricane [is approaching], satellite radio won't tell you locations of evacuation centers," he notes. "It also doesn't give you the time and local weather."

In terms of personal listening habits, Santos is becoming somewhat of a devotee of CBS Radio/Los Angeles Smooth Jazz "The Wave" (KTWV). "I'm a Bakersfield boy raised in the country [yet] I like jazz and salsa," he notes with a smile. "My dad doesn't even like it and he's Cuban. I really enjoy all types of music."

Spending as much time as he can with his three sons, however, holds a higher priority than radio listening. "They all have different interests and it's [fun] to see how their minds work," observes Santos, who enjoys golfing and playing basketball. "One likes reading and literature; another is into sports; and the verdict's still [out] on the other one who is a terror. It's like having three different radio formats."

### Gamblin' Man

Long before poker became an Internet and cable television craze, Santos was a semi-pro player and participates in tournaments whenever possible. "There would be 30 guys in a room [whereas now] there are a few hundred," he explains.

Nearly \$4,000 is the largest poker pot he's ever won. "There were 140 people in that tournament in Vegas and it ended at 3am," Santos recalls.

With his sights set on a gigantic poker payday such as the World Series or a healthy string of smaller events, Santos ponders, "If I win a few million dollars, I might buy a radio station or become a partner, investor or board member inside [Border Media Partners]. I'm having so much fun with what I'm doing with BMP and [my consultancy] and would love to see BMP continue to grow. I strongly believe with Jeff's leadership we'll get to be a much bigger company. It feels good to be here [as the expansion is] getting started."



**WHO: Jose Santos**

**WHAT: VP/Spanish Language Radio Programming**

**WHERE: Border Media Partners**

**HOW LONG: Since mid-March 2008**

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