

# INSIDE RADIO®

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“Personalities INSIDE RADIO”

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## SOMEONE YOU SHOULD KNOW

by Mike Kinoshian, Special Features Editor

Generally apropos of nothing, the late Dave Garroway during his “Today Show” tenure would famously hurl out innocuous tidbits like bananas were Nicaragua’s leading export.

For nearly 30 years, a highly-popular daily radio feature pounces on an interesting nugget (generally of greater impact than that of produce exportation) and turns it into an absolutely hypnotic 90-second education piece.

Topics might range from tomatoes being a necessary part of the anti-aging process to why daily hair washing is detrimental.

### EZ Decision

More than 5,000 enlightening “Something You Should Know” capsules have aired.

Each has been written and voiced by Fairfield, CT native [Mike Carruthers](#), who in 1967 at age 13, played drums in a “very bad” rock and roll band.

WICC/Bridgeport aired a “Talent Showcase” every night in which a local group would play four songs. “There’d be a weekly winner; monthly winner; and a ‘Battle of the Bands’ at the end of the year,” explains Carruthers whose band didn’t graduate from the weekly competition. [Nevertheless], I got to sit there for four hours and watched this guy play records on a stereo system I had never seen the likes of before.”

Simultaneously, the air personality talked to girls on the phone as he ate doughnuts and drank coffee. “He was getting paid for it and I thought to myself I’d just found my career,” Carruthers enthusiastically declares. “I began going there to put records and carts away. I just knew radio was what I wanted to do and I never looked back.”

Classical-turned-Beautiful Music/Easy Listening WJZZ, now Bridgeport Adult Contemporary “Star” (WEZN), was the site of Carruthers’ first paying radio job. “I was recruited because I was willing to work for minimum wage, which was \$1.60 an hour at the time,” he points out. “I ran Sunday morning religious shows and was eventually [given the chance] to go on-air when I was 16. It was after the religious shows were over and very few people were listening. It was a great experience because it was a small station and you did everything.”

### Imus Interloper

During that same time, Don Imus was doing mornings at WNBC/New York.

One day on a complete whim, Carruthers called WNBC’s request line and “The I-Man” picked up the phone. “I told him who I was and said I’d love it if I could watch him do his show.”

Implausible as it sounds Carruthers would go there on nine separate occasions. “I’d just sit and wouldn’t move,” he recalls with pure delight.

Personalities who came on after Imus didn’t know who Carruthers was or why he was there.

Rather remarkably though, they never asked him to leave. “I was always afraid to go to the bathroom for fear I wouldn’t be allowed back in,” he jokes. “These were some of New York City’s best air talents. There are good tennis players and there are great [ones]. I’ve seen many [on-air talents] but watching Imus is a completely different level. I’ve never seen anything else like it. He was a lovely guy and couldn’t be nicer to me. I was so impressed someone [of his magnitude] would let me do something like that.”

### Ex-Boss Gets High Marks

Following high school graduation, Carruthers studied Telecommunications & Broadcast Journalism at USC and worked at then PSA Airlines-owned Beautiful Music KPSA (now Univision-owned KLVE) where he ran the automation system and did some announcing. “The station was sold to the Libermans in 1975 and became [a Spanish-language station],” he recalls. “I was [its] last English-speaking announcer. At 6pm, we were all let go. We went to a Mexican restaurant and had a few margaritas. By that point [though], I was firmly of the belief radio was my life. I couldn’t imagine doing anything else.”

On summer break from USC, Carruthers would do vacation/fill-in work for WELI/New Haven, CT PD Steve Marx. “I was always very impressed with his knowledge of the business and his ability to analyze things,” Carruthers comments. “I learned a lot from him. He went from programming to sales. When it comes to radio, there’s no smarter guy. He’s now Chairman Emeritus of the Center for Sales Strategy in Tampa.”

### For The Record

A monumental moment in Carruthers' career would come when he returned to Los Angeles and became studio engineer for "Record Report with Robert W. Morgan."

Legion of partisans would concur it was an exceptionally well-done feature although Carruthers maintains, "It relied on the fact rock and roll artists have something of interest to say - very often, they don't. Robert W. Morgan made it interesting."

It was there that Carruthers got his first taste of the world of syndicated radio and when the show folded he landed a weekend/fill-in job in 1978 at Los Angeles' KIQQ.

As much as Carruthers enjoyed being an on-air talent, he confesses to believing, "I was never going to be the next Robert W. Morgan or Rick Dees. I also didn't want to travel around the country. I really liked the idea of taking time to produce a program the way we did with 'Record Report.'"

### Turning Point Transition

Shortly after his "Record Report" experience, Carruthers produced/voiced commercials for "Hour Magazine," a national Gary Collins-hosted television program. "I wondered what would happen if there were a show like 'Record Report' but the content was much more news-you-can-use like 'Hour Magazine,'" Carruthers remarks. "Merging the 'Record Report' format and the 'Hour Magazine' content is where the idea for 'Something You Should Know' came from."

It began on WFTQ/Worcester, MA in 1979 as a cash show. "We had 35 affiliates that actually wrote checks to us every month," points out Carruthers who in the meantime continued working on-air in Los Angeles for KIQQ and KHTZ. "In the 1980s, I went to KBIG where I stayed until 1993. I continued doing 'Something You Should Know' and in 1994, I met Ron Hartenbaum of Media America. He was in the business of repping shows and agreed to take on 'Something You Should Know.'"

That association resulted in the feature ceasing to be cash-only. Instead it became available on a barter basis and as Carruthers proclaims that's when it took off. "We went from [35 affiliates]

to well over 100. We have close to 200 today and it's still going strong. Stations like WBZ/Boston and KWAV/Monterey have been with us from virtually the beginning."

Originally intended as an Adult Contemporary-compatible feature, "Something You Should Know" isn't format-specific.

Approximately half of its affiliates are music-intensive FMs; the others are either all-News or Talk stations.

Often times, Carruthers spends years trying to convince a station to give the feature a try with CBS Radio all-News KNX/Los Angeles a perfect example. "It took us three years to get on that station," he notes. "It's been on for more than ten years and KNX loves it."

### Ultimate Feeling

Certain magic linked to "Something You Should Know" enables it to develop its own following. "It's impossible to explain this to someone until [the feature] is put on the air and the station starts getting feedback," Carruthers insists. "Listeners take the time to figure out what station they heard it on; somehow get the number; and call with a question. It's a great testament to the show and nothing but good news for the station that listeners care that much for them to do that."

Perhaps the most notable such piece of correspondence came from a Worcester woman who wrote Carruthers about a "Something You Should Know" piece dealing with skin cancer. "The guest was a dermatologist who was talking about moles," Carruthers recalls. "[The listener] thought about the moles on the back of her son's back and she immediately took him to the doctor who said she got there just in time."

Powerful punch-line to her letter was that Carruthers' feature helped save her son's life. "All of a sudden, I realized people really do hear the show and listen," he states. "If we can do something that changes a person's life for the positive, that's [incredible]. I can't imagine anything else being better than that."

Very seldom does Carruthers have to search for "Something You Should Know" guests, although it does occasionally happen in the dead of summer and around Christmas time. "It's a machine

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that just kind of goes,” he states. “People have [discovered] we do a pretty good job selling books [so] they find me. I have to sift through stuff and weed out what I want. I enjoy writing, recording and editing it. Doing a 90-second show is much harder than a five-minute one because you have to say the same thing in less time. It has to be within one-half second either way so it’s a challenge [but] I can’t think of having a better job.”

Three “Something You Should Know” staffers do affiliate and administrative work and Carruthers handles the on-air product, having written and produced all but two of the 5,000+ vignettes. “It’s a one-man show in terms of content but there are plenty of people looking out for my best interests,” he stresses. “In the old days, we sent out a month’s worth of shows at a time. When we switched to barter, we sent shows out every two weeks; now it’s every week. It takes a little effort to get ahead but I can do that so I have some time off. I have a place in Vermont I can escape to and I don’t take my work with me.”

### Non-Muddied Material

Network radio appears to be functioning better than its local level counterparts and Carruthers reports that, in the last several years, his 90-second feature has been sold-out 95% of the time. “I’m not hurting as a result of the economy.”

In fact, his operation has actually expanded by offering “Relevant Prep,” an offshoot of “Something You Should Know” in that it focuses on interesting material.

“Something You Should Know” is a completely self-contained with an intro, program body and a commercial whereas Relevant Prep consists of condensed blurbs that, according to Carruthers, “get right to the heart” of the matter. “The more I talk to radio people, the more I find they’re interested in lifestyle stuff – things that truly affect listeners – rather than shtick or news of the weird. They’re more interested in things the audience can relate to. I thought we could provide this kind of information in a simpler way that [personalities] could incorporate into their on-air [presentation].”

On his mind for quite a long time, the service launched three months ago (December 2008) and Carruthers maintains there’s no paucity of product. “Anyone could sit on the internet and find all of it but it would take forever,” he remarks. “This is a central source for it.”

Classic quality versus quantity arguments surface as Carruthers observes that some station people think prep services need to contain pages and pages of material. “We wonder how much of that a station actually uses,” he remarks. “Our feeling is [material] that never makes it on the air isn’t really that valuable. Much of it – such as celebrity birthdays and ‘This Day in History’ - is the same from prep service to prep service.”

It is his contention there’s a need for something less whacky that isn’t celebrity-based. “We include stuff listeners can use in their

life and talk about at the water cooler,” he explains. “That’s what we give exclusively. We don’t muddy it up with [material] they can get anywhere else.”

### Staying Sharp

Strand Media Group is the umbrella name for “Something You Should Know” and Relevant Prep. “My first wife and I were living in Manhattan Beach [CA],” Carruthers notes. “She said we would be so rich that one day we’d live on The Strand [the walkway adjacent to beach-front houses]. We never did but that’s where the name came from.”

Upon his 2004 return to Connecticut from Los Angeles, Carruthers contacted WEBE/Bridgeport and offered to do fill-in work at the powerhouse Adult Contemporary facility. “I’m there at least once a month doing a shift to see what the latest software is and what the industry is doing,” he points out. “I enjoy it but don’t think I could do it fulltime again. Like most [other] people, I’m concerned about radio but don’t know what the answer is. It will continue to evolve and I doubt it will ever disappear. I’m a diehard radio guy and pray things will turn around.”

Many non-radio-related activities are devoted to his four-year-old son although Carruthers readily concedes, “Radio is my life. We’ll be moving back to California as soon as we sell our house [in Connecticut]. Doing this has been such a success that it would be very difficult for me to go back and work for someone else. I’ve had some other businesses. The highs are high and the lows and lows but I love the entrepreneurial experience.”



**WHO: Mike Carruthers**

**WHAT: President**

**WHERE: Strand Media Group**

**(“Something You Should Know” and Relevant Prep)**

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