

INSIDE RADIO®

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“Personalities INSIDE RADIO”

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by Mike Kinoshian, Special Features Editor

Most radio personnel ruminating on Strother Martin’s often-quoted “what we’ve got here is failure to communicate” proclamation from the late Paul Newman’s classic 1967 film “Cool Hand Luke” assume the line is specifically geared to their situation.

Similarly, countless station staff meetings have included some variation of the exhorting utterance, “We’re in the communication business – let’s do a better job of communicating with each other.”

It is highly unlikely either aforementioned scenario afflicts Greater Media where Vice President/Corporate Communications [Heidi Raphael](#) meticulously keeps company employees, as well as the industry in general, thoroughly up-to-date.

Extended Family

Approximately 14 years with the privately-held company, the charming Raphael was initially hired as WRIF/Detroit’s Marketing Director. “Going to work at a legendary Rock station in the Motor City is the ultimate rock and roll experience from a radio standpoint,” she remarks. “The station has great on-air [personalities] and Doug [Podell] was absolutely terrific as a Program Director. A lot of great music comes out of Detroit and it was a dream for me. The men and women I work with at Greater Media are my second family. I’m proud to work there and to be part of the company.”

Promoted to Director/Corporate Communications four years ago (January 2005), Raphael was named to her current responsibilities approximately three years later (last February). “I was so excited and proud when [Greater Media President/CEO] Peter [Smyth] asked me to work on the corporate level,” she comments. “I remember calling my husband from the car to tell him. I couldn’t believe it.”

As a youngster growing up in Buffalo, Raphael was an ardent “97 Rock” partisan and would listen to WGRF as often as possible. “I just loved radio,” enthusiastically states Raphael who voiced public address announcements for her junior high school and high school. “I joined a program [which] included a radio advertising competition. After school, I’d go to my room with a Sears catalogue and a tape recorder. I’d pick different items, write copy and [record the spot]. I entered local competitions and it was very encouraging to win a few of them.”

Through that specific experience, she encountered several Medaille College students who shared her interest, prompting Raphael to choose the Buffalo institution from which she’d earn a Bachelor of Science degree. “It’s a small school with a great Communications program and I began doing internships [in my sophomore year],” recounts Raphael - now a member of Medaille College’s Board of Trustees. “By the time I graduated [in 1985], I’d already worked at WBEN-AM/Buffalo as a street reporting intern and was lucky enough to land a paid internship in a television newsroom.”

Over and above that Raphael did a stint in a local aerospace firm’s audio/visual department where she helped produce the company’s orientation tapes. “It broadened [my expertise] and I was able to use many things I learned there in radio stations,” she points out. “People were very supportive.”

Altitude Adjustment

Several ironies surround Raphael’s initial fulltime industry jobs, including her first in 1989 doing morning and afternoon news at WHTT/Buffalo. It was provided by Bill Weston and as Raphael notes, “Bill [programs Philadelphia rocker] WMMR for us and it’s great to be able to work with him again within our organization.”

As much as she enjoyed being on the air, Raphael discovered she was also partial to doing something different each day. “Through the years, I still did on-air things, whether it was a remote or covering a concert and worked weekends [as a news reader for] a Music of Your Life station,” she points out. “The promotion and marketing arm of the business [though] was very fascinating to me. It’s different and exciting and the station was always working on something new.”

With such a thought process in evidence, it’s not surprising she eventually became a Marketing/Promotion Director.

Especially noteworthy however is it happened at the very same Buffalo station – “97 Rock” - she faithfully listened to when growing up and as Raphael reports, “It is still rockin.’ When I go home to visit my family, it’s always great to turn on [that station].”

Airborne traffic is yet another facet in her repertoire as Raphael handled reports for Buffalo's WGR. "I remember the first time I went up in the copter," she notes with a smile. "It was the only job open at the station and I was excited to have the opportunity to do it. There was a storm that day. We were 1,000 feet up and I couldn't see anything but snow. I was scared to death but when they asked how I was doing I said everything was great. You get [acclimated] quickly because you have to; it was actually a very cool experience. When the weather was better, we flew in three-seater planes."

Exceptional Community Involvement

Some things haven't changed in that Raphael still spends a significant amount of time onboard aircraft.

These days though it's flying between Nashville (where she lives with her husband and where she's a current member/past Vice President of the city's AWRT chapter); Detroit; and Greater Media's corporate headquarters in suburban Boston (Braintree, MA). "It's pretty consistent," she notes of the travel. "I'm usually going somewhere once a week [including other markets where we own stations]. It varies week to week but I'm constantly setting up travel. You learn to get used to it. When my husband [who also is on the road extensively] and I are home, we try to live as normal a life as possible."

Responsible for all Greater Media internal and external communication, Raphael works directly for Peter Smyth and serves as point-person on numerous projects the company is engaged in. "I'm [also] Editor of our quarterly internal employee magazine ['The Grapevine'], work on our internal newsletter and do daily postings on our corporate [websites]," she explains. "I work with our programmers in terms of announcements or any special initiatives. Our marketing directors and I exchange ideas and I'm there as a resource. If I don't have the answer, I'll help find [it]. Every day is an event in a great way."

No longer than a nanosecond is required to appreciate the indisputable enthusiasm Raphael has for her professional duties. "I have no problem working around-the-clock on a last-minute project," she states. "My job is part of my life. You sometimes hear people [be negative] but radio is a great business. We do

[many] good things for people. Somehow that seems to get lost in translation. We don't talk about it, we just do it. Radio is always right there and if anything, it is sometimes taken for granted. Main Street is our street. We are our listeners' friends and we have a personal relationship with them. As a Marketing Director, I was at many events and it was always great to [feel] the passion listeners have for the station. They believe they really know you."

For more than a decade, the "Exceptional Women" program has been a staple on Don Kelley-programmed Greater Media Adult Contemporary WMJX/Boston and as Raphael points out, "WMMR morning personalities Preston & Steve do an annual 'Campout for Hunger' [while WMGK/Philadelphia wakeup talent] John DeBella does a lot of work for veterans. [Community involvement] is part of the fabric on our stations as our New Jersey stations are constantly raising money and collecting food and [Adult Contemporary] WMGC/Detroit does a lot with its 'Women Who Make Magic' event."

Lightning Quick Networking

Those outside the Greater Media family are undoubtedly familiar with Raphael for her role as President/Spokesperson of Mentoring & Inspiring Women (MIW), which promotes the advancement of women to senior positions in the radio industry. "I'm so proud to even be associated with this group," she modestly comments. "These are amazing women. I love the fact their common goal is helping others. We are all very fortunate to be in this business and these women [volunteer] in their spare time."

Among the highlights of last year's NAB Radio Show was a "Speed Mentoring" event MIW held in conjunction with AWRT. "Anyone interested in getting career advice and mentoring tips was invited to join us," explains Raphael, named 2002's "Mentor of the Year" by Nashville's Monroe Children's Home. "Every six minutes, [participants] had a chance to talk to some leading women in the industry such as Sheila Kirby [formerly with Interep now with Tribune], Lynn Anderson [from the RAB], [Clear Channel Chief Corporate Communications Officer] Lisa Dollinger, Corinne Baldassano [from Take On The Day], and [Focus 360's] Kay Olin."

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Feedback was so positive the group is doing an encore at this week's RAB confab in Orlando. "For a first-time initiative, it was very smooth and the mentors may have gotten more out of it than some mentees," Raphael declares. "I heard some people say as they walked out they wished that was around when they were getting into the business. It's just such a privilege for me to be part of that. I'm in awe of these women. We're making slow-but-steady gains and you can see it in the Gender Analysis reports. That's a really great thing especially in the sales management area."

Approximately one of every three radio General Sales Managers is a woman and Raphael opines those numbers will only improve. "That will translate down the road into GM and ownership positions [for females]," she maintains. "I'm encouraged by the consistent gain. Groups like AWRT and MIW work very hard to continue that positive direction. We also appreciate and respect support we receive from the NAB and RAB. We're grateful to [them] for letting us host sessions everyone can benefit from at their conferences/conventions. Especially for those with sisters and daughters interested in getting into our business, [MIW] is a great group of mentors and role models."

Likeable Target

That should be more than enough on just about anyone's agenda but energetic Raphael along with Beasley Broadcast Group Director/Corporate Communications Denyse Mesnik recently co-founded Radio Communicators Group. "We have a wonderful group of people who all do the same thing [which is] the PR and communication aspect of the business," Raphael remarks. "We don't have a group or association where we can get together and talk about ways we can take all our knowledge and help the industry. We thought it would be a great idea to work together with each other on special industry projects."

Typical with Raphael, RCG is a highly positive, pro-radio environment. "As things come up, we will address them and promote them where it makes sense," she notes. "It is a great way for us to embrace initiatives we have in this industry. I don't necessarily look at this as being 'work.' I'm doing it because I want to."

One such high-profile enterprise is HD Radio and Raphael is encouraged to see receiver price points decelerating.

Many car manufacturers are warming up to HD Radio and as Raphael reasons, "That's a very good sign. As HD progresses, content is always a big thing. One of our Boston HD stations is an Irish channel which is just terrific. People don't have to pay to hear it. All they need is [a special HD radio] to pick up all these great new channels. We're on-board with it and [supporting] it as a company."

A packed house of radio professionals witnessed last April's New York City charity skewering of Raphael's boss, Peter Smyth, but she insists, "He's such a nice guy so it was very hard to roast him. It was

a fun event and raised scholarship money for Bayliss, which is a great organization. We really enjoyed being part of that. Peter is a wonderful person. People love the fact he'll roll up his sleeves on a market visit and listen to what he's being asked. He's a genuine guy and sets the tone for the rest of the company."

Snow Place Like Home

Still a classic rocker at heart, Raphael is partial to Greater Media's WRIF and WMMR but also enjoys listening to Boston's "Magic" (WMJX). "Our FM Talk station there [WTKK] is very interesting and makes you think."

There probably wasn't a greater advocate for the city of Buffalo than the late Tim Russert but Raphael could also secretly be working for that region's chamber of commerce. "I love Buffalo – it's a great city," she proclaims. "The people are [sincere] and it's a wonderful place [in which] to grow up and live. For those quick to jump at the amount of snowfall, I say look around the rest of the country. There are many other areas that get a lot more snow. It's nothing like people make it out to be. Western New York State is absolutely beautiful."

After all it was in those surroundings she set her mind to work in this profession. That's precisely what eventuated and Raphael stresses she wouldn't change a thing. "It's a great career and I can't imagine doing anything else. Many Greater Media [employees] have been with the company a long time and, for the radio industry, that says something. They are all fantastic and I'm lucky to have the opportunity to work with them day in and day out. I don't take it for granted and would say the same thing 20 years from now. Frankly, I'm very grateful to be in this business. I'm fortunate to be doing what I love to do and I take things one day at a time."



WHO: Heidi Raphael

WHAT: Vice President/Corporate Communications

WHERE: Greater Media

WHEN: Since February 2008 (with Greater Media for approximately 14 years)

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