

WMOT celebrates thirty years Durham awarded graduate fellowship

Priscilla Wainwright
Special to Sidelines

If you ask some of the staff of MTSU's public radio station what they're proud of, they give several answers.

One is that the station is celebrating 30 years on-air.

Another is that the station serves its public, including keeping a playlist of songs, and returning calls as quickly as possible to identify a song a listener liked but was unfamiliar with.

And this service has other benefits. Listeners who get the music information they want make contributions to the station, which is listener supported.

But the staff is also proud of the caliber of programming the station has, one of several things that drew them back after their years as student employees.

Program director Greg Lee began with the station when he came to the university in 1981. He joined the station on a full-time basis in 1989.

Development coordinator Laura Dunn, like Lee, began at the station during her years as a student, 1978-82, then returned in 1986 after taking other jobs in the communications industry.

One of the things that drew the current staff back was the camaraderie they felt as student employees.

"I never had the same feeling that I had known here. It was like coming back home, to MTSU, and the station," Dunn recalls.

News director Randy O'Brien, who graduated during the 1975-76 year, returned in

1980, after working at another station as a reporter.

"I was talking to John High as a sounding board. He told me there was an opening coming up and wanted me to come back and talk to them."

Another thing that brought them back was the professionalism.

"I couldn't find the professionalism in the commercial 'real world' that we have here," said Sean Jacobs. "We also had access to technology here that a lot of stations didn't have," Jacobs added.

Other former students and staffers who have worked at the station and gone on to other careers include NBC White House producer Ken Strickland, Channel 4 News reporter and anchors Holly Thompson and Nancy Van Camp, Metro Police spokesman Don Aaron, and Joe Fisher, Assistant Director of the National Commodore Club at Vanderbilt and the "Voice of the Commodores."

Along with the more general memories of camaraderie and professionalism, each has memories of news events they lived through on-air.

"I remember when Reagan was shot," recalled Jacobs.

O'Brien recalls hearing then President Richard M. Nixon resign.

"The studio and offices were in the Dramatic Arts Building then."

1999 has already been a good year for the station. A House Resolution, sponsored by Rep. John Hood, recognized the station's landmark anniversary.

Earlier in the year, the

station was recognized by its peers and the music industry at the Gavin Awards, and was one of six jazz stations nominated for Jazz Station of the Year. WMOT was also nominated for the award in 1989. Gavin recognizes both commercial and public service stations.

A look at WMOT history also traces the birth and growth of public broadcasting in America. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting was established in 1967, two years before WMOT went on-air. National Public Radio was created in 1970, and WMOT became a charter member.

A year later, in 1971, "All Things Considered" debuted on National Public Radio and WMOT. In 1977, the station won a Corporation for Public Broadcasting Award of Excellence for News Reporting.

In 1980, WMOT became the first Tennessee station to use satellite, and two years later, debuted a jazz/news format.

In 1990, the station became part of the then newly-formed College of Mass Communication. A year later, the station was listed in Details Magazine as Middle Tennessee's best radio station. In both 1994 and 1995, WMOT was a finalist for the Nashville Nammies Top Station Award.

With the years have come changes in equipment and technology that allow station staff members to record programs and air them later, instead of having to be in the studio and broadcasting live.

Even with the technology, it takes good people to have a good station. ■

John Lynch
Special to Sidelines

Ryan Durham, a senior Journalism student at MTSU, has been awarded a graduate fellowship from Phi Kappa Phi National Honor Society.

Dr. June McCash, professor of Foreign Languages and Literatures and current president of the local chapter, said the award is one of only 50 awarded nationally and provides up to \$7,000 per year toward study in a graduate or professional school. She noted that Durham is the first MTSU student to receive the award.

Durham says he plans to use the fellowship when he enters law school in the fall.

He was recognized during the recent Phi Kappa Phi initiation of new members. More than 60 outstanding undergraduates were inducted into the local chapter. Two outstanding faculty members were also inducted.

Dr. Regina E. Johnson, associate professor of Speech and Theatre, and Dr. Stephen Shearon, associate professor of music, accepted invitations to join the Honor Society. In addition, two well-known business figures and MTSU Alumni, Bob Parks and Charlie Myatt, were inducted at the ceremony.

Durham was president of the Student Government Association in 1997-98, and was also appointed by Governor Donald Sundquist as student regent for the 1997-1998 school year. The job of the student regent is to provide the student perspective in the quarterly Tennessee Board of Regents meetings.

Ryan's parents live in Summertown, Tenn., and are MTSU graduates; Charles, B.S. '76, M.Ed. '83, and Linda, B.S. '79, M.Ed. '87. ■

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