ON THE MOVE

Radio

WPKN announced that its station will be relocating to Bijou Square in Bridgeport. Below, Collete Rossignol, chairman of WPKN’s board of directors, left, Phil Kuchma, president of Kuchma Corp. and Steve DiCostanzo, WPKN general manager are coordinating the move.

RADIO STATION WPKN’S RELOCATION PLANS INCLUDE INCREASED COMMUNITY SUPPORT

By Mike Horcyn

WPKN radio is on the move. The spirited, non-commercial, community radio station run by all volunteer staff except for two full-time paid employees—a general manager and an operations manager—broadcasts its 10,000-watt signal 24/7 at 90.9 FM and streams at wpkn.org.

That won’t change after the station uproots from its current home on the campus of the University of Bridgeport, it’s home since 1996.

In fact, WPKN will remain in Bridgeport when it relocates later this year to 277 Fairfield Ave., occupying second-floor space that was adjacent to the Bijou Theatre in Bridgeport’s Bijou Square area recently renovated by developer and WPKN enthusiast Phil Kuchma.

“We’ve always envisioned our neighborhood here on the square to be a hub of entertainment and creativity,” said Kuchma, president of Kuchma Corp., whose numerous Bridgeport-based properties include such arts-related organizations as the Downtown Cabaret Theater, the Playhouse on the Green, and the nonprofit gallery City Lights Gallery that he and his wife co-founded.

“WPKN is so diverse as far as the types of music and the types of people who have programs. Over the years, I’ve gotten to know more and more of those involved with the station, and it’s really refreshing to be dealing with volunteers who do so much because of the love that they have, and who don’t expect anything in return for it except to have people listening and participating. “It’s to WPKN’s credit, as a group, that this has continued to be relevant. We feel very fortunate to be part of this, and we really see a tremendous amount of opportunity here,” Kuchma said.

Collete Rossignol, in her second term as chairman of WPKN’s board of directors, feels that the move to the new location will reflect the station’s listener base.

“We felt it was time for us,” Rossignol said. “We have a community radio station, and for us to be more deeply ingrained in our community and moving to downtown Bridgeport is not only going to help us be more visible but also will offer us the opportunity to be more collaborative with other arts organizations and the city. The timing was just right.”

Rossignol, who began volunteering with WPKN as a teenager in the early ‘80s, explained the uniqueness of the station.

“We just do something a little bit different. We really run the gamut in terms of age, in terms of gender, in terms of having that diverse group of volunteers that reflects our listenership. “It’s not just that we have great music programming, but it’s also about our news and our public affairs, and even our community calendar, letting our listeners know about all the services and arts organizations and things that they can see and partake in.”

WPKN is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization reaching over 1.4 million listeners in Connecticut, Long Island, parts of New York and Massachusetts. It also has dedicated Apple and Android apps.

WPKN became independent and a listener-supported entity after acquiring ownership of its broadcast license from UB in 1996. The search for a new home became urgent last June, when it was announced that buildings and programs at the financially struggling UB would be taken over by Sacred Heart University, Goodwin College in East Hertford, and the Palmer College of Art in Hamden. Sacred Heart eventually backed out of the arrangement.

WPKN, which was concerned about losing its space, looked at 26 locations before settling on 277 Fairfield Ave., and the staff voted unanimously to approve the choice.

Last October, the station signed a five-year lease with Kuchma to move into its new home, with two 10-year extension options. More than 150 volunteers made up the on-air staff, and music programs include jazz, blues, reggae, folk, rock, classical and world music.

Two on-air staff members were included into the Rock ‘n Roll Hall of Fame: Mark Naffinals, original keyboardist for The Paul Butterfield Blues Band, and Chris Forma, drummer for Talking Heads.

Frantz, who’s been in plenty of radio stations in his career about 1,000, by his count — sees something special in WPKN.

“What makes it unique in the people who are on the air doing the shows,” he said. “Almost more than the music that’s played. I like the spirit of the programmers. I have a great deal of admiration for the people that actually come out of the goodness of their soul.”

WPKN General Manager Steve DiCostanzo, who has been in the station for over 25 years, said the station is moving out of its family’s house, because we’ve been in that space since the early ‘80s. There is a lot of staff to consider and prioritize on what gets moved and what doesn’t,” DiCostanzo said.

“It’s really remarkable from my vantage point to see how hard our volunteers are working on this, because it is unprecedented. Kuchma to Phil Kuchma, also. He is playing the role of construction manager and helping us with his expertise as somebody who not only owns buildings but also has a construction and a management company.”

DiCostanzo said the timetable for the move is late spring, early summer.

“The hope is that we’ll make the actual move sometime in late May or June,” said the station’s executive director Mike Horcyn.

He also volunteers for WPKN and is a member of the station’s on-air staff.

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