



Blues on the Bluff and community keeps WEVL airing strong

WEVL rocking on after 26 years of change

By SUE PEASE

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Memphian David Tankersley fondly recalls his 4 years as a volunteer programmer at Memphis volunteer radio station WEVL-FM 90, remembering the show he co-hosted with two other people as very eclectic and unique as those years themselves 1978 to 1982 tended to be.

With Steve Haley and Bruce Saunders, Tankersley hosted a program for the station called, 8:30 Thursday, which was a mix of diverse music, interviews and comedy. It was as eclectic as it possibly could be, he said with a chuckle. Told he has a bizarre sense of humor, he created characters for the show such as Rick Zipper, the sensitive sportscaster, and Reverend Angel from the Lord has Risen, He is Coming, Bapto-Methodisto Church in Frayser. Back then, you never knew what to expect with WEVL, Tankersley said.

The station, now 26 years old, continues to be independent and almost completely volunteer run with only two full-time and one part-time paid staff. Because of that grassroots nature, it continues to give Memphis a unique and indelible personality to the city's airwaves.

It's incredibly important, Tankersley said about having an independent, community radio station. It's a multi-music approach. WEVL is such a standard bearer of community broadcasting. And today, the eclectic personality of the stations airwaves continues from the country and bluegrass sounds of Bluff City Barn Dance to Cap'n Petes Blues Cruise. The volunteer programmers still continue to give the station its distinct personality.

The station operates with about 50 on-air and 100 off-air volunteers. Not only are those people keeping the station unique, they are also its secret to survival. There is a lot of love among the volunteers to do this effort. We are real lucky to have great volunteers and members who appreciate how unique it is, said program manger Brian Craig. A lot of cities don't have this type of thing. And without advertising dollars, keeping the station alive financially is always a challenge. That is where Blues on the Bluff lends a big hand.

This year, Part 2 of the concert series kicks off at 6:30 p.m. Aug. 17 on the grounds of the National Ornamental Metal Museum, 374 Metal Museum Drive. Admission is \$10.

Part 1 of this years event was July 20 and brought in more than 900 people. Weather permitting, next weekends event will be just as successful, station officials said.

Part 2 will bring to the stage Robert Wolfman Belfour, the Daddy Mack Blues Band and Reba Russell.

Blues on the Bluff has been a WEVL benefit concert for 14 years. It comprises a big chunk of the stations fund-raising effort every year.

The station runs on a yearly budget of about \$200,000, said station manager Judy Dorsey. Blues on the Bluff ranks high on the list of station moneymakers. But even more important than benefit concerts are member pledges. Dorsey said the stations two pledge drives each year bring in 75 to 80 percent of its operational revenue.

The stations first mission is to focus on music of Memphis and the Mid-South, Craig said, and secondly to provide music and programs not found on other stations. And for enthusiastic supporters of the station, the diverse programming is what keeps them coming back for more.

Acoustic artist Sid Selvidge has been a part of WEVL from the start, as member and volunteer performer at many of the stations benefit concerts. To him, the station is the heart and soul of the community of Memphis that I love, that I

feel a part of, Selvidge said. And it gives the best bang for the buck for a service here in Memphis. For the amount of money WEVL takes in, and for what they put out, it is the best value the city has. Period, he said. He remembers the stations start in Midtown, when the low-powered airwaves could barely reach around the block. It gave the station an intimate feel, much like carrying on a conversation with a small neighborhood audience.

The station has grown and moved since then, and now pumps out more power. Airwaves can reach a 50-mile radius, reaching a broader group of people. The growth is inevitable. As you grow, you lose something and you gain something, Selvidge said. The former feel may be gone, but the station has evolved to serve a more diverse audience. Even with a larger audience, the station maintains the local flair that has kept it fresh and on the air for more than a quarter century.

Darryl Torrell, a database analyst for Archer>malmo, has been a volunteer programmer at the station for 18 months, beginning his weekly show at 6 a.m. Fridays. His show, *The Modern World*, showcases punk and new wave music. Torrell is no stranger to radio. He's been involved in it typically commercial radio since 1987. But, his preference is community radio. It's free format. The programmers play the music that both they like and they believe the listeners like, Torrell said. It's more a local flavor.

Blues On The Bluff

When: Aug. 17, 6:30 p.m.

Where: National Ornamental Metal Museum grounds

Admission: \$10

Performers:

Robert Wolfman Belfour

Daddy Mack Blues Band

Reba Russell