

Press Release



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TO: ALL MAJOR RADIO PRESS OUTLETS

FROM: TOM KENT RADIO NETWORK

DATE: January 29, 2014

SUBJECT: An open letter to the radio industry

TKRN President and CEO, Tom Kent, feels that healthy exchanges, ideas, and opinions are vital to the radio industry in helping to solve problems and foster growth. Recent news in the industry concerning the erosion of TSL has prompted the following open letter to your readers:

Over the past few weeks, "Uncle Lar" has been on my mind. I don't spend a lot of time looking in the rear view mirror to the past but his recent passing has caused some reflection. I worked with Larry Lujack at WLS starting in 1980 at the "Enormous 89 Musicradio The Rock of Chicago" where I too was a proud WLS on-air personality. It was my dream station. I grew up listening to it on skip in my hometown of Winston-Salem on an ear piece of a small transistor radio tucked under my pillow at night. Radio romanced me and I fell in love.

Larry Lujack was one of the most interesting people I've ever known. If you were on the streets of Chicago and you bumped into him and didn't know him, you might think he was one of our less fortunate homeless folks. He wore tattered jeans, flannel shirts with the tails out, cowboy boots and hat and always looked disheveled. He was perhaps the funniest most talented person I've ever worked with. Even the word "legend" doesn't seem to do him justice. Hey, he was even recognized at this week's Grammy's for his contributions to our industry. Now that's BIG!

I have so many great Larry Lujack stories. Not only was he perhaps one of the most well compensated personalities in Chicago but the entire nation and yet would bum money off you to go and plug the meter on his beat up car parked in a meter on Lower Wacker Drive almost hourly. One of the things I loved about him was he shunned awards. He just thought they were totally stupid. Most of the time, he didn't show up for awards and in his words, "could give a rat's ass". Even though he didn't show up, the awards showed up for him. One year, an award appeared at the station in the form of a plaque for "Major Market Air Personality of the Year". He promptly placed it in the urinal of the men's restroom so that we would all have a chance to pee on it. You had to love that.

The romance of personality radio was not only fun but unpredictable. It was interesting in every way not just what was coming out of the speakers but behind the scenes. I could write a book!

My story takes a turn. Just the other day, I get in my car here in Cleveland and it's 5:42 in the afternoon. I hit the scan on my AM radio and it stops on my old station. WLS is booming in like a local station just as it did back before cell phones and the explosion of wireless communications created a plethora of AM interference. On this day however, the atmospherics were perfect. There it was in all it's glory...WLS..."The Big 89" coming in like the blow torch I always remembered. The audio and the processing sounded big and beautiful just the way I remembered hearing it! I was really excited because I hadn't listened to WLS since I was there for their "Rewind Reunion" back in 2007.

I had about 20 minutes in the car before I reached my destination. I listened to WLS from exactly 5:42 to 6:00 in the afternoon on skip as loud as any local Cleveland station. Here's what I heard and I couldn't believe it. I heard nothing but commercials the entire time! The only time there wasn't a commercial was a short traffic report and weather forecast. Other than those two brief service elements, there was only commercials all the way up to the news at the top of the hour which means there was a good 17 minutes of spots running in afternoon drive without any entertainment elements! I couldn't even tell you who was on the air although I did hear someone doing live reads and they of course were commercials as well. Is this what we've come to?

Back to Larry Lujack. Not only was he one of the all time great radio personalities forever branded into the history of Chicago and WLS but he was also one of the luckiest. I say "lucky" because this was a period in our broadcast history when people who ran radio stations cared about the audience first. Today of course, it's all about the shareholders. I subscribe to the Gospel of Frank Sinatra who once said "When I stop caring about my audience, they'll stop caring about me". If you came up in the era of "Uncle Lar" in Chicago, you couldn't wait to hear what he was going to say next. He created forced listening. You might even sit through a bunch of commercials to get to that point. When consolidation really took hold after the deregulation of the 90s, when the paradigm of programming versus revenues were shifted to money first, suddenly the new millennial's coming up weren't being romanced by radio any more. Now many of them not only don't care about the radio, they don't even own one! Is it any wonder why we've seen the steady erosion of average quarter hour listening? I leave you with this question and it's only a question so please don't be offended. Can we bring them back? You decide.

www.tomkentradio.com

TKRN is comprised of over 400 great radio stations in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

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