

Rick Francolini,
B.A.'83



Courtesy of University Archives

WCDB: 25 Years of Good Tunes and Great Times

By PAUL GRONDAHL

More than 2,000 alumni have worked their way through the University at Albany's college radio station — first as WSUA (640 AM) and later as WCDB (90.9 FM) — and most have stories about how the place touched their hearts and, perhaps, changed their lives.

For many, the cramped, disheveled warren of cubbyhole offices on the third floor of the Campus Center was a crucible of sorts. For some, it was also an introduction to careers in professional broadcasting and entertainment, including jobs as executives at major label record companies, as a sports disc jockey at a leading rock station in New York City, and as reporters, producers, writers and editors in television and newspapers.

Now, to mark the 25th anniversary of the founding of WCDB (which went on the air in 1978 after the switch from AM to FM), several alumni who worked at the station are organizing a drive to raise funds for the station.

The money will help to support a renovation and equipment upgrade, an increase in the station's power, and possibly an endowment to ensure the ongoing success and growth of WCDB during tight fiscal times. This initiative will be part of a quarter-century celebration in honor of WCDB during

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— Josh Rosenthal, B.A.'89, vice president of alternative sales and marketing for SONY Music, New York City.

Homecoming Weekend this Oct. 24-26. Alumni associated with the station are invited to participate in the festivities and to sign up for a guest DJ slot on the WCDB airwaves or to go on the air just to reminisce.

“We're ready to move the station to the next level,” said Bill McCann, B.A.'86, M.S.'87, an attorney at the New York State Board of Elections in Albany and catalyst for the WCDB

fund-raising effort. “President Hitchcock is on a mission to make the University excel in all things. As a first-rate university, we need to make this a first-rate radio station.”

As a member of the Alumni Association Board of Directors and of the University Auxiliary Services Board of Directors, McCann feels he is in a position to help achieve those goals. “I know the alumni base who worked at the station, I'm involved with the University and I want to be the sparkplug to get everyone excited about this,” said McCann, who started a WCDB jazz show his junior year. That was in 1985, and he's kept it going for 18 years running, each Saturday morning, from 8 a.m. to noon.

“The show is my therapy for the week,” said McCann, whose longevity makes his the longest-running show in the station's history. The forerunner of WCDB was WSUA, which went on the air in 1963. With a staff of about 60

student DJs and another 25 DJs who are either alums or friends of UAlbany, the station typically operates 18 to 24 hours a day, seven days a week, during the academic year. It is funded through the mandatory student activity fee, proceeds from which are managed by the Student Association.

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James Doellefeld, UAlbany’s vice president for Student Affairs, said that WCDB has made a rich contribution to the quality of student life since its beginnings. “It’s been a wonderful training ground for students,” he said. “Its strength is its durability and the opportunity it has provided to students for personal growth.”

Each incarnation of the station holds fond memories for alumni. Marc Gronich, B.A.'81, joined WCDB as a freshman in 1978, the same year it went on the air as an FM station. He got involved by attending an interest meeting, where an upperclassman suggested he try the news department. Gronich’s first assignment was to interview Gov. Nelson Rockefeller and other dignitaries at the dedication ceremony of the Empire State Plaza in

downtown Albany. “I remember it like it was yesterday,” Gronich recalled. “Governor Rockefeller gave me a one-on-one interview. He was very gracious. I got the news bug from that interview and stuck with it.”

Gronich founded his own radio

news operation, Statewide News Service, and covered the state Legislature and Rockefeller’s four successors as governor during 16 years at the state Capitol. Gronich now runs GeoPolitical Strategies, a political campaign and fund-raising firm based in Albany. Gronich fondly recalls his time as an integral part of the WCDB

Bill McCann, B.A.'86, M.A.'87



Mark Schmidt

WCDB Alumni - Where They Are Now

Lawrence Berger, B.A.'92: senior producer, NBA Entertainment, Secaucus, N.J.

Dean Chang, B.A.'87: city editor, New York *Daily News*

Michael Eck, B.A.'86: arts editor, Albany *Times Union*

William Goodfriend, B.A.'82: national sales manager, WSOC Radio/TV, Charlotte, N.C.

Mike Hammer, B.A.'80, M.A.'83: founder, *Cable Guide* magazine

Alan Cory Kaufman, B.A.'80: media consultant and television producer, New York City

Kevin Kelton, B.A.'78: television writer/producer ("Saturday Night Live," "Night Court," "Boy Meets World"), Beverly Hills, Calif.

Diarmuid Quinn, B.A.'83: executive vice president, Warner Bros. Records

Russell Rieger, B.A.'81: senior executive, Maverick Recording Co., Beverly Hills, Calif.

news department overseeing a dedicated staff, which aired 20 newscasts weekly and created public affairs shows.

"WCDB was an absolutely phenomenal experience for me and it helped develop my passion for news," Gronich said. "I'm looking forward to bringing together the team from the late seventies, early eighties, and once again seeing many of the friends with whom I worked closely at the radio station."

For Patti Mitchell, B.A.'81, a photographer and art teacher who lives in Austin, Tex., it took a lot of coaxing to get her on-air with a classic rock show her senior year. "I listened a lot, but was too shy for a long time," Mitchell said. "I started on the overnight 3 a.m. to 7 a.m. shift like everybody else. And I loved it. The experience has helped me so much as a photographer and a teacher."

Mitchell recalled the amazing rock shows she saw at Albany nightclubs such as J.B. Scott's and the Hullabaloo with then little known acts on the rise, including U2 and George Thorogood. "That's what got me into the music business," said Mitchell, whose photos have graced covers of compact discs and rock 'n' roll magazines.

Larry Berger, B.A.'92, now a producer with NBA Entertainment in Secaucus, N.J., near the Meadowlands sports complex, said he got his career start at WCDB as its sports director.

"I absolutely love what I do, and a lot of what I do is thanks to WCDB," said Berger, an English major. "It was by far the single most important aspect of my college years, as far as career preparation is concerned. It gave me confidence."

Josh Rosenthal, B.A.'89, started at WCDB his sophomore year after an internship

at Polygram Records, where University alumnus and WCDB veteran Jack Isquith steered Rosenthal along a similar path. "Jack is the reason I went to the University and got involved with the station. WCDB was the biggest part of my college life outside of my English degree and my mentor, Tom Smith," said Rosenthal, who is now vice president of alternative sales and marketing for SONY Music in New York City. Before he became a record company executive, Rosenthal started like every WCDB staffer - on the overnight shift.

"I have fond memories of trudging back to Indian Quad in the snow after my show, just as the sun was rising," Rosenthal said. "Like every good college station, WCDB was the sum of its parts, and the great people made it (what it was). The station became our community. We made it and we want to see it prosper for another 25 years."

To share your memories about WCDB or WSUA and learn more about the 25th anniversary reception and dinner, contact Bill McCann at wmccann@elections.state.ny.us or Marc Gronich at mgronich@juno.com.

