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**Economy, corporate goals
challenge media families**

By **RANDY WRIGHT**

Many of us got into radio, television or print because we love the media, and it's all we've ever known or wanted for our career.

When I started at the old KFMZ radio — now off the air but formerly at 98.3 FM — I was 14 and “volunteered” after school cleaning carts and taking out the trash. It was so long ago that anyone at a radio station today likely would have no idea what a cart is, or was, but suffice it to say it took a lot of rubbing alcohol and razor blades to clean them so that the next commercial or song could be recorded.

I walked from Jefferson Junior High School downtown to KFMZ several afternoons each week to spend a couple of hours soaking up as much as I possibly could in the hope that someday I might be able to go on the air as a disc jockey — another out-of-date term!

I finally got that chance to go on the air after passing the FCC Third Class Radiotelephone Operators test (no longer given) in Kansas City. It was a big deal in my life because it fulfilled a dream.

You see, I had been “playing radio” as a kid with my record player and a speaker positioned in my bedroom window on Pheasant Run Drive in the Shepard Boulevard neighborhood. With the paper cutout letters of “K-O-R-N” radio placed in the window, I would routinely “broadcast” to the front yard and any passers-by — surely a pleasant experience for my listeners. My parents must have been so proud.

Upon passing my FCC test, KFMZ gave me the chance to do the real thing. At 15, I began working overnights — from midnight to 6 a.m. — and I enjoyed every minute of it. Proving parents’ love knows no time, my mom and dad would drive me downtown to KFMZ every Friday and Saturday night at 11:30 and pick me up just after 6 the next morning when my shift was over. We did this weekend after weekend for months.

For a long time, I held a fantasy-like fascination with the media industry — television and radio in particular. It all seemed like a walk through a magic kingdom. Along the way there have been some bumps in the road, but none bigger than in

2001, when I accepted my first general manager position at the ABC station in Springfield.

As many know, that experience ended up poorly. My wife, girls and I never made the move to Springfield after the company that hired me backed out on the contract. What ensued was a three-plus-year odyssey that included double house payments and really took the wind out of our sails, drained us financially and woke me to the reality of big business.

This year has seen tough times for some in Central Missouri media, and it has touched me personally because a couple of people I know and care about have been hit by big corporate ownership just as I was seven years ago.

Most recently, KRCG-TV’s corporate owner, Barrington Broadcasting Group, directed stations to make substantial cuts in operational expenses, and the cuts included longtime Sports Director Rod Smith.

If you know Rod, you know this isn’t a cut KRCG General Manager Betsy Ferris would have advocated; it had to be led by someone out of touch with Central Missouri and, especially, Jefferson City. I’ve talked to Rod a couple of times, as have many of you, and he has been blown away by the compassion and support of hundreds, if not thousands, of Central Missourians.

I think Betsy will find the same sentiment from her media colleagues as she announced her resignation from KRCG yesterday, a move that will without doubt make a challenging situation for Barrington that much more difficult.

Rod loves the media and his life, and he will be fine. Opportunities will abound for him because of who he is as a person and how he has conducted himself all these years. I wish Rod, his wife, Lana, and their three girls nothing but the best.

It’s a shame someone in an office in Chicago didn’t have the good sense to listen to those in Central Missouri who know what’s best for their television station and viewers.

Former Cumulus market manager Greg DeRue is a similar story from earlier this year.

DeRue joined Cumulus from Artistic Media in South Bend, Ind., where





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he was a successful market manager. Moving to Columbia last summer, DeRue joined my family in a suite for KMIZ's Fire in the Sky July Fourth celebration. We wanted to welcome him to the community and share some time with him because he had left his wife and young daughter back in Indiana until they found a house in Columbia.

DeRue began the process of rebuilding Cumulus and laid out an aggressive plan of hiring and training account executives, bringing more than 15 new staffers on board in a little more than six months. Revenue began to grow, and things seemed to be on the right track.

Then, in a single meeting, DeRue's employment was terminated, and he was told the growth wasn't fast enough for corporate expectations. Just like that, it was over. DeRue's wife and daughter had recently moved to Columbia, and they were all excited about building a life here. DeRue recently accepted a market manager position in Traverse City, Mich., but his wife and daughter remain in Columbia waiting to sell their house.

Sure, those of us in the media might love what we do and are in it for all the right reasons, but there's a tough reality to corporate America.

While Columbia has typically been immune to layoffs and cutbacks through the years because of stable ownership, tough economic times, large corporate ownership and aggressive goals make for some unfortunate and challenging family stories.

Phoenix plan

Woodruff Sweitzer has announced a partnership with the University of Phoenix's Kansas City campus.

The agency is responsible for strengthening the University of Phoenix brand in the metro area through a community relations strategy.

"After seven years in the metro area, the University of Phoenix has become a great corporate citizen that is actively involved in improving the community," said Brian Messer, University of Phoenix vice president of Missouri campuses. "We've been less aggressive in communicating our involvement to the people of these

communities. I believe our new partnership with Woodruff Sweitzer will help close this information gap."

The Kansas City campus is made up of five locations, including Lenexa, Topeka, Kansas City North, Independence and Kansas City.

"The University of Phoenix brand is strong because of what it promises and what it delivers," said Woodruff Sweitzer President Terry Woodruff said. "Woodruff Sweitzer is pleased to put our public relations expertise to work for such a powerful brand."

Blue-light Blu-ray

With plans to sell Blu-ray players for less than \$300 this month, Wal-Mart will become a low-cost purveyor of the device, which has failed to gain traction among mass-market consumers largely because of its high price.

Blu-ray is the prevailing high-definition optical disc storage format. Wal-Mart will sell a Profile 1.1 Funai player under the Magnavox brand with picture-in-picture functionality.

Best Buy is expected to offer the player under the Insignia brand, beginning in July, for about \$350.

Big TV

Samsung has unveiled an 82-inch LCD panel that a company executive termed the "optimal display for future TVs."

The display has a resolution of 3820 by 2160 pixels — for a total screen resolution of 8.3 megapixels — and is said to be four times better than today's 1080p TVs.

People, news and notes

Socket, a Missouri-based telephone and Internet service provider, welcomes **Anthony Heman** as a programmer. Heman graduated from the University of Missouri with a bachelor's degree in computer science and a philosophy minor. He will be programming internal online interfaces for the company and handling the database administration, including designing applications, Web pages and utilities.

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