

PUBLISHER'S Profile

BY ERICA FARBER

kent Burkhart loves radio. A true living legend, he has enjoyed a career in programming, management and ownership, as a satellite and network pioneer and as a national and international radio consultant. He recently got back into station ownership after realizing that retirement just didn't work for him.

Getting into the business: "I grew up in a small town in south Texas and used to listen to various stations around the country on my Hallicrafter SX-42, which was sort of a big radio at that time. When the sky wave came in I could hear Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, Denver, etc. I figured I would never get to those places and found it interesting to hear the time and temperature and certain disc jockeys or announcers in those cities.

"A guy in my hometown decided to build a radio station, and he let me have a segment every afternoon to play the current hits for the high school kids as they got out of school. I did that all during high school, and I loved it. I went to college and found out that I knew more than the professor, so I helped him address the issues of radio.

"At that time Top 40 had not happened yet. It was just a thought in Todd Storz's head. When Todd came along I tried to hook up with his company and, fortunately, got hired. He had some great people working around him, and I learned a great deal."

On his success: "Some people are just born to do certain things, through genes or whatever. I have what I refer to as a 'commercial ear'. I hear things other people don't hear, and I can guess what's going to happen next, and it seems to be reasonably accurate. I don't know why I can do this, but I know that it sort of falls into place."

Latest project: "I have my foot in a lot of things. My brother-in-law and I and his group recently bought a radio station in Palestine, TX. It's something we've wanted to do together for a long time. We closed Oct. 1. I am sort of the overseer as well as being a stockholder. I grew up in small-market radio, and I understand it.

"I'm also helping a friend of mine with a Chicago company called TicketsNow.com. They're sort of like an eBay for tickets. If you need a ticket in the third row of the Sting concert and you want to be sitting on an aisle, they can find it for you."

Future growth plans: "On the radio side, we definitely have some plans. We are not locked into any part of the U.S. We had to buy this AM and FM in Palestine because of a certain condition that a broker friend of ours had. The AM station, KNET, was the first radio station owned by Gordon McLendon. He was there for a number of years, and that's where he sort of honed his craft. It is now Sports. The FM is KYYK. From there McLendon moved to Dallas and bought KLIF."

Biggest challenge: "The No. 1 challenge is to be certain that your station is local, local, local. The second challenge is to find a great GM who is sales-oriented. The third is for that GM to find half a dozen great salespeople. That is a major problem for all small-market broadcasters.

"As luck would have it, the manager we have was hired by the previous owner. I'm not sure we would have bought the station without this manager. He's a 30-year-old whiz kid, and we felt very confident with him.

"I just wrote a column for RadioDailyNews.com about how GMs can keep their jobs, and I listed 15 points. If you want to read it, it's archived at www.kentburkhart.com."

State of radio: "I really liked the competitive wars of the past. I enjoyed having a Top 40 station or a Country station or whatever and being able to compete. It added a lot of excitement to the industry in the markets where the wars took place. I don't hear that today with a lot of the niche formats.

"Stations in groups don't want to compete with one another. They want to find other ways to gain audience. I understand that it's a whole new world, but I would say that the jury is still out. I've watched the ratings pretty carefully, and I go from market to market listening to radio. It doesn't sound as exciting to me, but I defer to the listeners."

Thoughts on satellite: "I was in a limo the other day in Atlanta, and the guy driving the car had on a Classical satellite station, and he loves it. He made the point that there wasn't an FM station in Atlanta that plays classical music. I've been into a retail store in a suburb of Dallas, and they were playing a satellite Classic Rock station. I was in there twice, as a matter of fact, and they had the same station on. And I have a friend who lives down here who was tired of not getting enough news during the course of the day. He wanted hard news, so he bought a satellite unit and is very pleased with what he has.

"I've read that there are going to be 35 million sets sold by 2010. There are going to be people who are very interested in finding specialized formats. The question is, how much come and TSL is this going to take away from terrestrial radio? I would suggest that it's not too much. Ten or 15 years from now 10% of the audience might have gone to satellite, but we might also find that 10% have gone to the Internet, leaving 80% with terrestrial."

On audience measurement: "I am very big on electronic measurement. I have been screaming about it for 20 years. I'm glad that Clear Channel is moving along with it. I know nothing about the Clear Channel experiments or even who's on the committee, but it doesn't matter to me who gets it done. We need it for our own benefit, to be able to walk into a client or advertiser and be able to display it. I am afraid the smaller markets such as ours will still be using the diary method 10 years from now and the larger markets will be in electronic mode."

Career highlight: "I was really pleased to be elected on the first ballot of the Texas Radio Hall of Fame. I'm just a guy out making a living and having fun at it, but that was really a rewarding thing for me. I also loved being on an NAB Legends panel about five years ago. Dr. Don Rose was on it; Gary Owens was on it; Casey Kasem was on it; and my former partner, Lee Abrams. Dan Valle hosted it and did a great job.

"I enjoyed running WQXI/Atlanta. I was in my late 20s. I went on to buy some other stations and formed a group called Pacific and Southern Broadcasting. I got to be President. In '72 or '73 we started our consulting company, and suddenly we had 40 or 50 stations. I started hiring people, I hired Lee Abrams, and then suddenly we had 120 stations. I was on a plane four or five days a week and loved every minute of it.

"Lastly, I picked up a book one day in 1995, and it was a special edition of *Radio Ink* that dealt with the 75 broadcasters who made a difference in the first 75 years of commercial broadcasting. I flipped it open to see who these people were, and there was my picture. That absolutely floored me."

Career disappointment: "One of the mistakes I made was when I was the General Partner for GECC and we had a radio station in Austin, KEYI. This was 15 years ago. There was a horrible recession going on, and there was about \$19 million worth of radio revenue in Austin. The Country station was doing about a third of it, and LBJ Communications was doing another third, so there was not much left.

"I had an option to buy the station when we got to a certain revenue point or profit point, I can't remember which. I drove around Austin looking at all of these shopping centers that were bare, and I knew there was a major problem, so I declined to buy it. They sold it to somebody else, and now there's probably \$150 million in that market. What can you do?"

Most influential person: "No question, Todd Storz. I worked directly for him in Omaha at the original Top 40 station, and I worked at WQAM/Miami as PD. I loved him as a guy, and I loved him as a broadcaster. Absolutely a top-notch person."

Favorite radio format: "Country, News, Sports, Classic Rock and CHR. I still listen at 5am around the United States, just like I did when I was a kid."

Favorite television show: "I watch Greta Van Susteren every night at 10 on Fox. Also *American Idol*."

Favorite song: "I Love the Night Life" by Alicia Bridges."

Favorite book: "I read mysteries, and my favorite writer is Stuart Woods."

Favorite movie: "Chicago."

Favorite website: "Radioandrecords.com — no kidding. And then I go to a former client who is at what we now know as CBS SportsLine."

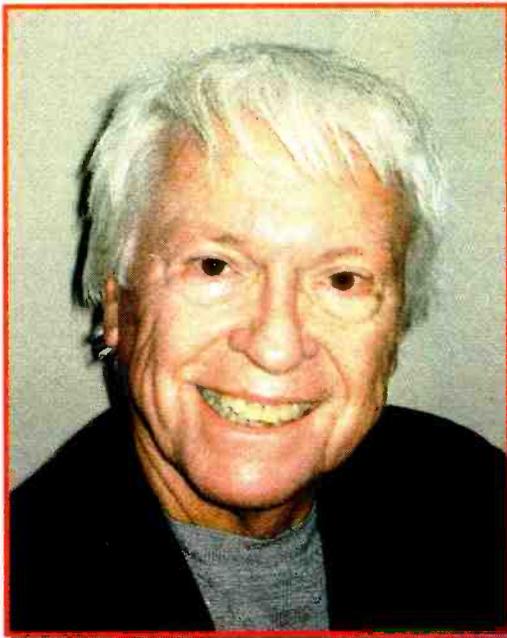
Favorite restaurant: "The Palm."

Beverage of choice: "White wine."

Hobbies: "My No. 1 avocation is sports of all kinds. I really enjoy walking up and down the beach. I like to exercise, walk, run — all of those things. It's very therapeutic, and I love the sunshine."

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Advice for broadcasters: "Don't be discouraged by all of these other elements, all of these mortar rounds being shot at you. Just stay in there, do local radio as much as you possibly can, and everything will work out fine."



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