

McLendon

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KILT/Houston, K TSA/San Antonio, WAKY/Louisville, KEEL/Shreveport, KABL-AM & FM/San Francisco, WWWW/Detroit, WYNR (later WNUS)/Chicago, WYSL/Buffalo, KADS/Los Angeles (now KOST), and KELP-AM & TV/El Paso.

Many Firsts

During his many years in broadcasting, McLendon was recognized for accomplishing many firsts. He was one of the original pirate radio broadcasters, setting up Radio Nordc off the coast of Sweden. He brought Top 40 to KLIF in 1957; put on the first Good Music station to become number one in a market (KABL); and developed the first all-News presentation at 50kw XETRA/Tijuana-San Diego, targeted to the Los Angeles market. McLendon also instituted an all-ads format at KADS.

Perhaps the earliest example of McLendon's imagination and programming creativity was the Liberty Network. Founded in 1947, Liberty amassed almost

500 affiliates until it was suddenly disbanded in 1962 — making it the largest radio network up to that time.

Calling himself "The Old Scotsman," McLendon broadcast live recreations of baseball, football, and basketball play-by-play for the network, using sound effects blended with stats provided by a sports wire. The Liberty Network also grabbed the rights to Louisiana State and Miami University games, and made audiences feel they were hearing the events live as they happened.

Developing Top 40

The net's theater-of-the-mind programming ended when the major league clubs, who were being paid, withdrew Liberty's rights on the contention that the broadcasts were interfering with minor league attendance. Losing baseball was too much of a financial burden, and the network closed.

McLendon is not credited with starting Top 40 (that's attributed to Todd Storz at KOWH/Omaha). But in R&R's 1977 "The Top-40 Story" he said, "I guess if I take any credit at all for Top 40, it would not be

originating it but having developed it into a more modern day version." Sadly, Storz did not live long enough to see the full fruits of his format blossom under McLendon.

Bart McLendon, managing partner of the McLendon Companies, talked with R&R about his father. "I ran the (radio) chain for several years, but Dad never did get out of the day-to-day operations. He could no more let go his grip of things than he could pick up the Sears building with two hands. He loved it too much."

A Programmer First

"He was a businessman, but a programmer first and foremost, as he possessed a marvelous feel for people and what turned them on," the younger McLendon continued. "He was a hard taskmaster, and yet no one ever worked harder than Gordon McLendon. He'd save it all up, fly into KILT, call up the PD, and they'd spend the next 72 hours talking about programming — with the PD crawling out of the room on his hands and knees. No one ever forgot that he owned those stations."

Bart went on to recall some personal facts about his father: "The most enjoyable times of his life were spent behind the mike as a sportscaster. He was considering a return to on-air sportscasting as recently as April 1985.

"There are so many things I'd like to say, but most of all I feel proud to have been his son. He was a fabulous father, even though he was always busy. There was never a question at any time in my life that he loved me and cared for me, and that there wasn't anything he wouldn't do for me."

Idea Man

Chuck Blore of Blore & Richman worked with Gordon at KLIF, K TSA, and KELP. "It was his idea to do local news, married with the music ideas of Todd Storz, which brought Top 40 into being," Blore remembers. "Gordon had a policy book, and everyone had to read it. It was a collection of memos, thoughts, and ideas. It was all based on the idea of competing with TV, which was taking all of the bright radio people away.

"I became enamored with him and his ideas about radio, as he was not only an incredible writer but a communicator," Blore added. "I used those ideas as my foundation when I left to program KF WB/Los Angeles in 1968. Anyone who is in radio today is doing what they are doing only because of Gordon McLendon's genius."

Shamrock Radio Division President Bill Clark recalled, "When Gordon and I worked together for five or six years at KABL, I was either a GSM or a GM, so we didn't cross paths all that much. He was interested in the programming. He gave us great facilities and wonderful ideas."

Clark continued, "Gordon's greatest contribution to radio was his injection of a tremendous amount of life and spirit into a medium many had turned their backs on. Both he and Todd were like magnets, drawing talent which got the attention of listeners, advertisers, and the entire industry. Gordon was a great showman and innovator. He gave many good people a chance to learn and develop. Many went on to own their own stations. Gordon did an immeasurable service to radio and to budding talent when both needed it so badly."

Ken Dowe worked with McLendon for ten years. He started at KLIF as a jock, became PD, and then progressed to National PD for McLendon Broadcasting. He eventually became Executive VP for the company, and is now a broadcast investor.

"Many people use the term genius too liberally," Dowe said. "I've only known one genius in my lifetime: Gordon McLendon. He was wonderfully creative. He did not allow conventional thinking to stop him from pursuing any of his ideas. He caused those around him to

have the insatiable desire to achieve. He was unusual in that he wasn't driven by money or ego, but by the ability to create. His fun came from taking previously untried concepts and seeing them succeed. Not all of them worked, but he always operated on the principle that he learned more from his failures than his successes."

Dowe also shared an anecdote: "Gordon and I were together in Acapulco. He gave me instructions to return to Dallas, contact the Pentagon, and offer to buy the Armed Forces Radio Network. He was really serious! Gordon told me, 'At the very worst they may sell it to us, and if not they'll at least respond to our offer of \$1,000,000 cash.' He was a generous man who helped finance many a career in trouble. Everything I have I owe to Gordon."

Eye To The Future

McLendon saw the future, and the future was FM. He sold KABL to Starr and KLIF to Fairchild in 1972. He also offered Fairchild KNUS for an additional \$150,000. Fairchild declined and KNUS — with its CHR format programmed by Michael Spears and managed by Ken Dowe — beat KLIF in a year's time.

Spears, now PD at KKDA/Dallas, talked about other grads of the McLendon school: "There's Ron Chapman over at KVIL, Randy Brown who just left KEG L, Dave Cook, Beau Weaver, Jo Interrante, and so many others. Each of us got a solid education in entertainment. I believe he was the first to use jingles, and the first to put editorials and hourly news on the air.

"I first worked for Gordon from 1966 to 1969, starting out as a parttimer and eventually doing the night show," Spears recalled. "I knew him as a brilliant man who surrounded himself with a lot of talented people who wanted to work and grow with him. I will miss him very much."

By McLendon's request a funeral was not held, although a memorial service is planned for this weekend at Cielo, the McLendon Company's ranch. He's survived by his ex-wife Gay; son Bart; three daughters, Jan Moss, Kristeen McLendon, and Dr. Anna Gray-McLendon; and seven grandchildren.

Jordan

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reports to President Monica Lynch, who commented, "We've been looking for someone who fully understands what Tommy Boy is all about. But doesn't have preconceptions about how the job should be done. Jazzy has the right stuff."

Jordan told R&R, "My programming experience can only help, since I understand the problems that radio has to go through and how hard it is to maintain ratings. That's obviously going to influence our outlook in promoting Tommy Boy releases to radio."

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