

Juke Van Oss speech to Holland Historical Society  
Feb 9, 2010 at Hope College Maas Center

WHTC WE HAVE TO CHORTLE--WHTC WE HAVE TO  
CHUCKLE--WHTC WE HAIL TED CHEFF--WHTC, HOLLAND THE TULIP  
CITY. WHATEVER IT IS, THIS RADIO STATION HAD TO START WITH  
AN IDEA.

NO WE WERE NOT THE FIRST STATION, THAT WAS A TEMPORARY  
INSTALLATION SET UP ON THE STAGE OF THE HOLLAND THEATER  
IN 1927. IT WAS STATION WHBM. FOR A COUPLE OF MONTHS IT  
MADE QUITE A SPLASH, WITH LIVE BROADCASTS OF LOCAL VOCAL  
AND INSTRUMENTAL GROUPS. THE FACILITY WAS BROUGHT TO  
HOLLAND BY MR. CARLEY, OWNER OF THE THEATER, THE  
HOLLAND FURNACE COMPANY AND BUSS MACHINE  
WORKS. APPARENTLY THERE WAS NOT ENOUGH SUPPORT FOR  
THE STATION AND IT WAS MOVED TO MINNESOTA WHERE IT STILL  
CARRIES THE SAME CALL LETTERS AS AN FM STATION

LOCAL CITIZENS WERE BUYING RADIOS, WITH NAMES LIKE  
ATWATER KENT, CROSLY—MANUFACTURERS WERE BUILDING  
SETS THAT WOULD PUT US IN TOUCH WITH THE WORLD. WE WERE  
PUTTING THEM IN OUR HOMES, STRETCHING ANTENNAS FROM  
THE HOUSE TO THE GARAGE FOR MAXIMUM RECEPTION.

I RECALL OUR FIRST SET—A WIRLITZER TUNED RADIO FREQUENCY  
RECEIVER CONSOLE THAT REQUIRED TUNING THREE DIALS TO  
THE SAME NUMBER TO BRING IN A STATION. IT WAS EXCITING TO  
LOG A NEW STATION HUNDREDS OF MILES AWAY. MOST WERE  
BATTERY SETS, BECAUSE MANY PEOPLE DID NOT HAVE  
ELECTRICITY IN THEIR HOMES, BATTERIES NEEDED WERE AN A, B,  
AND C AND WERE READILY AVAILABLE, BUT RELATIVELY  
EXPENSIVE. THE A BATTERY WAS THE SAME AS THE 6 VOLT CAR  
BATTERY AND WAS FREQUENTLY REMOVED FROM THE CAR TO  
LISTEN TO RADIO AWHILE.

THE FIRST PROGRAM I RECALL LISTENING TO, WAS THE KELLOGG SINGING LADY—SOON FOLLOWED BY JACK ARMSTRONG, BUCK ROGERS, CHIEF WOLFPAW AND LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE.

HOLLAND LISTENED TO CHICAGO STATIONS, AND WOOD IN GRAND RAPIDS. DURING THE THIRTIES, WE LISTENED TO SOAPS LIKE MA PERKINS, VIC AND SADE AND A HOST OF SIMILAR PROGRAMS. THE MOST POPULAR WAS AMOS AND ANDY, FOLLOWED CLOSLY BY LUM AND ABNER. SATURDAY NIGHTS THE AIR WAS FILLED WITH THE COUNTRY SOUND FROM WSM IN NASHVILLE AND WLS IN CHICAGO. ONE NIGHT THE WLS BARNDANCE TALENT APPEARED IN THE HOLLAND ARMORY. TWO SHOWS, WITH A FULL HOUSE.

HOLLAND NEEDED A LOCAL RADIO STATION. THE WAR SLOWED THE PROGRESS OF ANY PLANNING BUT NELSON BOSMAN WAS THINKING ABOUT SUCH A STATION IN 1945. HE TALKED TO BILL BUTLER, PUBLISHER OF THE SENTINEL ABOUT IT AND HE TOO HAD BEEN THINKING OF AN FM STATION FOR HOLLAND. THESE TWO SELECTED THE OTHER FOUR ORIGINAL BOARD MEMBERS. THEY WERE HERB MARSILJE, MILLARD WESTRATE, TED CHEFF AND WILLARD WICHERS. ALL PUT IN \$4000 DOLLARS TO BEGIN. FIRST WAS THE HIRING OF A WASHINGTON ATTORNEY TO MAKE A FREQUENCY SEARCH. 1450 WAS SELECTED BECAUSE IT WAS A LOCAL FULL TIME FREQUENCY, BECAUSE IT WOULD ENABLE NIGHT TIME SPORTS BROADCASTING. THESE SIX WERE THE MEN WHO TOOK IT UPON THEMSELVES TO INVEST IN SOMETHING THAT MIGHT FAIL; HOWEVER THE FEELING WAS THAT THE POPULACE WAS READY TO ACCEPT SUCH A STATION.

AFTER THREE YEARS OF PLANNING, OBTAINING LAND, THE LAND IS A CITY BLOCK, LEASED FROM THE CITY AND LATER PURCHASED FOR \$8600. AT THAT TIME THE LAND WAS USED FOR A LANDFILL DUMP WITH THE ENTRANCE FROM COLLEGE AVENUR. THEN THERE WAS BUYING EQUIPMENT AND GOING THRU THE LEGAL PROCESS, THE STATION TOOK TO THE AIR JULY 31 AT 6 PM. THE SWAMP WAS CHOSEN AS A BUILDING SITE BECAUSE IT PROVIDED GOOD GROUNDING CONDITIONS. COLLINS BROADCAST EQUIPMENT WAS USED, BECAUSE IT WAS CONSIDERED THE BEST WITH A GOOD TRACK RECORD OF USE DURING THE

WAR. BECAUSE OF THE SWAMPY GROUND, WE HAD TO PUT DOWN PILINGS FOR A FOUNDATION. MUCH OF THE "LITTLE GREEN SHACK WAS PUT UP BY SOME EMPLOYEES OF THE HOLLAND FURNACE COMPANY. OFFICE DESKS AND CHAIRS WERE ALSO ALA HOLLAND FURNACE. THE OFFICE WAS LOCATED IN THE SIXTH FLOOR OF THE WARM FRIEND TAVERN. ALL THE BOARD MEMBERS ASSISTED IN PUTTING THINGS TOGETHER. THE 160 FOOT TOWER HAD TO BE BOLTED TOGETHER BEFORE BEING PUT INTO POSITION

THE FIRST VOICES REGULARLY HEARD ON WHTC IN THE MORNING WERE BOB GREENHOE AND BILL WILSON. BILL WAS AN ENGINEER. AT THAT TIME A LICENSED ENGINEER WAS REQUIRED TO BE ON DUTY WHENEVER THE TRANSMITTER WAS TURNED ON. MOST DID NOT HAVE "ON THE AIR" VOICES. THE THREE ENGINEERS IN THE BEGINNING WERE, BILL, PAUL HINKAMP AND MILLARD WESTSTRATE. OF COURSE WE NEEDED A WOMENS PROGRAM AND HELEN TYSEE AND JEAN HILL FILLED THOSE SPOTS. JEAN HILL FOR MANY YEARS ALSO HAD A CHILDRENS PROGRAM. FRIDAY WE HAD BIRTHDAY DAY WHEN THE FIVE AND SIX YEAR OLDS WOULD INVADE THE RATHER CRAMPED STUDIO AND SING ALONG AND LISTEN TO STORIES READ BY JEAN. PRETTY EXCITING STUFF!! ONE OF OUR AFTERNOON D.J.S WAS HOWDY JOYCE. HE ALSO HOSTED THE HOLLAND JAMBOREE, ON THE AIR WITH RECORDS FIVE NIGHTS A WEEK, AND LIVE ON SATURDAY NIGHT FROM THE WOMENS LITERARY CLUB. LOCAL TALENT LIKE JAY BRUISCHOT, COTTON ROGERS, JOE KLINGER AND PAUL KLINGERBERG FILLED THE AIRWAVES WITH THEIR VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL TALENT. AT 10:15 AT NIGHT, FRED MARTIN DID A LIFELIKE 1450 CLUB, KICKED OFF WITH CLAUD THORNHILL'S SNOWFALL. FRED COULD PUT US IN AN IMAGINARY BALL ROOM WITH HIS DEEP DULCID TONES.

WE SIGNED ON WITH THE DETROIT TIGERS --- BUT--- WE DID NOT FEEL WE SHOULD CARRY THE SUNDAY GAMES IN HOLLAND, SO WE GOT SPECIAL DISPENSATION TO OMIT THOSE FROM THE SCHEDULE. LATER WE CARRIED RED WING HOCKEY, TAPING THE GAMES FOR MONDAY NIGHT PLAYBACK WITH THE WARNING NOT TO GIVE OUT THE SCORE ANYTIME DURING THE DAY.

OUR FIRST MANAGER WAS PAUL NESPER AND THE FIRST SALES PERSON WAS KEN WELCH. BOTH HAD LEFT BY THE TIME I CAME ON BOARD IN 1951. MORNING MAN, BOB GREENHOE WENT INTO SALES AND MIKE BASKET TOOK HIS PLACE. SANDY MEEK A PROGRAM DIRECTOR AT WOOD, BECAME OUR MANAGER. MIKE QUIT IN A DISAGREEMENT WITH THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR AND LARRY COLLINS FILLED HIS JOB. LARRY AND I BECAME VERY GOOD FRIENDS AND WERE UNTIL THE DAY HE DIED THREE YEARS AGO. HIS LAST JOB WAS AS A PROGRAM DIRECTOR AT KWXY IN PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA.

SANDY MEEK WAS NOT A DYNAMIC MANAGER, HOWEVER, OUR BOARD LIMITED HIS EFFECTIVENESS IN THE AMOUNT OF MONEY HE COULD SPEND AND THE DECISIONS THAT COULD BE MADE WITHOUT BOARD APPROVAL.

II ANSWERED AN AD IN THE SENTINEL FOR A 1<sup>ST</sup> CLASS ENGINEER IN JULY OF 1951. I HAD BEEN TAKING A PREPERATION COURSE AND HAD ONLY A 2<sup>ND</sup> CLASS LICENCE, BUT I APPLIED FOR THE JOB AND THE MANAGER, OFFERED TO BUY A BOOK FOR ME TO CRAM FOR THE FINAL ELEMENT OF THE TEST. I WENT TO CHICAGO A WEEK LATER AND PASSED—READY TO GO TO WORK, WHICH I DID THE FOLLOWING SUNDAY. MIKE BASKETT USUALLY CAME IN JUST UNDER THE WIRE AT 6 AM. ONE MORNING HE WAS 20 MINUTES LATE. I DECIDED TO GO ON ON TIME WITH THE NEWS AND A FEW WEEKS LATER I WAS WHTC'S FIRST COMBO MAN. THE REST IS HISTORY.

MANY ANNOUNCERS PASSED THRU OUR PORTALS—MANY THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN HAPPY TO STAY FOR AN ENCOURING BOOST IN PAY, HOWEVER THE BOARDS THINKING SEEMED TO BE THAT WE WERE A TRAINING GOUND AND MOST ANNOUNCERS WOULD BE HERE A COUPLE YEARS AND LEAVE. THAT WAS TRUE IN SOME CASES. BILL ALLEN LEFT TO GO TO WOOD—AL ACKERMAN LEFT TO GO TO WOOD. I APPLIED AT WOOD AND ACTUALLY HAD A JOB WHEN THE BOARD HAD AN EMERGENCY MEETING AND GAVE ME A HEFTY RAISE TO CHANGE MY MIND. I ALSO APPLIED FOR A JOB WITH THE VOICE OF AMERICA; HOWEVER, I DID NOT HAVE THE REQUIRED THREE YEARS OF EXPERIENCE. JOHN KLUNGLE WAS THE CHIEF ENGINEER AND WE

GOT ON VERY WELL- THE THIRD ENGINEER QUIT AND JOHN AND I DECIDED WE COULD COVER THE ENTIRE WEEK BY WORKING SEVEN DAYS A WEEK. WE DID THIS FOR SIX MONTHS. THE FCC DECIDED THAT EQUIPMENT HAD BECOME SO DEPENDABLE THAT OUR STATION AND OTHERS COULD OPERATE WITH ONLY ONE FIRST CLASS ENGINEER ON STAFF. THUS WE COULD HAVE PERSONNEL OF A LESSER GRADE FILL IN ON THE WEEKENDS.

IN 1956 THINGS CHANGED. TWO COUNTY DEPUTIES, BUD GRYSSEN AND LEN VER SCHURE HAD BEEN DROPPING IN FREQUENTLY AND THEY, ALONG WITH JOHN DECIDED TO START ANOTHER STATION. THIS WAS WJBL AND THEY LOCATED AT JAMES ST AND US 31. OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS TRIED TO STOP THE CONSTRUCTION PLEADING ECONOMIC DISASTER IF TWO STATIONS WERE TO BE LOCATED IN HOLLAND. THE FCC, IGNORED THEIR ARGUMENTS AND THE OTHER STATION WAS BUILT. WJBL WAS REFERRED TO BY OUR MANAGER AS THOSE BASTARDS ACROSS THE RIVER, BECAUSE THEY WERE NOW COMPETING WITH US FOR THE ADVERTISING DOLLARS. THEY HAD CHOSEN TO EMPHASIZE THE RELIGIOUS BROADCASTING AND LOTS OF POTENTIAL SPONSORS WERE READY TO SIGN UP WHEN THEY TOLD THEM THEIR PLANS, HOWEVER WHEN THE TIME ACTUALLY CAME, THINGS WERE NOT THAT CUT AND DRIED. THEY HAD AN INTRODUCTORY PROMOTION WITH PLASTIC MICROPHONES, TUNED TO THEIR STATION. THE PROMOTOR GOT MOST OF THE MONEY. LATER THEY HAD TO HAVE ADDITIONAL CAPITAL TO KEEP GOING. EVENTUALLY THE STATION GOT ROLLING AND THEY HAD THEIR SPONSORS AND WE KEPT MOST OF OURS.

MEANWHILE WHTC LOST VERY LITTLE ADVERTISING TO THEM. THE DECADE OF THE FIFTIES SAW MANY PERSONALITIES PASS THRU THE DOORS OF THE LITTLE GREEN SHACK IN THE SWAMP AS WE WERE KNOWN. GUY VANDERJAGT WAS PROBABLY THE MOST FAMOUS AS HE WENT ON TO SERVE MICHIGAN FOR 26 YEARS AS A CONGRESSMAN—GAVE THE KEYNOTE SPEECH AT THE CONVENTION WHEN REAGAN WAS NOMINATED FOR PRESIDENT. GUY WORKED PART-TIME WHEN HE WAS ATTENDING HOPE COLLEGE. AL ACKERMAN CAME TO WHTC-AN EX SCHOOL TEACHER—REALLY DID NOT CARE FOR SPORTS—THAT IS UNTIL HE DISCOVERED THAT THERE WAS MONEY TO BE MADE

THERE. HE SPENT HOURS STUDYING RULE BOOKS UNTIL HE FELT READY TO GET INTO THE PLAY-BY-PLAY BUSINESS. HE LEFT TO WORK AT WOOD, SPENT A FEW YEARS IN SAN FRANCISCO AND LATER WOUND UP AT DETROIT DOING THE TIGER PRE-GAME SHOW. IT WAS DURING AL'S TENURE AT THE STATION, THAT WE DISCUSSED AND PROPOSED A TALK SHOW SIMILAR TO THE ERNIE SIMON, JACK BRICK HOUSE SHOW IN CHICAGO. IT REPLACED A FORTY MINUTE DULL SHOW CALLED LUNCHEON NEWS NOTES. AS WE GOT INTO IT, WE GAINED SOME SPONSORS BY "TALKING" THEIR COMMERCIALS. THIS WENT OVER BIG WITH THE ADVERTISERS—EXPECIALLY IF AL AND I WENT TO CALL ON THEM TO GET THEIR IDEAS.

AFTER AL LEFT, A NEW ANNOUNCER, JACK MACCAULEY JOINED ME AND IT WAS THE JACK AND JUKE SHOW. JACK LEFT AND - CHUCK ANDERSON JOINED ME. AFTER MANAGEMENT TOOK EXCEPTION TO SOMETHING THAT WAS SAID ON THE PROGRAM ON DAY, WE DECIDED IT HAD RUN ITS COURSE.

THE NEXT LEAP TO A TALK SHOW WAS WHEN BILL GARGANO RETURNED FROM A JOB IN JANESVILL WISC AND IN 1959 STARTED "THE TALK OF THE TOWN" FIRST WITH A HALF HOUR OF TIME AND A SINGLE SPONSOR—PAUL BAKER AND HIS STORE ON VANRALTE AVE.

MEANWHILE WE WERE WORKING ON GETTING A NEW BUILDING TO REPLACE THE LITTLE GREEN SHACK. IT WAS A MUCH LARGER STRUCTURE TO INCORPORATE THE OFFICES WHICH HAD BEEN HOUSED IN THE 6<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR OF THE HOTEL. MANY STEEL PILINGS HAD TO BE DRIVEN DOWN TO 60 FEET TO PROVIDE A SOLID BASE FOR THE FOUNDATION. THOUGH WE DID NOT WIND UP WITH THE BUILDING THE STAFF CONSIDERED IDEAL, WE GOT A BUILDING. WE WERE ALSO GETTING A PERMIT FOR WHTC FM.

IT ALL CAME TOGETHER AND WE HAD AN AM AND FM FACILITY. THE FM WENT ON THE AIR AT 3 PM AND PLAYED MUSIC. WE HIRED A DJ, BUT FM WAS NOT SELLING, EVENTUALLY WE BOUGHT AN AUTOMATION SYSTEM THAT RAN FOR MANY HOURS WITH LITTLE ATTENTION.

OUR MORNING TALK SHOW, MEANWHILE EXPANDED TO TWO HOURS AND PROVED VERY SUCCESSFUL. WE COMBINED THE AM AND FM TOGETHER ON THE TALK OF THE TOWN.

THE MORNING THE TOWER FELL DOWN—I GOT A CALL AT HOME ON A SATURDAY MORNING FROM TERRY HOFFMEYER, WHO WAS THE OPERATOR ON DUTY. HE SAID, JUKE, THE TOWER FELL DOWN. I OF COURSE SAID HE HAD TO BE KIDDING BUT HE INSISTED AND IT WAS INDEED TRUE. I CALLED THE OTHER ENGINEER AND WE BOTH MET AT THE STATION. AFTER LOOKING AT THE DAMAGE, WE DECIDED WE COULD PUT UP A LONG WIRE ANTENNA, MEASURED FOR 1450 FREQUENCY. WE ANCHORED IT ON ONE END WITH A HI BOOM TRUCK PARKED IN THE SWAMP AND TIED IT INTO THE TRANSMITTER. WE WERE BACK ON THE AIR IN THREE HOURS THO AT MUCH LOWER EFFICENCY. THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS HAD A HASTY MEETING AND DECIDED SINCE WE WERE GETTING A NEW TOWER PERHAPS THIS WOULD BE THE TIME TO GO TO A 400 FOOT STRUCTURE. THE TOWER ERECTION CREW WAS ON THE WAY THAT VERY DAY. A WEEK LATER WE HAD THE TALL TOWER. AND LATER WE DID GO TO A HIGHER POWER FM SIGNAL.

THE AM SIGNAL AND OUR PROGRAMING CONTINUED TO BE SUCCESSFUL—THE BOARD ALWAYS MINDFUL OF THE COMMUNITY THEY WERE SERVING. THEY WOULD ACCEPT A LOWER PROFIT TO KNOW THEY WERE THE COMMUNITY FAVORITE.

AS THE BOARD MEMBERS AGED, THEY DECIDED TO SELL THE STATION FOR ONE MILLION DOLLARS. IN 1980 IT WAS SOLD TO MIKE WALTON. THE STAFF DID NOT KNOW WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO THEIR JOBS. A FEW DAYS AFTER MIKE WALKED IN THE DOOR, BILL GARGANO WAS FIRED, AND ONE OF THE SALESMEN WAS FIRED. MIKE BROUGHT IN AN OPERATIONS MANAGER THAT HAD A POOR ATTITUDE TOWARD ANYTHING LOCAL. HE HAD BEEN A ROCK JOCK IN WISCONSIN. THINGS WERE VERY TENSE FOR MANY MONTHS, THE ENTIRE STAFF BREATHED EASIER WHEN HE WAS FIRED. MIKE HAD MEANWHILE COUNTED ON A GRAND RAPIDS MARKET TO GAIN SOME REVENUE. WE PUT THE FM TRANSMITTER IN HUSONVILLE. BECAUSE THAT MARKET WAS ALL SUPER

SATURATED WITH RADIO STATIONS, THERE WAS LITTLE CHANGE AND EVENTUALLY MIKE DECIDED TO SELL THE STATION.

I MANAGED TO STAY ON AFTER MY RETIREMENT AT 62, WORKING 2 HOURS A DAY ON TALK OF THE TOWN.

THE NEW OWNER WAS DUKE WRIGHT FROM WAUSAU WISCONSIN WHO OWNED SEVERAL STATIONS, IN INDIANA, ILLINOIS, WISCONSIN, MINNESOTA AND MICHIGAN. 43 AS OF THIS DATE, INCLUDING WKZO, IN KALAMAZOO.

WE ADVERTIZE OURSELVES AT THE HOMETOWN STATION, BUT I DON'T THINK THE MISSION IS AS STRONG AS IT WAS WITH OUR ORIGINAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS. PEOPLE I TALK TO, ARE NOT NECESSARILY HAPPY WITH THE PROGRAMMING, BUT THEY VERY MUCH ENJOY RED'S MORNING PROGRAM AND I GET A LOT OF GOOD COMMENTS ON THE TALK OF THE TOWN. BEYOND THAT, THERE ARE A LOT OF OUT OF TOWN VOICES AND NOW THE LACK OF MUSIC TENDS TO MAKE IT MORE A NON-LOCAL STATION.

WHAT WILL IT BE IN 20 YEARS?? NEW THINGS LIKE AM STEREO, AND TYING SEVERAL CHANNELS TO THE MAIN CHANNEL ARE IN THE WORKS. THIS WAY A STATION CAN PROGRAM DIFFERENT FORMATS ON A SINGLE CHANNEL. OF COURSE, WE TILL NEED RECEIVERS THAT WILL PICK THEM UP.

MANY PEOPLE TELL ME –WHEN YOU QUIT, THAT WILL BE THE END OF TALK OF THE TOWN. I DOUBT IT. WHENEVER I THINK I'M INDISPENSIBLE, I STICK MY THUMB IN A GLASS OF WATER AND PULL IT OUT. IT LEAVES A FEW RIPPLEM AND THEN THE WATER SMOOTHES OUT.