

# Beverlee Brannigan



**It's Only Make Believe:** Brannigan with the late Conway Twitty during the CRS artist-attendee reception in the late '80s. She's only missed the seminar twice since 1979.

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You have to love every person you work with for the talents they bring.”



**Class Acts:** With Dick Clark in the United States Presidential Suite at an early '80s CRS. Brannigan went to Northwestern University with Clark's son, television producer Rac.



**Guitar Pic:** Brannigan is still hanging with the format's biggest stars, evidenced by this shot at Keith Urban's Wichita show last year.

## Encourage Meant At Every Level

*Country Radio*  
HALL OF FAME

One of only four women to be inducted into the Country Radio Hall of Fame, **Beverlee Brannigan** spent 20 years at KJYY/Des Moines, arriving as a 24-year-old first-time PD and tasked with launching the station from scratch. KJYY went on to become a steady ratings leader with a nationwide reputation for excellence. For the past decade, Brannigan has equaled or surpassed that success at Journal's KFDI/Wichita, which has consistently ranked No. 1 in the market. National honors during her tenure have included a CMA Station of the Year Award and two morning shows recognized as Personality of the Year. Brannigan doubles as cluster OM, and in 2010 she was elevated to the company-wide post of Dir./Country Programming.

**I've been interested in radio my whole life.** No lie, one of my very first memories is of the WNEW/New York jingle from when I was four and living in New Jersey. Why is that that taking up space in my head? I grew up north of Boston in a preppy little town called Topsfield. My memories are full of radio. You hear musicians saying there was always music in their house; for us it was the radio. Mother listened to WBZ/Boston, a Group Westinghouse station. Dad loved classic music, so that was always blaring.

**My first Country job was at WOKQ/Dover, NH.** I got a call one day out of the blue from JJ Jeffrey of the famous WRKO. He and "Doc" Bob Fuller had bought some radio stations, and 'OKQ was one of them. They were looking for part-time air talent, and he'd heard me on WNBZ. I didn't know a thing about country music.

**I fell hard for the music.** After college I did afternoons at WOKQ for two years and loved it. The owners, Fuller-Jeffrey Broadcasting, then bought KJYY/Des Moines, which was actually licensed to Ankeny, IA. They needed to run it on a shoestring. I was single, unattached and I could relocate. That was my first PD job, in 1981. I was 24.

**I didn't know enough to be scared or intimidated.** I packed my things in my car and drove across the United States to Iowa. Some of the biggest challenges were all the ones that just come with a startup. Plus, I was a woman. I also did middays and afternoons, but I'm not the greatest air personality. I had the benefit of working with some terrific people who gave me great coaching, like Rusty Walker, Joel Raab and JD Spangler.

**The big station at the time was KSO-AM/Des Moines.** KJYY went on to be a really great station with one of the greatest staffs I've ever managed, but believe me when I tell you I made plenty of mistakes. In 2001, Wilks came in and bought KJYY from Barnstable, and my services were "no longer required." I was two weeks' shy of 20 years there, but I saw it coming. I got up in the morning, and my husband had left me flowers. It was a hard day.

**Being out of work was a great centering time.** I'd meditate and pray and think about what I needed and wanted to do. It was a great time to step back and listen to radio differently. I learned how annoying some of the radio stuff is when you're listening as a listener. I learned that just because it happened on the morning show, not everyone heard it. I learned it's important to account for people who aren't listening when the cool thing you did happened.

**I'm a long-term thinker and relentless,** which may explain my longevity. When you have a long-term view, the bumps in the road are easier to get through without being too reactive. If I have any gift, I suppose it's being able to recognize what is spectacular about the different personalities I've worked with. They are way cooler than me. It's a matter of pointing out to people what they do well and encouraging them.

**You have to love the air talent.** That's the first thing. You have to love every person you work with for the talents they bring to you. After you love them, you hold them accountable for being great. Brian & Kelly [current KFDI morning hosts] would say,



"She gets us." [APD/middays] Carol Hughes would say, "She's hard, but has made me a better jock." Then they'd say, "Her desk is messy." I love a clean desk, but I have a great deal of difficulty keeping it that way. That's my dirty secret.

**I'm proud of the morning show talents** who have won the CMA Personality of the Year Awards at KFDI. The station won a CMA in 2003, and that was a highlight. The week I was called with the Hall of Fame news was the same week Brian and Kelly won the CMA Award. We also had a terrific book, and that was the most exciting news. The accolades are wonderful, but the thing you come to work and grind on every day is to move the ratings needle.

**I don't know what being in the Hall of Fame means yet.** I'm so flattered and extremely honored to be in that group of people. My first reaction is probably that I'm not worthy, but apparently some other people think I am, so I'll accept it graciously and hope in some way my being in there can encourage other people. Encouragement is probably most true to my heart. I want to encourage people to be great every day, to be part of the industry I love so much. Since I'm among so few women on that wall, perhaps it will encourage others. If that happens, I'll take that as a win. I have just been so fortunate to work with great companies, talented airstaffs and people who have made me look good. I really won the lottery when it came to that.

**Encouraging excellence is something we really need to continue doing.** When I look around broadcasting, what I'm seeing is making me sad. We're getting away from serving our local listeners. Broadcasting comes with a responsibility, whether it's Country or other formats. Bob Fuller, one of the first owners I worked for, instilled this. You have to serve the people listening, and I see instances where that isn't happening. For those who do continue to serve listeners and be good broadcasters, more recognition is probably in order. **CAC**