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Victor Sansone

Radio At Its Best

Over more than three decades with Capital Cities/ABC/Disney, Sansone held a variety of sales, management and market oversight roles. Among his charges were legendary Country properties KSCS/Dallas and WKHX/Atlanta. He steered the former to ratings and revenue triumphs including 21 consecutive rating periods at No. 1. That success was replicated with his 1997 move to Atlanta, where WKHX enjoyed a 10-year run of similar dominance. More than achievement, however, Sansone's fondest memories are of the people he worked with and the service they rendered to their communities.

Radio was never on my radar. I wasn't a guy that dreamed about it. I got in by accident – more because my dream of owning a jazz club in Syracuse in the '70s wasn't all it was cracked up to be. A friend who I bought radio time from for my club – Champagne Lenny Bilotti – threw me a life raft when it went bust. He said, "Come work for me selling radio." His sell line was, "Nobody knows what we do, we make better than average money, we get better seats to stuff than the mayor and we have trades for food at cool restaurants." Who wouldn't want to do that?

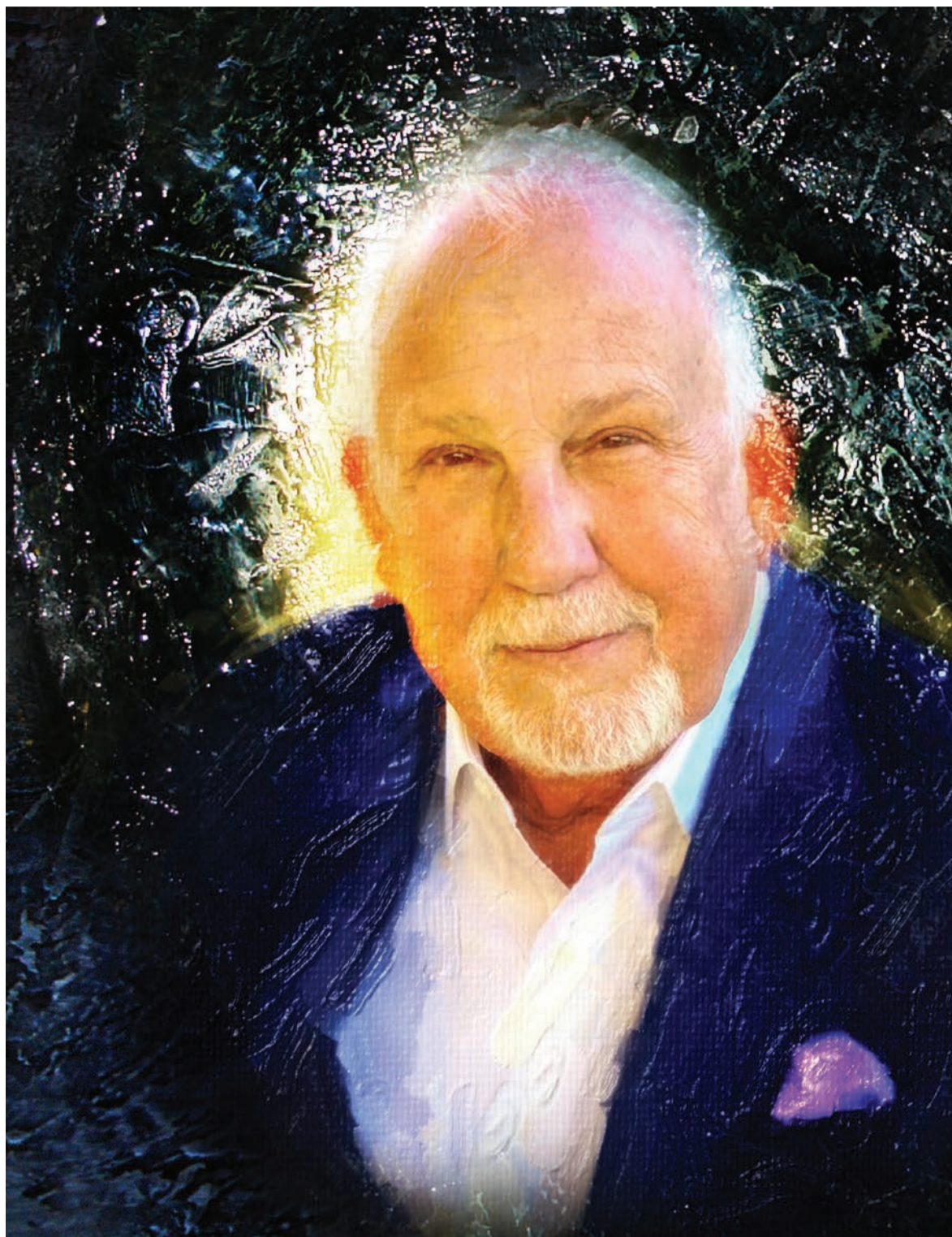
I didn't know WFBL-AM/Syracuse was less than average. Actually, I didn't know anything, I just sold it like he wanted me to. Salespeople left – I didn't know why, nor care – but I got more accounts because of it and did even better. I was on my way and stayed there for two or three years. Then I had a chance to leave Syracuse for a job in Buffalo with the legendary WKBW-AM and the even more legendary Norm Schrutt. This was real radio – Capital Cities – and a mentor who could only help us live better. That was 1977 and really began a 35-year love affair with CapCities, ABC and Disney.

In that life, I had the typical growth: slow. The company didn't promote throngs of people to management ranks, but I learned I'd found a good company that cared about me, where my kids went to school and how I lived. As long as I earned, I was in a good place.

We had a small pipeline – major markets, though – and the managers didn't turn over. That said a lot to me about how a good business runs. CapCities believed in the investment in people. "Hire good people; let them do their jobs." I got in that line and grew, rising to Operating President/GM of KSCS/Dallas, then back to WKHX & WYAY/Atlanta before returning to Texas. I retired 12 years ago.

Radio was at its best then. We had fun, paid our people and were part of the community in every sense. I loved using our resources to help worthy charities in our market and learned early on that if you love what other people love, they love you back. I found that to be a coincidental but meaningful part of how we won in our markets. We tried to be part of big things that elements of the community embraced. One by one, we became the face of many. I loved raising more than \$1 million the first year we did a *Country Cares for St. Jude* radiothon then making it part of our annual plan. Doing things that are client-driven are essential, but you can't pat yourself on the back because your beer client wants your help at an event that sort of qualifies as charity. You do them, but that's just commerce. The joy was making a difference; you felt it in the building.

Being major market, Country and big, those stations were of national significance. That led to an importance in the industry that relies on having a great working relationship with us. I got involved with the CMA when Joe Galante – speaking of legends – came to Atlanta and asked if I would serve on the



board. The company was great about it and felt it was important to have insight into decisions being made industry-wide that could affect our business. That experience lasted for years, and I served in leadership as CMA board President, then Chairman. Hopefully I contributed, because I certainly learned a lot. For



The Cowboy Way: With (l-r) Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones, Tracy Lawrence and fellow inductee Mark "Hawkeye" Louis.

instance, I developed a different empathy about the label/radio relationship, what to expect from artists when they come to your town and – even more – I learned about the power of the song. The times that made me smile the most in that era were in being part of great musical moments. Those invigorated me. **All in all, it was great run.** A life gone right. The

stations were successful – printing money. My time with the CMA was personally and professionally gratifying. And my family was whole and happy.

The "career impact moments" list is a big one. Radio was always in motion. But winning – at anything – lifts you up. Those long strings of owning the market and having the highest profit margins was what got you attention in our company, so that charged me when I had them. Getting a call from John Rich who wanted help building a statue at an army base in Georgia, and getting it done with a concert, charged not just me but our whole staff. Having Clarence Spalding play me "Believe" on the bus with Brooks & Dunn before it was released. Being on the planet to hear the evolution of great songs like "Live like You Were Dying," "The Dance" and "In Color" reminds you that you are more than a sales building. And having an 18-year-old girl, wide-eyed and full of energy, knock everyone out in your conference room before going on to become *the* Taylor Swift the rest of the world got to know – all are special moments.

Having spent 35 years around energetic, motivated and talented people who did dream to be in or on the radio makes me smile the most. Working around Danny Neaverth, Moby, Rhubarb Jones, Terry Dorsey, Cadillac Jack and all the dedicated people who make local radio a part of their communities – and all the artists I've watched grow into superstars – makes me think I did something more than make money for the company.

My old friend Lon Helton called me with the news. I laughed and told him, "I thought I'd have to die first! Out of sight, out of mind." But I'm genuinely grateful and happy there are people who remember me, how we worked together and also what we accomplished together. And they thought that was good enough for their vote!

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