



BOBBY KRAIG

Radio Leads To The Record Business



As a youngster, Bobby Kraig dreamed of a career in sports. When a spinal condition sidelined him, his father said, "You could always be a sports announcer," and his attention turned to radio. Having grown up on Twin Cities Top 40 radio, Kraig attended the highly-regarded Brown Institute to pursue a broadcast career, starting in Hayward, Wisconsin for \$125 a week. He advanced to PD gigs at

WONE/Dayton, WTHI/Terre Haute and KPLX/Dallas, where his skills were recognized with four Billboard PD of the Year honors and a CMA award.

Kraig then shifted successfully to the record side, helping build countless careers in national promotion at Arista/Nashville. When Arista was absorbed by Sony BMG/Nashville, he continued to lead the label's promotion efforts before retiring in 2006. Kraig sees himself as having been blessed with the good fortune of being able to learn from and work with numerous talented people. His career is truly one of the Country industry's most admirable success stories.



My first job was working at a St. Paul pirate station. One day I was playing a record and a guy kicked open the door, showed me a badge, knocked the needle off the turntable and told me I was going to serve time in jail. As it turned out, he wasn't a federal agent at all; he was the dad of the guy who owned the place! It was their idea of doing a funny joke. Now, I had just gotten my First Class FCC license and knew the penalty

he cited was incorrect, but I didn't know for sure and wasn't going to open my mouth until I heard the giggling from around the corner. That was the scariest moment I ever had in radio.

Another scary moment was when I got to WTHI/Terre Haute. I was on the air when we went from AOR to Country, and I got to play the first country record, which I think was Johnny

Russell's "The Baptism of Jesse Taylor." That turned out to be a real milestone for me, as I didn't know it was going to go on to become such a great radio station. But the college students were pretty upset when we made the switch. Our studio had a big picture window facing the street, and people could see the guy on the air. I wanted to close the curtains, but we weren't allowed to do it. Some guy came

a good job." So I was all depressed and thought maybe he was right.

But as a result of that meeting, a year later when Arista opened, Allen Butler called and asked if I had any interest in doing national promotion for them. I said, "Give me 24 hours." My wife was fine with it, and although my contract wasn't up, I went in to see Dan and told him what I wanted to do. And he said, "You know,

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Kraig's List: Following his retirement, Bobby Kraig and his family were invited to join the RCA Label Group for its annual CRS Boat extravaganza. Alan Jackson stopped the show so that he, Sony BMG Chairman Joe Galante and EVP Butch Waugh could present a special plaque to Kraig. Pictured (l-r) are Jackson, Galante and Waugh.

up, pointed a pistol at me and fired. It turned out to be a pellet gun, but it made a hole in the glass. I'm not sure it was the first hole, either, but it was the first for us as Country.

I kept up with Dan Halyburton during my early years, hoping one day he'd give me a job. He had taken WDGY/Minneapolis Country. At CRS one year - nearly all my jobs happened through CRS - he drew me aside and said, "I've got a friend who's looking for somebody to program KLIF/Dallas. They're going to take it Country." His name was Herb Allen, and at the time he was programming Susquehanna's sister station WFMS/Indianapolis. I met with Herb and two weeks later got a call from WFMS GM and RVP Larry Grogan. He said he'd been listening to WTHI, really liked it and wanted me to go meet the GM of KLIF and KPLX.

All the while he was talking about KPLX. So I said, "This job's for KLIF, isn't it?" He said, "No, actually we're looking for somebody now for KPLX." Well, that was the job I really wanted. So I went down there for a meeting - it was my first commercial airplane ride. Two weeks later I got a call from the GM's secretary. She said, "I'm supposed to set you up with an apartment." That's who gave me the news, and she later became my wife.

About six months later, Dan came on to be my boss, and I never would have had the success I've had were it not for him, as well as for others. I've been blessed with some great people as bosses. Circumstances have always been a friend of mine, and Susquehanna was a great company.

that doesn't surprise me. I knew it'd kind of end up here." Monetarily, it was a hard decision because I had to leave for less money. I knew very little about the record business other than how to pick up a phone and call somebody. But they taught me what I needed to know, and then I hopefully brought some things aboard that they could learn from. We had some great artists and I had a great staff. Those guys were superstars in my eyes.

I certainly owe a lot to Allen Butler and Tim DuBois for giving me a shot, and I owe an equal amount to Joe Galante and Butch Waugh. When they took on the label, they didn't have to take the promotion department. They trusted and believed in us and let me run the staff. I have so much respect for those guys.

One day I was driving with Bob Moody to the Vanderbilt Plaza Hotel from a CRB board event at Reba's house. My foot slipped off the brake and I hit one of those planters on the side of the building like an eight-ball in the side pocket. I thought, "Man, I just bought a hotel." The potting soil was up on the windshield like a plague of locusts. At first the hotel people thought I was drunk; thank God I wasn't. But as I'm sitting there, the bus with all the board members on it pulls in. Bob tried to get the concierge to find a neck brace for him to wear to the board meetings the next day. But I told everyone that Bob was the one driving, and I still do to this day.

The most emotional career moment for me was when I came to the realization I wouldn't be able to come back to work anymore. The lunch meeting with Butch Waugh to tell him was rough. But Joe Galante and the staff then invited me and my family on the RCA Boat in 2006, and Alan Jackson stopped the show that night so they could present me with a big plaque. That was the most special moment ever, and my biggest high.

Tim DuBois and I had a meeting talking about artist management. I wanted to get involved in the Country music industry in a capacity other than radio. I didn't know that it was going to be records. Tim said, "Mister, why would you want to do management? It's like winning the lottery. For God's sake, you've got a family, you've got



A-Team: The Arista crew gathers around (standing l-r): Butch Waugh, David Friedman, Dawn Ferris, Bryan Frasher, Teddi Bonadies, Jeri Cooper, Lesly Tyson, Skip Bishop, Joe Galante; and (seated, l-r) Suzette Tucker, Lori Hartigan, Kraig and Alicia Butler.