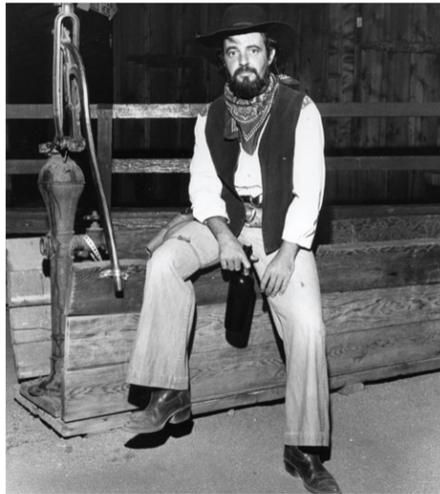




BOB MCKAY

Making Radio Larger Than Life



Country Radio Hall of Famer Bob McKay may be “retiring” at the end of this year, but don’t look for him in the bingo parlor. He’ll be sought after for his trailblazing knowledge of PPM, for keeping Beasley’s WXTU/Philadelphia on the cutting edge of contemporary Country radio since 2000, as well as prior triumphs at WBCS/Milwaukee, KCBQ/San Diego and WKIS/Miami, among others. Talk about work ethic: Bob lives by the words of his late mentor, John Bayliss, who told him, “Bobby, my boy, these paychecks don’t come gift-wrapped.” Tech-savvy, always evolving, community-driven and competitive, the East Liverpool, Ohio native personifies the modern-day programmer, even after more than 40 years in the business.



In high school I used to drive to the highest point in our area to listen to WKYC/Cleveland, WLS/Chicago, Philadelphia stations and, on a good night, WABC/New York. I loved everything about the magic coming out of that radio, but never envisioned doing it until **Armed Forces Radio** in 1965. I was stationed in Guam with the Air Force, decrypting messages as a communications specialist during the

In 1967, I was sent to Minot, ND, a place I didn’t know even existed. I applied for a job at the local AM Top 40 radio station, **KCJB**, and they told me to get my third-class FCC license. I did and got hired for \$1.25 an hour, but I would have worked for nothing. We had news, weather and farm reports, and between all of that we played rock and roll music.

Kevin Metheny replaced me at WKY, and through him I got to know is dad, **Terrell Metheny**, who ran WBCS/Milwaukee. I always had a great fondness and appreciation for Country. I had just never done it, as I had come up through the apex of so much great popular music. It was now 1978, and disco was coming on, and I wasn’t seeing much future doing that. But Terrell had the same concerns anybody

In 1992, Hurricane Andrew wiped out Dade County; it looked like a war zone. Within two weeks, we put together a concert at the Miami Arena with all the proceeds benefiting the Red Cross. **Sawyer Brown, Alabama, Pam Tillis, Mark Chesnutt, Randy Travis** and others couldn’t say yes fast enough. **Alabama**, who were in Colorado Springs for a gig that night, chartered a plane, flew to Miami, opened the

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Vietnam War. AFR was great because you experienced all the different music formats, learned to read PSAs and re-enlistment promos; you learned about everything. That’s when I fell in love with radio and never looked back.

I became totally consumed by the radio business and, after a year doing 7-midnight, I answered an ad for the 9pm-midnight shift at **WKY/Oklahoma City**. I got the job, and for someone with only a year’s experience, that was really a monster leap at the time.

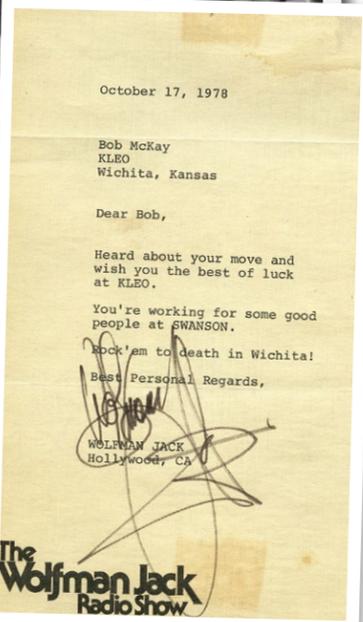
would: “Are you sure you really want this?” I said, “Absolutely. I want to experience this, I want to make this work and I want to really work for you.” It was Terrell who gave me my first entrée into Country.

show, did an hour and 10 minutes, and then flew back – all at their own expense. Everyone pulled together for free – the city, the police, the security, the artists – and we raised about \$150,000. It was just amazing, and you can’t ever forget that.



The Evolution-ary PD: Bob McKay (third from left) gets a little lovin’, touchin’, squeezin’ from his friends in Journey on their bus in 1977. Bob was awarded a platinum album for helping break the San Francisco group nationwide.

Got Any Extra TV Dinners? When Bob joined Swanson’s KLEO/Wichita as PD in ‘78, he received this personal note from one of the biggest names in the business.



WKY PD **Danny Williams** changed my name to **Tripp Summers**; I became “The Night Tripper.” About 30 years later, I’m backstage at a **Garth Brooks** concert in Miami. One of the record guys said, “You need to tell Garth you were The Night Tripper at WKY. I think he might remember you.” So I said to Garth, “I don’t think this means anything, but back in 1969 and 1970 I was The Night Tripper on WKY in Oklahoma City.” He said, “You’re kidding me! You’re The Night Tripper? Tripp Summers?” I said, “Yeah, man.” He gave me a big hug, a high-five, then another hug, and said he used to listen to us every night with his little earpiece on his transistor radio when he was eight years old. That moment made me feel 10,000 feet high.

I enjoyed going up against market-dominant KSON/San Diego while at KCBQ because I had a great airstaff: **Charlie & Harrigan, Bill Moffat, Shotgun Tom Kelly, Ed Chandler** and **Bozo** from Miami. We gave KSON all they could handle, and beat them three out of four books.

Lon Helton, Charlie Cook, Rusty Walker – we all went to school on **Bob Pittman**, as what he did at **WMAQ/Chicago** in the mid-’70s was pretty phenomenal. Most of us were in contemporary radio, and back then, Country radio was really lazy, kind of like a *Hee Haw* station. At different points in time, we all put structure on Country radio with bigger-than-life promotions and promos.

Those tighter, consistent formatics and **Bill Drake** philosophies came right from the bedrock of Top 40. Executing the Country format at KCBQ with those personalities, who were predisposed with those instincts anyway, made it a lot better and much easier.

Marc and Greg Oswald were volunteer firemen in San Diego, and they first went to KSON with a concert promotion but couldn’t get past the receptionist. Then they came to us. We didn’t really have to give these guys the time of day, but something about them was good; you could feel that vibe. We agreed they’d take all the risk on paying talent, and we’d give the promotional support. We put together a concert on the U.S.S. Kitty Hawk with **Hank, Jr.**, and [for Marc and Greg], the rest is history.

Our 2001 WXTU Chili Cook-off took place right after 9/11, on October 4, and the lineup was as good as it gets: **Keith Urban, Montgomery Gentry, Phil Vassar, Brooks & Dunn** and **Martina McBride**. Normally, when an act finishes performing, they do a meet-and-greet, take some pictures and leave. But I asked everybody if they’d stay to the end because we were going to have onstage three firemen coming down from New York, plus five from Philadelphia who were there on 9/11. The artists didn’t even bat an eye; they all agreed to stay all day. By the end of Brooks & Dunn’s second encore, the place was going crazy. And then, right at sunset, **Martina** walked out and starts to sing “God Bless America” a capella. **Montgomery Gentry** came out, then **Phil Vassar**, and then they all came out, singing in unison. **Kix** jumped into the audience with the flag, with people holding him up, and he then was returned to the stage with the flag and the firemen. It was magic, absolutely exquisite and literally brought tears to your eyes. It was probably the best moment of my career.

Speechless, stunned and exhilarated. Those are the emotions I ran through when I was told I was going into the Country Radio Hall of Fame. I still can’t kind of believe it. I’ve had a really wonderful career, made great friendships, worked for great companies and am very fortunate. The biggest thing is that our kids are well adjusted, despite all the moving around that we did. I couldn’t be happier. **CAC**