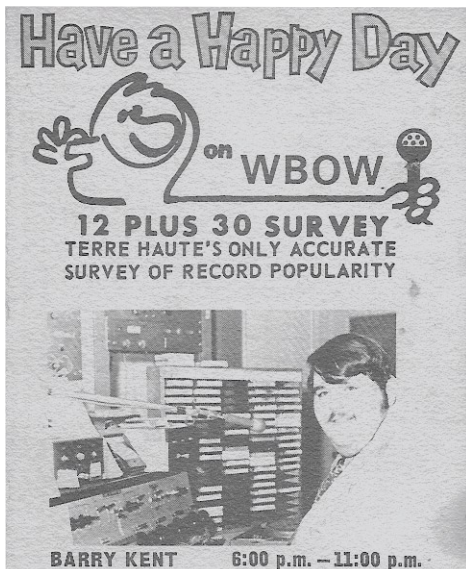


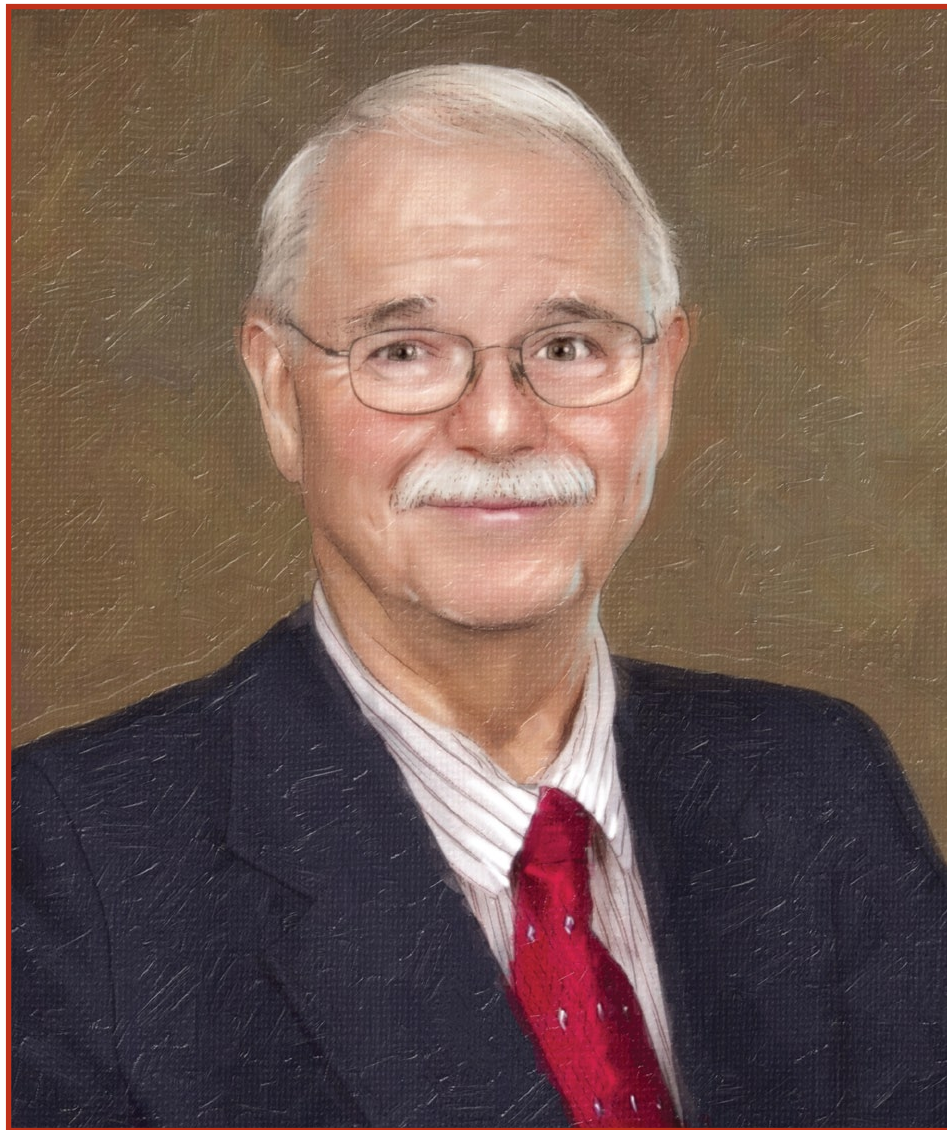


# BARRY KENT

## There's No Place Like Home



*Terre Haute, IN was more than a great town for Barry Kent to start his career, it's also where he's spent his entire 42 years in the business. For the last 29, Kent's been at Emmis' market-dominant Country WTHI, which he has consistently led to 20+ shares. As OM for WTHI and Classic Rock WWVR, Kent appreciates what hometown stations can mean for a community. He also recognizes the opportunities they gave to someone in love with radio since childhood, including the chance to meet his favorite listener, his wife Kelly, while spinning Top 40 hits at crosstown WBOW as a young "Rockin' Barry Kent."*



**When I was getting ready for school**, my mother always used to turn on the Top 40 station, which had a block of Country from 4-6am. People used to give me radios, and many had shortwave bands. That led to a fascination with ham radio, and I got my license at 14. I tried to see how far away I could pick up AM stations, listening to Bill Mack at WBAP/Dallas and other legendary jocks at WABC/New York and all the Chicago stations. I also would

changing 45s on the air. His wife just let it run all day long while she did housework.

**The phone rang constantly** during my 7pm-midnight shift at Top 40 WBOW back in 1970; we were *the* station in town. You get to talking to the girls, "Hi, who are you? What do you look like?" At personal appearances and remotes, it was like, "Hey, come back to the station and we'll cut an audition tape.

offered me the job, but I had a no-compete contract with WBOW. Fortunately, I was able to talk my way out of it. I think the station's new GM thought I didn't have a chance to get another job here in town, let alone go to the direct AM competitor. Being local helped me get the job at WTHI, as Dave told me he was tired of hiring somebody from out of town who would leave after a few months. So I showed him that my non-compete had been canceled,

lot, and the families come to get them. Seeing the looks in the eyes of these parents, knowing that their kid's going to get a new bike for Christmas, is priceless. The "thank yous" are, too. The power of this station and the reach we have is scary sometimes.

**We staged our first appreciation concert** in the '80s; I think it was TG Sheppard. We'd presented several country concerts at the

# “ THE POWER OF THIS STATION AND THE REACH WE HAVE IS SCARY SOMETIMES. ”

listen to the *Grand Ole Opry* and Grant Turner announcing, thinking, "This is too cool." How radio worked was just magic to me.

**By high school, I knew I was going to be in radio** somehow. My mom thought it was a bit of a pipe dream, but she helped me buy some of my first ham radio equipment. Our mailman was a ham radio operator, and found out that I was, too. He worked part-time at then-Gospel WWVR, and told me they were looking for an evening announcer and board operator. He helped me study for my FCC Third Class license and even drove me to Indianapolis to take the test. I passed and got the job! My first day, I was scared to death. The guy I relieved, Dick Lee, had been in radio for years and had a voice just out of this world. He gave me a run-through on taking the transmitter readings, then said, "Well, I'll see ya!" and walked out the door. But I had everything laid out and don't think I had much dead air. It paid \$1.25 an hour, enough for the tank of gas to get me there every day. We own that station now; it's right across the hall.

**In the summer of '69**, I got a job doing mornings at WPFM, named after the owner/engineer Paul Ford, who built his Country FM station on his back porch. The tower was in a field behind his house and the studio and transmitter were in his backyard. To play the 45s, there was one automatic Garrard turntable/changer. He said, "Just take some of those songs and put 'em on the changer, and talk until the needle sets down, and then turn the pot up and let the music play. When the song is over, just pot it down and talk until the next record drops." At home, you could hear the record changer

Let's go into the production room. I'll show you the ropes." It's one way to meet the girls, that's for sure. But this one girl kept calling me every night. She had a nice voice, so I decided, "Hey, it's time we meet each other." Kelly was a teenager, and I wasn't much older than she was. I met her one evening outside her home, and we walked, sat, talked for awhile and have been talking ever since. We were married in 1974.

**After starting out at \$85 a week**, I became PD at WBOW-AM & FM in 1975 and also did afternoons. In 1982 the stations changed ownership and management, and for some reason the new GM didn't like me. I heard there was a PD opening at WTHI, where [Country Radio Hall of Famer] Bobby Kraig had once been PD, as had [former Lyric Street VP] Dale Turner. Then-GM Dave Liston



**In It For Radio:** As many new artists do each year at CRS, newcomer Shania Twain takes time to hang with WTHI's Barry Kent.

started the next day, and have been coming into this building ever since.

**WTHI was the AM Country leader**, with a fledging FM Country station that had been Easy Listening. We took the AM Oldies and I started on the FM, doing afternoons. The building was constructed in 1890, and the TV station took priority, so the FM had been pretty neglected. The control board, on a table held up by a 2x4 under the leg, had wires hanging underneath, and I was afraid to put my legs there for fear of being electrocuted. But I knew the potential was there because Country was hot. Outlying stations were pulling ratings, and we took off running pretty quickly.

**I've always tried to be a leader musically**, and make sure the jock talks up the fact that this is a new song or artist. I will start a new song in evenings and weekends, but if it gets some requests and sounds good on-air, we'll move it into a better rotation real quick. I remember playing the Judds real early. I was at the Nashville Palace during CRS, when RCA's Dale Turner came over and said, "Hey, I want you to meet our latest act, the Judds." Here were Naomi and Wynonna in long, blue sequined dresses. Wow. As soon as I got back to the station, I listened and put 'em on.

**Community service is very important** to me. An engineering school here volunteers to put bicycles together for Toys For Tots each year, and this time we raised enough money to buy 450 bikes. The students get together on a Saturday with 20-30 assembly lines, having a ball. Then we line the bikes up on the parking

10,000-seat Indiana State University's arena over the years, but this time we decided to do our own. People lined up around the corner to pick up free tickets during live broadcasts at sponsor locations. The night of the show, you could look into the faces of people walking around as if, "Wow. I've never been to anything like this before." I realized these were people who couldn't afford the \$15 to go to a concert. We had a bunch of new people who'd never seen a show, and we were their ticket. Pretty cool.

**I can walk into the Kroger** and the checkout person will say, "Hey, Barry, I heard you on the air this morning." It embarrasses my younger son to death. Somebody will stop us at Wal-Mart and say, "Hey, how you doin'?" and want to talk. And my son will say, "Dad, who was that?" I'll reply, "I don't know, but he's a listener and we gotta treat 'em nice." Many listeners remember when our first child was born or heard me talk about the car accident when I hit the deer. It's part of what keeps you here. Years ago, I had aspirations to work at WLS/Chicago or WABC or WSM/Nashville, but as you put roots down, they're harder to pull up. I feel blessed to be able to do something I love in my hometown, to work with good companies and such great people.

**When I first got interested in radio**, I never really thought about being on the air, and had no inkling that I'd ever be in any kind of Hall of Fame. I feel very humble, I tell you. I was joking with the people here, saying, "Well, *there's* another thing I can mark off my bucket list." The fact is, it pretty much *is* the bucket list. **CAC**