



LEE ROGERS

He's Got Your "Six"



Growing up on a small farm in rural Washington State, Lee Rogers once walked four miles just to see his favorite DJ, the now legendary Pat O'Day, do a remote. He served in Vietnam, and worked his way up from a northern Minnesota daytimer to eventually program top stations in Seattle, Minneapolis, San Diego and Jacksonville before taking the reins at KUPL/Portland, where he also held

down mornings from 1995 through 2009. A former touring bandleader and passionate team defender, Rogers has the uncanny ability to connect with the country life-group and unify everyone around him.



When I was around 21, a guy in our Air Force barracks in Duluth, MN did a weekend show at Top 40 station there, and he invited me to sit in the studio with him. He gave me AP and commercial copy to take back to the barracks, and he'd critique me after I'd sit with a little Teac reel-to-reel and phonograph, talking over the intros, reading the copy. I had just been married and was looking for a place to live. A guy who owned the trailer we found happened to be GM at nearby 250-watt daytimer WKLK/Cloquet. When I went to see him about the place, he was on the air. I went in the studio, and said,

they heated the building in the wintertime. I did the morning show, and froze my butt off.

KBFW/Bellingham, WA was owned by Fred Danz, who owned almost every drive-in movie theater from southern California to northern Washington. He built a new drive-in theater and put our station on the second floor with the projection equipment. Fred added a couch, and we got to see all the movies for free.

I've played music all my life, but always considered myself more of a businessman than a musician. When I put bands together, I did

You gain a P1 listener forever the moment they think, "Wow. That person is just like me." And you can only do that by sharing who you are. The morning of 9/11, I was on the air at KUPL, playing Brooks & Dunn's "Only In America" when we got the AP word of the first plane hitting the World Trade Center. I cried on the air. I immediately knew it was terrorists, got on the air and said, "You dirty little cowards. Put on a damn uniform and stand up and fight like a man." I called the local Army recruiting office live on the air and volunteered. Of course, I was almost 60

great programming was. But he couldn't help himself and started to micro-manage me. I walked into his office and threw my keys on his desk and said, "If you want to program the station, here are the keys to my office. If you don't, then let me do my job. That's what you hired me for." And we had a mutual respect for one another from that day on.

One rainy night we were doing a big KRPM/Seattle event at the Riverside Inn, and Jaye Albright was PD at KMPS. I had our flyers in plastic sandwich bags and I was going out to put them on the



EVERY TALENT WORKING FOR ME KNEW I WOULD FIGHT FOR THEM FOR EVERYTHING I COULD GET.



"I've always wanted to do that." He said, "Really? Sit down!" It turned out he was, as GM, on the air from 6am-11pm every day. He was willing to do anything to get relief, and started showing me how to run the board. I got \$50 a week and all the records I could eat, and knew right then that radio was all I ever wanted to do.

I moved back to Washington and worked at daytimer KBAM/Longview. The owner was so cheap that he built a hood over the 5-kw transmitter, put a fan in it, and that was how



Heavy Metal: In recognition for regularly attending the funerals of Portland soldiers, paying homage to them on-air at KUPL and playing the National Anthem daily, Vietnam veteran Lee Rogers was presented with the Veterans of Oregon Honorable Service Medal.

all the booking, paid everybody and bought all the equipment. Because I was on the radio at the same time, I was able to cross-promote my radio and band jobs and always had the best-paid bands in town. I played mostly rhythm guitar and bass, but if my drummer needed to throw up, I could play drums long enough for him to get outside and come back.

While at KMPS around 1976, the Jack Roberts Agency in Seattle hired my band, Lee Rogers & Stampede Pass, to back several *Grand Ole Opry* stars on tour through the Northwest and Canada. For two weeks, I traveled with Webb Pierce, Minnie Pearl, Don Gibson, Hank Snow and others. One night we were at a gym in Yakima, changing clothes for a show nearby. Don told me he wrote "Oh, Lonesome Me" and "I Can't Stop Loving You" in the same day within a couple of hours. I said, "Dude, you must have been on a bumper that day." We sat in the shower room, watching Merle Travis pick with my guitar player while Don sang some of the great songs he'd written and recorded. Minnie Pearl used to introduce my band each night, and saved me for last. She'd say, "And now, I want to introduce you to the bandleader. He's such a handsome man." I had a beard at the time. She said, "When I first met Lee, he asked me, 'Minnie, do you mind kissing a man with a beard?' I told him, 'Heck no, I never mind trompin' through a little brush to get to a picnic.'"

years old. So I formed "Rogers' Rangers." I said, "This is for old guys like me who want to, but can't. All you need is to have the desire to fight." We gathered as a group a few times, and I still hear from some of them today. Each morning, I'd say, "Never forget 9/11. We're proud to be Americans" and play the National Anthem. I did that every day at 7am until the day I left Dec. 18, 2009.

At every personal appearance, pre-concert party or station event, I would shake hands and thank every person who would make the effort to come out. To win the street battle against my competitor, I wanted every P1, P2 or P3 to the country life-group to feel that my station wanted their business more than the other guy. Our people were not allowed to stand behind a table and wait for someone to come up. It was their job to get out from behind and work the front. And those P2s and P3s became P1s to the station or that personality instantly.

Whenever I'd fly in for a job interview, I could walk in the station and tell within 15 minutes whether there was any magic. The first thing I ever set out to do at a station was to create camaraderie and that magic in the hallways because I felt that happiness could be heard on the air.

KEEY/Minneapolis GM Mick Anselmo hired me to fix the station, and knew what

windshields of every car in the parking lot. I get outside, and see a doggone KMPS flyer under the windshield of the first car! I'm running around putting KRPM flyers on, and she's following right behind, taking mine off and putting theirs on, and I'm doing the same thing. But there was no animosity because we respected each other's competitiveness. That made us better and became a cornerstone of our friendship.

I'd take a bullet for Jaye Albright, Charlie Cook, Lon Helton, and many others. That's one of the qualities that I looked for in my employees and wanted to display to them: "This is a guy I would follow out of the trenches." If we were under fire in a trench, and a guy jumped up and said, "Let's go," I'd follow him because he would take the bullet first. And that's what I mean by saying I'd always attend station functions – pumpin' paws and slappin' backs – because that's what I'd ask of my talent.

As we used to say in Vietnam, the leader is in the 12 o'clock position, and the guy right behind is at six o'clock. So the guy who had your back "had your six." I believed that every talent working for me knew in their hearts that when I sat down in front of the GM at renewal or review time I would fight for them for everything I could get. You have to stand up for your station and employees. You have to have their six. **CAC**