



# MIKE HAMMOND

## An Inner Sense Of Excellence



**CMA, ACM, CRS, Marconi, Edward R. Murrow, Associated Press – you name the award, WIVK/Knoxville has earned it. While Director/Operations & PD Mike Hammond will defer these accolades to his talented team, he deserves much of the credit for the honors and the 20-share ratings WIVK consistently generates from its top personalities, distinguished news coverage and tireless community service including being one of the first St. Jude supporters. The Country music industry also owes a tremendous debt to Mike as a supporter of new artists. These are just a few reasons why**

**the 30-year station veteran has helped keep WIVK No. 1 for 106 straight weeks – a distinguished individual track record that’s unlikely to ever be matched.**

I grew up on a farm way back in the mountains ... an original Tennessee hillbilly. Our family would gather around to listen to the *Grand Ole Opry* on Saturday nights, and so I became aware of Country music at a very young age. My grandmother had always wanted to go to the Opry, but she and my grandfather never got their driver’s licenses

on the radio as a teenager is that you never had to worry about getting a date. I earned \$1.60 an hour, and to get a paycheck was one of the grandest things.

I came to the University of Tennessee, decided broadcasting would be my degree, and started working in Knoxville radio part-time before

department. We had gotten some two-way equipment, and tornadoes came through, destroying a town about 45 minutes away. We drove down there to do some interviews, and police directed us to a church where people had gone. Down in the basement there were probably 150 people and you could hear a pin drop. They were huddled around a radio,

and [current GM] Ed Brantley. But I learned that as long as I was helping them reach their goals, rather than them helping me reach mine, it would work. And alcohol helped! (Laughs). We have a tight bond here, and my philosophy has always been letting them be themselves while providing whatever coaching and training I can. Instead



“ THE PD SHOWED ME THE CONTROL BOARD THAT FIRST DAY AND SAID, ‘I’M GOING TO GO GET BREAKFAST. GOOD LUCK!’ ”

and it was a long, two-lane road to Nashville in those days. When I worked at WKDF/ Nashville back in the early ‘70s, I had the chance to take them. For my grandparents to be able to see Roy Acuff, Minnie Pearl, Porter Wagoner and all the people they’d heard all those years was really special.

**My sights were set on being a lawyer;** I didn’t want to do farm work the rest of my life. And I never thought I would get into radio. But I was in 4-H, and at 15 got involved in speech contests and oratorical things through that and the Optimists Club. The manager of local AM daytimer WMCH/Churchill, TN heard me one day. She came up and said, “I was wondering if you had ever thought about being on the radio.” I said, “Well, no, I haven’t.” She said, “I have a weekend slot open if you’d be interested.” I said, “OK,” went down there and she hired me!

**The PD showed me the control board that first day and said,** “I’m going to go get breakfast. Good luck!” And then he left. I was sitting there by myself; there was a lot of dead air that day. But I learned the board quickly, and when he came back I asked him, “Why did you leave me? I didn’t know what I was doing. I know it sounded awful.” He said, “Well, that’s the only way you learn; you gotta do it. I knew if I stayed here with you, you’d rely on me, but I’ll bet you know how to do the board now.” I’d work after school until sign-off, playing the Supremes, Beach Boys, Rolling Stones and the Beatles. One of the great things about being

WIVK. James Dick was the owner at WIVK, and he gave me an opportunity to grow, which means I made a lot of mistakes. My first job was to create a news department. I told Mr. Dick I didn’t know anything about it, and he said, “Well, we’ll teach you.” Sure enough, they did.

**A life-changing thing happened** to me in 1974, just after we started the news



**Hammond It Up:** As Mike Hammond likes to say, “back when I had hair” (top left), here’s the portrait of the broadcaster as a young man” on-air at WIVK. In addition to programming WIVK, Hammond has served many years as the courtside announcer for UT Lady Vols basketball, partly for fun and also out of his respect for one of his “standard of excellence” influences, Hall of Fame coach Pat Summit (right). East Tennessee native Kenny Chesney owes a lot of his success to Hammond and WIVK, and brought him a plaque (above) commemorating his sales success.

listening to that person talk about what had happened. I was thinking, “The only thing these people have in order to know what’s going on outside this building is the guy on that radio.” Those people were scared to death; they didn’t know if they had anything left. I knew then I had an important job. I left that building with a renewed sense of commitment about what we owe to our community.

**My life changed again** in 1980 when Mr. Dick came to me and said, “I want you to be my program director.” I said, “Well, I’ve never been a PD.” And again, he told me, “We’ll teach you.” Mr. Dick sensed in me a love, energy and passion for wanting to get it done right because I really believe in a standard of excellence. There also was a creativity I felt I could bring to the job, and our news department had done well. I’m just thankful he gave me the opportunity.

**I was very young and dealing with a seasoned airstaff** including Claude Tomlinson, [former GM] Bobby Denton



of spending time in front of a computer, spend it in front of your staff. I genuinely enjoy people, and if I can help someone win an award, be successful or get their ratings bonus, that really excites me because I see the hard work and dedication they put in off the air. Once I hang it up here, I really would like to teach.

**Helping arrange Neyland Stadium** for Kenny Chesney back in ‘03 was probably the most special time for me, and I know it was for him. Kenny had come by and told me one of his dreams was to play there. I asked him, “If I can help, will you do it?” Kenny said, “Man, you work it out, I’ll play.” I got a commitment from the city to shut down roads around the stadium for a street party. A university presentation was made, and although a stadium show had not happened since Michael Jackson in 1983, UT Athletic Director Doug Dickey said, “Let’s do it!” I thought I was going to wet my pants. Kenny brought in Keith Urban, Rascal Flatts and Brooks & Dunn, and the rest is history. Backstage, I was told Kenny wanted me to introduce him. I said, “I’ve got our air talent here for that.” They said, “No, he wants you.” Oh, my gosh, there’s 60,000 people out there. But I went out there, and said, “Folks, it’s time for Kenny Chesney!” and I mean, it erupted.

**I did not expect to be inducted.** When R.J. Curtis called to tell me, I got choked up; it was about 30 seconds before I could even talk. This means everything to me ... to have your peers say you should be recognized with the people on that wall – a little boy from Churchill, Tennessee – it’s unbelievable. **CAC**