

Community Station To Go On-the-Air

By JOE KENNEDY
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The house which stands at 825 Patterson Avenue in Southwest Roanoke appears little different from the others on the block, at least when viewed from the curb.

But within, the home of Rich and Patty Dinsmore is indeed unique. It is about to become the headquarters of Roanoke Free Radio, an experiment in noncommercial, nonprofit broadcasting due to occur in early March at 90.1 on the FM dial.

Both of the Dinsmores are commercial radio veterans, she having worked in the sales side and he having held down disc jockey slots for almost 12 years.

Rich, 28, goes by the air name of Rich Randall, familiar until last fall to listeners of WROV, Roanoke's Top 40 AM station, and heard now by listeners of WPRV-FM.

Like many others infected by the radio bug, they had dreamed for four years of owning and operating a station, and of imprinting it with a personality of its own.

Then, last November, "We sat down and decided to do it," with the intention, not of making money at it, but of serving the public, improving their airwaves (in their view) and bringing together diverse elements of the Roanoke community.

They formed the nonprofit Corporation for Community Broadcasting. They scoured about and came up with an offer of some low-priced, second-hand transmitting equipment, and they formulated a financing plan.

They also applied to the Federal Communications Commission for a license to broadcast under the aegis of WRFB at a power of 10 watts, which should carry their offerings to FM receivers in the Roanoke-Salem-Vinton area.

And what will their offerings be? Unique, to say the least.

Dinsmore begins by saying, "This is a community radio station, owned and operated by the community."

That means the station will seek funds from the public in the form of donations or subscriptions costing \$12 per year.

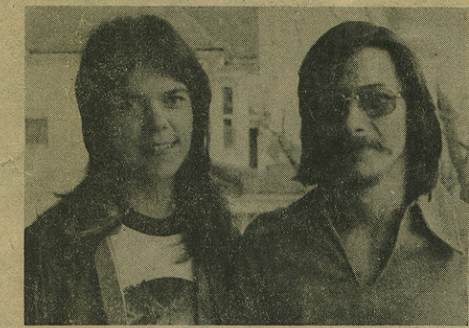
Subscription holders will receive a monthly program guide, a newsletter, financial statement and a radio station survey. In addition, they will be invited to attend twice-yearly corporate meetings, where their suggestions will be solicited for all aspects of the station's operation.

But Dinsmore says that is not the only time their assistance will be sought. He says the station is designed to reflect the tastes and talents of the Roanoke Valley's population, and so whatever its citizens have to offer—be it records, minidramas, poems or free time—will eagerly be accepted and, he says, put to good use.

Already, he says, 10 citizens have volunteered to man the microphone at different times during the week, when they will present music of their own—and, it is hoped, of others—preference.

At first, Dinsmore's description makes the station sound much like the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, with which WYWR-FM, at Virginia Western Community College, is affiliated.

He says the difference lies in the amount of



Times Photo

Pat and Richard Dinsmore Are Ready To Begin Work in Their Home

public service programming that station is able to present, and the way it is presented.

Roanoke Free Radio, he says, is hoping to expand public service information in an entertaining way—by blending it with music, telephone calls, or interviews.

Already, some syndicated religious programs on commercial radio consist of rules of right living for the young, interspersed with attention-holding popular songs. In one way, at least, the future WRFB will resemble them.

An example of the service to be rendered goes like this: Suppose, he says, some 20 percent of people in the Roanoke Valley are unable to afford regular health care, and a smaller percentage can afford no care at all.

The radio station might research the Free Clinic, possibly unknown to many of the poor, and present its findings, with interviews, over the air.

To keep things interesting for all listeners, it would blend the facts with music drawn from all facets of the recording business.

And that's not all, Dinsmore says the station has hopes of presenting live entertainment in the form of unpaid singers and radio actors in weekly segments.

Even a family slot, at 7 p.m. during the week, will be set aside in the hope that other families will listen in. The first 15 minutes will consist of the day's activities as discussed by himself, Pat and their young children. The second 15 minutes will be devoted to stories for the young.

The idea was derived from the Dinsmores' regular family routine.

Then there is the musical slate, the mainstay of most any radio station, commercial or not.

"We may offer just about anything that's ever been recorded, if that's what people want to hear," Dinsmore says, be it blues, jazz, classical or progressive rock. On an average day, it will probably be all of that, and more.

"It is a common misconception of people in

radio that they hear on the radio is what the people want," says Dinsmore, no fan of the Top 40 approach.

In his view, the truth of the matter is, "Whoever doesn't like what's on the radio has no station to put their kind of music on. They sit at home and listen to the stereo, and buy their own records."

Roanoke Free Radio hopes to become their station of choice.

All of this sounds well and good, but it leaves unexplained the how of the matter. Putting a radio station together is a massive (not to say expensive) undertaking, is it not?

Not necessarily, Dinsmore says. In fact, he figures that at 10 watts, the effort could continue for a year with hardly any subscribers, so long as he holds his job with WPRV. Equipment is the major expense, and on Tuesday, a music festival will be held at the Jefferson High School auditorium to buy the equipment they need.

The concert will begin at 7:30 p.m., and will carry a \$2 admission charge. It will consist of benefit performances by such area musicians as the Grievous Angels, blues singer Vince Scree-

ney, the Sixx River Band and Southland Bluegrass.

In short, it will be an evening of country, blues and jazz, with the goal of raising \$500 to buy the old transmitter, antenna, tower, the compressor and limiter from the Washington and Lee University station.

New equipment would cost \$3,000, Dinsmore says, so the station is getting itself a bargain. Another bargain was the control board, set up on the second floor of the house. It was donated by Pat Garrett, the Cave Spring High School student who has been the station's

Plans call for the money to be raised, equipment to be purchased and put in working order, and the first broadcast to occur on an evening around March 1.

Because the FCC license will not have been issued by then, the maiden voyage, and those which immediately follow, will be powered by only one watt, as allowed in the FCC rules. It will cover the Southwest Roanoke area and not much else.

Once the license is issued, the power will go up to 10 watts, and eventually, Dinsmore says, he would like to see it reach 1,000 watts.

A level higher than that becomes economically unfeasible because of the technical staff required, he says.

In addition to the programming outlined above, there will be news broadcasts covering national, international and "alternative" events, and there could conceivably be almost anything else to listen to.

"I all sounds slightly like a dream," says Dinsmore freely admit that merely putting on that initial broadcast will fulfill that four-year-old dream of theirs.

But he thinks music and people have changed in recent years, and that commercial radio has been slow to adjust. And he thinks the listening audience—not a huge one, he admits—is there, waiting to hear what it likes.

"Most people, particularly those between 18 and 25, have become very open-minded to all kinds of music," he says. He notes that Wayne Jennings in no way suffers from his country music fame, and that the best rock musicians appeal more to a more than just the teen-aged crowd.

"There's a whole new area of music opening up between Grand Funk and Wayne Jennings," he says, and by hitting that group, and by aiming at the specialized fields (classical, jazz, blues), too, he and his cohorts hope to make Roanoke Free Radio an ongoing success.