

WROV

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"Sleeping until 10 o'clock in the morning is not unappealing."

Jacobson, a former rock singer, joined WROV in 1979 as a newsman and later switched to being a DJ.

"We're going to go to movies and go to events and go to clubs and talk about it on the radio," said Jacobson. "It's really not a talk show. It's a fun show. The bottom line is we're going to have fun, and I think having fun is contagious."

Jacobson said WROV will aim itself toward "the adult who's intelligent and who has a sense of humor, who likes music and who wants to know what's going on." There will be lots of input from listeners via telephone, he said, and there will be occasional visitors to the studio.

"It's going to fill a void in the market," he said. "I hope we turn the valley upside down. We're going to kick some tush."

A new announcer will be brought in to replace Jacobson in the evening. In the meantime, the shift is being covered by Bill Young. Though principally responsible for WROV's promotion and public relations, Young is an experienced DJ and has often substituted at the microphone since joining the station last year.

During the 1960s and 1970s, WROV dominated the teen audience in the Roanoke Valley. That changed when WXLK-FM (K-92) exploded onto the air with the first moments of 1980.

Levine said WROV took the chance to stop concentrating on the teen market and to be perceived for the first time as an adult station. It changed its musical format accordingly, de-emphasized personalities, beefed up its credentials as a source of news and information and began promoting itself as "The Station You've Grown up With."

"We had something different for awhile," said Levine. "Then everybody started doing the same thing. They all want the same audience."

That's the "adult contemporary" audience, which is composed roughly of listeners between 25 and 49. They're plentiful and they're beloved by advertisers.

At the moment, WROV, WFIR-AM and WSLQ ("Magic 99") all call themselves adult contemporary stations and all have a piece of the audience. There is further audience overlap with country music stations because of the crossover phenomenon in popular music.

Even the so-called "beautiful music" stations are getting into the act, said Levine. They play orchestral arrangements of pop tunes.

Levine blamed the audience fragmentation for the recent decline in WROV's average quarter-hour share of all listeners ages 12 and up. In that broad category, the station dropped from fourth to sixth in the last Arbitron report.

In the cumulative ratings, which count those who're sampling the station long enough to hear a song or pick up a piece of information but not long enough to qualify as a quarter-hour listener, Levine said WROV is consistently strong.

"We have no problem attracting listeners," said Levine. "What we want to do is satisfy more people so they'll keep listening."

The way to do that, he decided, is to devise a program format that's perceptively different but which continues to exploit proven strengths.

The result will go on display Wednesday. What's different is the emphasis on fun and entertainment. What's proven, said Levine, is the appeal of station personalities like O'Brady and Jacobson, plus WROV's attention to news and information with a local slant.

"I think radio in Roanoke is kind of boring right now," said Bly. Looking for something new, he had the idea of doing a show with Johnson, a teacher and actor and Bly's partner on a light-hearted television show called "Cookin' Cheap."

They did a demonstration tape, and Levine liked it. The first show will be on April 28. They'll do three per month. Frelantz and Fisher will continue to work together one Saturday afternoon per month on WROV.

"It's not so much a comedy show as a combination of music and on-air chitchat and call-ins and call-outs," said Bly, an advertising man and former broadcaster who's been keeping his hand in radio with a Sunday-night oldies show on WROV.

"There'll be topical humor, observations, lots of audience participation, music, and of course Laban and Larry. We don't want this to be your typical two stooges sitting behind the mike taking pot shots at each other. We don't want just two people doing a disc jockey show."

Heretofore, WFIR-AM has been the only other Roanoke station with an on-air duo. The members of that team are Bill Bratton and Leah Brandon. They're on the air weekday afternoons and, according to WFIR program director Courtenay Carson, are doing well in the ratings.

There are other similarities between WFIR programming and that to which WROV is moving. WFIR emphasizes personalities, listener involvement, news and information and plays music similar to that heard on WROV. WFIR's ratings have been increasing among all listeners age 12 and up, whereas WROV's last two ratings periods have been disappointing in that broad category.

McFarland, the new morning man for WROV, was born in Roanoke and is a 1970 graduate of Patrick Henry High School. He began working part time for local radio stations, including WROV, while still in high school and while attending Virginia Western Community College.

His professional career began modestly in Neenah, Wis., and went on to include stints in such big markets as Milwaukee, New Orleans, San Francisco and, most recently, Charlotte.

The job with WROV provided a happy ending to an unhappy story. At roughly the same time, McFarland's mother had a stroke and he lost his job in Charlotte due to a change in station ownership.

"I grew up listening to this radio station and I know the legacy," he said. "I'm close to Nirvana. I have the opportunity to come home and be with my folks and do my profession. I don't know that a guy could ask for more."

Asked whether the move might represent a backward step in what has been generally a big-city career, McFarland said, "This is my hometown. How can you look down on the town you came from?"