

WROV fights 'takeover,' keeps sense of humor

By MELINDA J. PAYNE
Staff writer

Radio station WROV spent most of Wednesday fighting off an attempted takeover by the Roanoke Times & World-News.

At least that's what it had many Roanoke Valley listeners believing on April Fools' Day.

According to reports over the station's airwaves, the newspaper had decided overnight that it needed a radio station on which to broadcast its news. A change of call letters from WROV to WRTW as well as a change in format from adult contemporary to "elevator music" had been proposed for the newspaper-operated station.

That just downright upset many listeners out there in radioland who grew up with WROV.

"We really don't know why they want our station," a disc jockey announced over the air. "We have barricaded ourselves inside the studio and security guards have been called to patrol the station."

The phone lines lit up immediately.

"People were genuinely concerned that it was true," said Mike Bell, operations director. "We explained to them that it was an April Fool's joke, but many of them still wanted to believe it was true."

What made the prank even more credible were over-the-air comments by folks pretending to be other folks.

Reportedly, Don Piedmont,

Roanoke's public relations director for Norfolk Southern, called to say that if the takeover happened, the railroad would close its headquarters in Roanoke and move to Charlotte.

The railroad's move would hurt the paper's revenue sources, the impostor said.

Big Tony from New York called to say that there would be some broken appendages of newspaper management and staffers if anyone encroached on WROV's sound.

"It's a siege, but we're trying to hold out," said disc jockey Sam Giles.

Another caller reported that the newspaper had led a parade down Maiden Lane. Marchers chanted, "Takeover, takeover, takeover."

None of the calls was solicited, Bell said. "We apparently have more comedians in Roanoke than we realized."

Folks called in contributions to help with the court fight that disc jockeys assured listeners was inevitable. By midday, the station had gained a temporary restraining order with the help of a Federal Communications Commission official who had heard of the newspaper's desires.

Giles, the morning DJ, is credited with the idea. He thought of it while taking a shower Wednesday morning.

"It's great to know that so many people care about WROV," Bell said. "I guess Roanokers have finally found out how much of a hot property we are."