

INSIDE RADIO

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“Personalities INSIDE RADIO”

Holiday Greetings From Toronto

by Mike Kinosian, Personality Editor

In its glory days, CKLW-AM/Windsor (Detroit) was North America's No. 1 Music Station and boasted a truly All-Star air staff.

To this day, CK's jingles, imagery and classic promotions are fondly remembered and widely regarded as the gold standard.

The legendary Bill Drake format was executed flawlessly on “The Big Eight” by a group of remarkably young and gifted personalities, including an energetic talent who made each day a holiday.

But when **Pat Holiday** decided to hang up the headphones, the Kingston, NY native managed to engineer two successful career transitions.

Not only did one of the medium's top on-air talents segue to become a well-respected programmer, Holiday – for the past nearly nine years – is leading three Standard Radio/Toronto outlets as VP/GM.

Major Market Manager

With a population of approximately 4.5 million people, Toronto would rank as the USA's sixth market, falling between Dallas and Philadelphia.

Although never having had designs on becoming a GM, Holiday's first experience in that role was at a Standard Radio/Calgary (Alberta) Big Band-Rock combo. “I've never done it for the power or glory,” he maintains. “I've done whatever I've done because I like it and enjoy doing it. The main reason I became a GM was to see if I could do it.”

There was a huge curiosity on his part, but Holiday wanted to accept the new responsibilities on his terms. “I've worked for some amazing people and wanted to combine all their good [traits],” he notes. “We had monster success in Calgary; it was very cool.”

Air Staff Interaction's A Big Deal

Former CKLW GM Herb McCord was among the superlative

talents who've surrounded Holiday over the years and sticks out as a positive role model. “I didn't get much nuts and bolts stuff from him, but he was amazing when it came to camaraderie and larger-than-life showmanship,” remarks Holiday, who holds an Accounting Degree from the University of Houston. “In the best possible way, he was like P.T. Barnum. He'd pull things off that were just neat. He was a great salesperson, but also handled people very well.”

Another person who did an incredible job dealing with an air staff was CKLW PD Alden Diehl. “He's probably the best I've ever seen at making people believe in themselves,” Holiday notes of Diehl, who passed away in October 2000. “That's the approach I went for when I was a PD. I tried to instill to an air personality that by following a plan, success would automatically follow and there'd be no failure. There would be a full-on 100% buy-in. Fortunately, the numbers always popped. It's like riding a horse. You just hang on for dear life as they drag you down the road. They're going in 100 different directions and all you have to do is point to people.”

The Big Show

Fascinated with the way Standard Radio President Gary Slaight handles detail, Holiday declares, “It seems like he can juggle 1,000 things in his head at one time and keep everything crystal clear. I have no idea how he does that because I certainly can't. He also gives shots to people other [executives] wouldn't.”

As then-high school freshman Holiday walked to school, he'd pass by Dot Broadcasting day-timer WBAZ-AM/Kingston, NY, which was located in a tiny strip-mall. “They had a street-front studio and you could hear music through the speakers,” he recalls. “The guy on the air wasn't moving very much, but all the animation was in the audio. There were promos firing and liners running. I found it all just so fascinating.”

As it turns out, the person Holiday was listening to would notch his own fame as an industry personality and eventually CD Media VP/Manager of Operations – the late Tom Shovan.

Talented Trio

The hometown trio of “Super” Max Kinkle, Tom “Dr. Don Regan” Brownlee and Holiday started in radio together at Kingston's WKNY. “We all happened to like Drake stations,” Holiday comments. “I loved [WABC/New York personalities] Dan Ingram and Ron Lundy, but had no desire to work [there].”

We made a pact that whoever got out first would try to drag the others along. Pretty amazingly, all three of us got to work at CKLW at one time or another. [My parents] said if I wanted to do [radio], they were behind me, but they probably thought I was from Mars."

Remembering it with great clarity, Holiday arrived at CKLW on August 30, 1970 and, with the exception of an 18-month stay at WOR-FM/New York, he'd remain at the Big Eight until 1984. "I can't [stress] this enough – we were all just kids," Holiday remarks. "I don't think any one of us was over 25. I don't know if any station would allow kids to do that any more."

The late Byron MacGregor took over as News Director when he was only 21. It's been nearly 10 years (1-3-1995) since Gary Mack (a.k.a. MacGregor) passed away at just 47 years old. "He did an amazing job and didn't accept 'plain;' that word wasn't in his vocabulary," stresses Holiday, who was one of 90 honorary pallbearers at MacGregor's funeral. "They wrote the news to make it memorable. Again, that speaks to giving someone a shot."

Claiming he gained a great deal of programming savvy through osmosis, Holiday would spend an enormous amount of time with famed CKLW Music Director Rosalie Trombley. "It was a pretty tight knit group," the former afternoon driver explains. "On a typical day, I'd go into the station at noon and hang out in the music library with Rosalie. You couldn't help but notice what was going on and understand how everything works from the music end. She was doing research before anyone else did. She called every record store in Detroit in 1970 – that was pretty advanced for the time."

The great majority of CKLW air personalities felt they were outcasts, but in many ways, Holiday opines it helped them. "We were on a Canadian radio station across the river from Detroit. Even though we were Americans, we weren't part of that culture. In effect, we were shunned by American broadcasters and were competing against them. At the same time, we weren't Canadian and other Canadian broadcasters didn't like the radio station. We were always in this 'no-man's land' of not being anything to anyone."

Getting In The Mix

The most challenging thing involved in Holiday's air talent-to-CKLW-PD transition was coming to the conclusion he no longer wanted to be on the air. "It's not that I didn't like it any more – I just knew I'd run out of things to say," he concedes. "I wasn't getting the thrill as I used to. I wanted to be a PD, but didn't see any difference [from being an air talent]. On one hand [as an air talent], you do a show three hours a day and on the other [as a PD], you do a show 24 hours a day. I always viewed it that the PD's show involves liners, music and how he wants the [air talent] to sound. I was there for so

long and understood the place inside and out, so it was pretty easy for me to make that transition."

But graduating to VP/GM was far more complex, since Holiday didn't at all have it in the back of his mind to make such a jump.

While programming Lite Adult Contemporary WLTJ/Detroit, Holiday did a consulting project for Gary Slaight in Toronto. "I wrote him a note that basically said I didn't understand his station at all," Holiday recounts. "It was awesome that he called me back in a couple of days. I did a monitor and [suggested] that he fix a few things."

An offer to program CKFM followed, which Holiday accepted, and he flipped the station to Mix. "We went around the other stations in the market by doing what is now referred to as Hot AC and it did very well."

Biggest Private Broadcaster

Impressed with Holiday's results after three years in Toronto, Standard Radio asked the personable PD to program Mix 96/Montreal and also to expand his talents to the sales arena. "I did that for three years and we had huge success with 20-shares," Holiday states with great satisfaction. "You'd see our logo in the window of [area businesses]. We had no promotional tie-ins with these places – they just put out our logo. This is an English station and two-thirds of the city is French."

About a year into that run, the PD of co-owned News/Talk CJAD/Montreal needed a liver transplant and Holiday was called on to program both stations. "It was a huge learning experience because News/Talk is an enormously different animal," he remarks. "Gary [Slaight] was expanding the chain with the right opportunities. When I got there, the chain consisted of seven stations. It's now up to 51 and is Canada's largest private broadcaster. We're teamed with CBC and Sirius for satellite radio."

According to Holiday, the only difference between programming in the United States and Canada is that you must understand and have some sort of history of Canadian content. "One-third of the music [on Canadian stations] has to be Canadian content," he points out. "You have to know what songs test well, but in reality, are tried. That part's a little different. Other than that, it's exactly the same."

People visiting him from the U.S., however, are usually blown away by the quality of radio in Toronto. "That has nothing to do with me," Holiday maintains. "It's like that on all our stations. Cutbacks that happened in U.S. radio didn't happen here. The depth and quality of talent here are very strong. Instead of having one or two really good people on a major station, we have six."

Huge Staff

Most U.S. broadcasters will undoubtedly cringe in learning that approximately 185 full- and part-time staffers comprise Standard Radio/Toronto's three-station cluster.

When CFRB-AM goes into magazine mode each Saturday and Sunday, the News/Talk facility does 27 local shows with 27 different people and no syndicated programming. "I recently took the morning people from all three stations to the agencies and explained what we were doing for the book; what we stand for; and our branding," Holiday reports. "We did that so buyers and planners know what they're buying and they can match the two in their head."

Toronto's "Best Music Mix, Mix 99.9" (CKFM) is full-blown Hot AC. "It's adapted a little bit toward this market, but think of it as [ABC Radio Hot AC] WPLJ/New York," Holiday states. "[Mike McVay-consulted] Easy Rock [CJEZ] is a traditional AC like [Clear Channel's] WLTW/New York."

Programming Prerequisite

Clear Channel's new policy regarding spotloads is in line with where Standard Radio has been for years. Much of that stems from Standard being a programming-based company. "Gary's been running the radio company the past 20 years and believes when you get really good numbers, you can sell it," Holiday states. "I'm sure it's a little easier because it's a private company. It's a gigantic family business and there are no stockholders."

In a refreshing change of pace, it's a mandate that all Standard Radio GMs come from programming and Holiday doesn't conceal he misses that side of the business. "It was fun and I'm still involved with it because this is a programming company. When there's a problem, I immediately have empathy and understanding and can drag up six other places where I [ran into something similar]. It's just another head to come up with a solution and works very well."

A PD's evolution to the GM's chair isn't hard at all, Holiday claims, especially for programmers who pay attention to what they're doing. "The hard part is it has to be in your personal character and nature to go out and do what salespeople do. That's traditionally a different kind of character makeup than someone from programming. I can talk through problems with sales managers and have the correct answer, because I understand it. I would be terrible, however, at going out and making sales calls with someone."

Best Of Both Worlds

Given the amount of time Holiday has spent in Canadian radio, many people are surprised to discover he actually holds dual citizenship.

The six-foot five-inch Holiday joined the U.S. National Guard

in 1968 and jokes that he might be the only person who went the other way (Canada to the U.S.) during the war. "I worked at CKLW and, for four years, flew back once a month and for two weeks a year to Camp Drum/Watertown, NY. That was a little bizarre."

The State Department changed the law approximately six years ago to let people like Holiday have Canadian citizenship, provided they didn't renounce their U.S. citizenship. "There's clearly no reason for me to do that," explains Holiday, who occasionally slips in an occasional "eh" in a conversation. "It's like having two sets of parents and I like them equally."

A year after arriving in Toronto, he was voted Canadian PD Of The Year and CKFM was named Station Of The Year. "I didn't say anything, but can distinctly remember walking on the stage and thinking to myself I'm part of this now and belong here."

Community Service

Perhaps the most personally gratifying promotion Holiday has been involved with is the "Have A Heart For Sick Kids" radiothon his three stations do each February for Toronto's Children's Hospital. "We go to the hospital for three days and talk to patients who are dying and to parents whose kids have died," he notes. "The Hospital sometimes manages to pull off miracles and saves kids from dying. Insulin was discovered there and it's the second-ranked Children's Hospital in the world."

In three days last year, the three Standard Radio/Toronto stations helped raise \$2.2 million. "The Slaight Family is charity-oriented to begin with and have been involved with Sick Kids Hospital the past 15-16 years," Holiday explains. "It's a massive hospital and our radio stations are the biggest donors."

About To Take It Easy

Describing himself as very healthy, Holiday – who turned 57 this month – nevertheless rather morbidly states, "Most guys are dead by 70. I have 13 years left and then I'm probably worm food, so I don't see much reason to work until the very end."



WHO: Pat Holiday
WHAT: VP/GM
WHERE: Standard Radio News/Talk CFRB-AM, Hot AC CKFM-FM "Mix 99.9" & Soft Adult Contemporary CJEZ-FM "EZ Rock 97.3"/Toronto
HOW LONG: Approximately nine years