



story by Paul Hoffman/Business Exchange editor

cover story

striking gold with oldies

"It's been a booming success," he said. "We knew oldies was going to be very interesting and popular. But never in our wildest dreams did we know how incredibly great the outcry was going to be. The passion of this listener was just unbelievable."

The top-40 oldies (1950s-'70s) void was created last March when the popular Gold WGLD-104.5 FM changed to JACK-104.5 FM, which offers hits from the 1970s, '80s and '90s.

"The old Gold was a top-five station for eight or nine years consistently," Tipmore said. "When they switched, it was a passionate loss for its listeners to the tune that some said they were not going to listen to radio anymore."

WIAU — "W" indicating the station is east of the Mississippi River, "I" for Indiana and "AU" is the periodic symbol for gold — quickly filled that void as Jonathan Byrd II's Raven Broadcasting became involved.

Byrd, who owns Jonathan Byrd's Cafeteria in Greenwood and has owned auto racing teams, had recently purchased ESPN AM-950 and was looking for an FM station that was ready to grow, Tipmore said. Byrd got involved with Joy 96 WJJY, considered a few programming options and opted for oldies.

Forty days later, the last three days of which included nothing but polka music on its frequency, Gold 95.9 was launched on Sept. 21. The station can also be heard online at its Web site, www.gold959.com.

meshing two staffs

Putting together a format change that quickly was nothing short of amazing, Tipmore said, considering they were meshing the off-air staff from one station with the on-air staff from another.

The first thing Tipmore and Jeremy Bialek, WJJY's programming director at the time and current advertising and marketing director, did was seek out WGLD assistant program director, Dr. Don Riley, to be their program director.

"I'd like to be humble and say there was (stumbling blocks), but Jeremy and I had an extremely detailed plan of launch," Tipmore said. "We got Don on

board and he knew everything we needed to do. ...Don is a programming genius for oldies.

"...Dr. Don was the most important component so we'd have a base to work from. There's so much in Don's brain that we just put jumper cables on each ear and put him to work."

Then, they hired former WGLD on-air personalities Steve "Rock 'n Roll" Rich and Scott "Records" Roddy to take middays and afternoons, respectively. Roddy recently left to become music director at another station. Wendy Carroll recently started flying solo as the morning host. The nights are handled by Tom Kent, whose syndicated show originates from his Cleveland basement. The regular on-air personnel rotate with part-timers on the weekends.

Also remaining from the Joy days are Jacob Bialek, production director; Jennifer Lockwood, office manager; Jason Davis, production assistant; and Charlie Sears, engineer.

What has made the venture such a success so quickly, Tipmore said, is having someone with the integrity of Jonathan Byrd involved and having "absolutely the greatest talent in town."

That talent is allowed to breathe a little easier than the disc jockeys did back when this music was new.

Technology has done away with turntables, cart machines and reel-to-reel tape players. All of it is computerized now.

"Essentially, the computer is replacing an engineer," Riley said. "It takes care of the housekeeping and busy work. Now, there's a greater emphasis on the on-air talent to be entertaining because there's nothing else to do," he added with a laugh.

Computerization also aided Gold in making the transition so quickly, Bialek said.

signal boost

The station isn't ready to settle into complacency with its early success. Plans include a boost in signal as well as boosts in listenership and advertising sales.

"We have great aspirations to grow it," Tipmore said. "...Our goal is for there not to be one person



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Founded: Sept. 21, 2005

History: WIFN operated on the south side of Franklin before moving to the city's north side. It became WGAQ in 1983, WPZZ in 1988, WJJY in 2003 and finally, WIAU.

If you listened to a top-40 radio station in the spring of 1979, you might have heard John Stewart sing, "There's people out there turning music into gold" on his hit song, "Gold."

More than 25 years later, a Franklin radio station is turning songs like Stewart's into gold.

Gold 95.9 (WIAU-FM) filled a void in the metropolitan Indianapolis oldies market when it switched formats from contemporary Christian music last September. The response has been overwhelming, according to vice president of operations, Randy Tipmore.

Top: Gold 95.9 talent includes, from front to back: morning host Wendy Carroll; program director Dr. Don Riley and midday host Steve "Rock 'n Roll" Rich.

Photo by Phil Smith/correspondent

Left: The station has asked the Federal Communications Commission to increase the size of its tower from about 300 to 500 feet in order to boost its signal. Above right: a DJ keeps control of the sound board.

Photos by Dana Shepherd/correspondent

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— Randy Tipmore, Gold 95.9 vice president of operations