

With WGIV's passing, black radio loses groundbreaker

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munity has lost part of its heritage.

"For years it was the only radio station I knew," he said. "When I went in the car it was on WGIV. Everywhere I went the station was on. Back in the day we used to carry the small transistor radios and listened to the station. Teachers confiscated the radios. That's where I got all of my information."

In the '50s WGIV's staff was half white and half black.

Before long, the station became the birthplace of black radio veterans. Legends like Genial Gene Potts worked there. Potts was one of the "Original 13," the first group of full-time black radio announcers in the South. Other legends passed through, like "Rockin'" Ray Gooding and "Chatty" Hattie Leeper. WGIV's studio was later named after Leeper, who founded a communication school after retirement.

"A lot of listeners felt a grave loss and were shocked when they heard the news of our closing," on-air personality Altheresa Goode-Howard said. "Just the name 24 hour gospel means something. I will miss listeners like Daisy Redfern and Evangelist Byron Brown who would call every day. We had daily things like Scripture of the Day and Word of the Day.

Goode-Howard, who will switch over to WPEG for gospel on Sundays, says she is grateful for the time she worked at the station.

"I'm also thankful for the people and management that allowed us to stay on the air," she said. "I could look at the situation in the negative. But I choose to be thankful. The saddest thing about WGIV, as we affectionately call it is that it won't be here. It's one thing when you

as an individual no longer work at a place. It's another thing when the place is no longer there. It carries a different feeling of loss.

"We're feeling sorrow and grief but the gospel will go forward."

Avery says she believes WGIV's flagging listenership had more to do with sound quality than format.

"I'd like to see a FM station go gospel," she said. "I think that would work. People want to hear clear music these days. I believe that's where the low listenership comes from."

Ken Koontz, managing general partner of All-Stars Communication and a veteran of Charlotte radio and television, compared the historical significance of WGIV to Second Ward High School, which was razed in the 1960s along with an entire black neighborhood downtown.

"We have lost the broadcast equivalent of urban renewal that wiped out our traditions, legacies and history," he said. "WGIV had a rich, long and strong legacy in this community. That means something.

"It's like black schools during desegregation when our black schools were deemed not to have value and were shut down. And the history and legacy of those schools were obliterated. I'm big on

preserving history. WGIV has historic significance. Talk to people 40 years old and up. That station means something to them. Even people 25 and up know and heard the station's legacy. There's something to be said about reviving that tradition."

Although New York-based Infinity has decided WGIV outlived its usefulness, Koontz says that's ridiculous.

"Saying WGIV has outlived its purpose is like saying Johnson C. Smith (University) has outlived its purpose because now we can go to UNC-Chapel Hill. People need to write to Infinity and the FCC to express their concerns.

"When the FCC was here two months ago Infinity knew they were not going to renew WGIV's license. I'll assure you it was a well-kept secret. My thing is sometimes people that are so detached from the situation and the community don't have the sensitivity of the people at the local level. The detached people are the ones that decide to take WGIV off the air."

Koontz admits Infinity was within its rights to pull the plug on WGIV. He wishes something could've been done locally to keep the sta-

tion on air.

"I'm not upset and angry with Infinity for making the right business decision for

them. I have a greater concern that we missed an opportunity to salvage a significant part of Charlotte's

ethnic identifiable community."

Goode-Howard can be reached at altheresah@aol.com.

USDA studies rural use

A U.S. agency wants feedback on how rural areas are developed.

The Dept. of Agriculture is making changes in ineligible areas in Rowan County and will take public comments on rural development until Feb. 24, 2004. USDA determines ineligible areas by populations of 10,000 or more people for towns and some areas of 25,000 or more and adjacent areas, which affects Charlotte, Davidson, Cornelius and Huntersville.

Details of the proposed changes can be reviewed at the USDA Rural Development Office at 26032 F Newt Road in Albemarle.

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