

Principal gets into radio biz

Station gets unsolicited aid

By CARL STODDARD

The big sound of WSHJ radio (103.3 FM) will sound a little different this year as it is broadcast from Southfield High School.

The 150-watt station, the highest powered student-operated station in the tri-state area, has been reprogrammed by Southfield High principal Jon Reynolds.

At his request, the station will curtail the number of broadcast hours and undergo a substantial change in format. The change has not gone over well with some students at the station.

Reynolds ordered the following changes:

- Broadcast hours are limited to 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. The hours had been 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 6 a.m. to midnight Fridays.

- Robert Sneddon, teacher and general manager, was told not to use air time. In the past, Sneddon served as a disc jockey one hour a day. Disc jockey shows are to be cut back. WSHJ had functioned as a pop music station, a format which relies heavily on disc jockeys.

- About 75 per cent of each broadcast hour is now to be programmed for student-produced news, special events and informational programs.

- Non-students will not be able to broadcast from the station.
- No telephone solicitations will be allowed.

REYNOLDS SAID he presented the changes to Sneddon in June. Sneddon later responded with arguments against those changes, but in the end Reynolds was unwavering.

"I'm extremely proud of them (the radio staff). They put a sound on the air that would rival or surpass many commercial radio stations," Reynolds said.

"Unfortunately there are times when I have to act like a school principal."

Some students at the station protested the changes and said they planned to make an appeal to the Southfield Board of Education.

"We thought when the millage passed (in August) we'd be able to go stereo and everything," student John Westlake said. "I guess we can't."

Sneddon, a former disc jockey who has managed the station for several years, said this is the first time changes of the scope have been requested. "Ever since it went on the air, it has been the same," Sneddon said, referring to the format of music and disc jockeys interspersed with news spots and special programs.

REYNOLDS SAID he cut back the hours of station operation because he found it difficult to justify the hours the station was on the air and because he was concerned about the problems of supervision.

Sneddon said he has a two-way radio in stashed in his car so that he can remain in constant contact with the station. At home in the evenings, he has monitored the station and remains in constant contact.

Reynolds said he limited the amount of disc jockey time at the station because in talks with commercial radio station managers he was told that "disc jockeys are a dime a dozen." Changing the format, he said, should give more students the opportunity to learn more and different types of skills.

Sneddon questioned if the change would be feasible. A format calling for 75 per cent informational programming will be more difficult and time consuming to produce, he said.

The prohibition of non-students, Reynolds said, was done to give students more time on the air. In answer to arguments that the former students freed present students to take time to study for tests and exams, Reynolds answered that if students were unable to find sufficient time to go on the air, perhaps the broadcast hours should be shortened.

Sneddon ANSWERS that the non-students were for the most part licensed professionals who provided help and guidance at the station.

Sneddon was asked not to schedule regular air time for himself. Reynolds said, to give students more time on the air. According to Sneddon, the time he has spent on the air during the last five or six years has helped him stay informed of current radio practices and identify problems at the station first hand.

Telephone solicitations were eliminated, Reynolds said, because as a non-commercial station WSHJ is not supposed to sell advertising.

Sneddon said students solicited advertising via the telephone for the WSHJ newsletter. Funds from the sale of advertising were used to pay for broadcast of "away" football and basketball games, he said.

Sneddon said he also interpreted the ban on solicitations to mean that the station could not call record companies and request new record releases.

Both Sneddon and Reynolds said the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has not objected to the past format or practices on the station.

However, Reynolds said he has received complaints from parents of students working at the Southfield High station that the station hours started too early or extended too late into the night.

There was also an incident involving a young girl who called the station and later received suspicious calls that were believed to have originated at the station, Reynolds said. It was never proved that the calls came from someone at the station, he said but it did point to the need for closer supervision at WSHJ.

Exactly how the changes will be implemented and how well the new format will work are still to be determined. In any event, WSHJ will certainly undergo a reorganization unlike anything it has experienced since it first hit the airwaves nearly nine years ago.

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