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# Untying traffic with quick ad libs

By Kathy Parrish  
staff writer

Colleen Burcar never knows what Dick Purtan or Tom Ryan will ask her next. And the wisecracking radio duo never know what CKLW's traffic reporter will answer.

The suspense may not keep early morning listeners on the edge of their car seats, but it's made Ms. Burcar an important part of the Dick Purtan Show.

"Ninety-five percent of the time she says exactly what we want her to," kids Ryan, who admits he often plays "heavy" to the petite brunette's naivete.

"She makes a fool of herself 95 percent of the time."

On a show where making a fool of yourself boosts ratings, Ms. Burcar comes up short next to zany Purtan characters like stowaway Sam Sakowitz, Lance Sweetest and her fictional mother Candy Burcar (a much-married psychic).

A former Farmington teacher with a young daughter, the Southfield-based reporter is admittedly "very straight."

Her traffic reports every 15 minutes in the morning (6:30-9 a.m.) are soft-spoken, to the point and often lend a touch of sanity to Purtan's madhouse world. There's less kidding on the 4-5 p.m. broadcasts with disc jockey Jack London.

"IT'S A BIG nothing on the freeway system," she told Purtan recently on a day when there were no traffic tie-ups. "No problems to report."

But suddenly Sam Sakowitz was asking her if she models. She asked, "What do you have in mind?" and Purtan was off and running. "See how she immediately assumed something illicit about what you're suggesting, Sam?"

"I have a great time, but I'm conservative," Ms. Burcar said. "I'm one of the straightest people I know."

That's one reason she's been responsible for several "humma-hummas" at the prompting of her two Windsor-based cohorts.

"I've said some really terrible things because I didn't know what I was saying. I didn't think first," she said.

"Dick and I are so straight and pure we have to tone her down," said Ryan, who enjoys working with Ms. Burcar because she's a "good ad-libber and people love her."

"They want to know what these crazy put-on guys are gonna do to this lovely girl," added the Bloomfield Township resident. "They're all on her side."

Joining the Purtan show, which Ms. Burcar calls a "neat happy little family," actually was a "complete fluke" for the Southfield resident.

ALTHOUGH SHE has a degree in speech and theater from Michigan



Daughter Kimberly, whose birth brought in 1,000 contest entries from listeners trying to guess her sex and birthdate, has changed Ms. Burcar's life.

State University, she considered acting and modeling a "nice break" from teaching at East Junior High School in Farmington.

During 1977 summer vacation, she read that Jo-Jo Shetty-MacGregor was leaving her job as CKLW traffic reporter to become Channel 2's weather reporter.

"I enjoyed teaching and loved the kids, but was interested in doing something different," said the northwest Detroit native.

She was shocked to get not only an interview but the job. "If you don't gamble, you never win."

CKLW news director Keith Radford interviewed 35 women searching for someone who "sounded authoritative, bright and lively but wasn't a copy of Jo-Jo."

The job is important because so many commuters rely on the Windsor station, which has a large Detroit audience.

"Weather and traffic are probably the most important things they listen to this radio station for," said Radford, pleased with his choice.

"She and her mother have become big celebrities," he said with a grin. "She gets invited to all the freebies, and I don't."

ORIGINALLY ON THE air with Tom Shannon, her role expanded when Purtan came to the station in November 1978. She recalls vividly the disc jockey's first call to her.

"He said 'Don't be nervous, but if you goof this up, we'll both be fired.' I was just petrified."

For a while she did feature reports, which she loved but were dropped by the station. Now she helps contestants in Purtan's "Name That Voice" contest and makes many appearances on behalf of the radio show.

"The longer I've been here, the more my personality has come out on the air and developed," said Ms. Burcar, whose voice is often recognized now.

She has her own theme song — "When I'm Calling You" from Slim Whitman's "Indian Love Call" ("We got him on the Johnny Carson Show" she kids).

One of CKLW's game prizes — along



Her quick ad-libs have made traffic reporter Colleen Burcar an important part of CKLW's Dick Purtan Show.

with Purtan aprons and Sakowitz designer underwear — is a blue denim Burcar babushka.

Even her 18-month-old daughter Kimberly Paige Gallerani, who has her own toddler-size Purtan apron, is a celebrity. One thousand listeners tried to guess her sex and birthdate. And Ms. Burcar's mother, a Grosse Pointe whose name is actually Mary, is also featured regularly on the show. "Her mom listens faithfully — her and her lawyers," Ryan said.

BUT MS. BURCAR actually keeps a low profile. Most of her fans believe she's a blonde, flies in a helicopter and is stationed in Windsor — all false impressions.

"Once I started working with Dick, people noticed me more, but that's not my purpose here," insisted Ms. Burcar, a 5-foot-3-inch brunette.

"I love hearing good news from people I help out."

About once a week, though, she does get an irate call from someone who ran into an obstacle she didn't warn about.

"It's virtually impossible to comment on everything. I'm going to make mistakes," said the traffic reporter, who gets her information from the state police and the Wayne County Sheriff Department.

"They're having their troubles, but they're never too busy to help out," she said gratefully.

Although her predecessor checked out traffic conditions from a helicopter, Ms. Burcar works out of CKLW's Southfield advertising office. Being grounded is fine with her, since she's afraid to fly.

She would prefer to be stationed in the bustling Windsor office, but couldn't get Canadian working papers. Being close to her Southfield home has worked out well since the birth of her "little buddy," Kimberly.

"SHE'S CHANGED my whole life," said Ms. Burcar, whose daughter "kind of meshes" with her work schedule. "She comes with me everywhere. I'm very proud of her."

Twice weekly she and Kim attend mother-tot exercises classes.

"I love exercise," said Ms. Burcar, who is kidded by Purtan about working in a bathrobe but actually always dresses up for work.

"I don't like jeans," said the 31-year-old.

Although she's getting more fan letters and calls daily, Ms. Burcar doesn't think of herself as a celebrity. It even surprised her when her butcher recognized her voice recently.

"I'm me and hope to do the best job I can," she said. She is more comfortable with her disc jockeys but still doesn't know what to expect from them, she said.

"I just think of myself as very lucky."



Ms. Burcar's early morning and late afternoon work schedule allows her to spend a lot of time during the day with Kimberly. Above, she juggles lunch with a phone call.



Right, mother and daughter visit with CKLW disc jockey Tom Ryan in the Windsor station.

Staff photos by David Frank