

Out with the oldies, in with women's radio

BY LINDA STROWBRIDGE

Think of it as Extreme Make-over, the radio edition.

On June 1, M10 Broadcasting executives transformed their ailing Pikesville "oldies" station into what they claim is the hottest new trend on the airwaves.

At the stroke of midnight, WWLG ceased to exist. From its ashes emerged WVIE 1370, "The Voice" of women in America.

"Female talk is the next big format in this industry," said Bob Pettit, the station's general manager.

And the format change, Pettit said, is already paying off in record ad sales for the locally owned station.

iPods, Web casts, satellite radio and other new technologies have steadily eaten into the ad sales and audience share that music radio once enjoyed, Pettit said.

At WWLG, an oldies music station that drew 65 percent of its audience from the ranks of Baltimore's senior citizens, that trend was keenly felt.

For years, advertisers have steadily shifted their money to talk radio stations.

But that shift, Pettit said, still left advertisers unable to reach a key group of consumers — women. (Talk stations featuring Howard Stern, Bill O'Reilly or other hard-line commentators and shock jocks attract mostly men.)

So executives at M10 Broadcasting, a subsidiary of Mangione Family Enterprises, crafted a talk radio lineup to attract female listeners and the companies that want to sell to women.

That lineup includes celebrities ranging from Dr. Laura Schlessinger, "the relationship coach," to Tammy Bruce, the "pro-choice, gun-owning, pro-death penalty, voted-for-President Bush, progressive feminist."

Within the first month of operation, WVIE raked in ad sales exceeding all sales records achieved by WWLG, Pettit said.

"There's still a glow around here," said Nick Mangione Jr., vice president of M10.

The company, he added, had multiple reasons to celebrate in June.

In addition to the successful launch of WVIE, it landed a contract to broadcast Rush Limbaugh on WVIE's "brother station" WCBM, after he was canceled by WBAL.

WVIE executives are still trying to round out their lineup.

Pettit said the station has been inundated with proposals for shows about child-rearing, personal relationships and cooking. They've been rejected.

"I think it's insulting to say that if we are going to attract women, we have to talk about baking cookies," Pettit said.

Instead, he's searching for new shows that focus on computers and women in sports.

WVIE executives are aiming to boost their audience to a cumulative 100,000 through the week (from 65,000 when the station was WWLG) and attract mostly 25- to 64-year-old listeners.

Executives say the station has one special draw — WVIE is one of the few locally owned radio stations in the market, and it dedicates air time to local programming.

"The owner (Nicholas Mangione Sr.) is from Baltimore. He loves Baltimore, and he has always been an avid fan of talk radio and giving people an opportunity to voice their opinions," Mangione said.

The local lineup includes "Clear View," a weekly program with veteran broadcaster Zohara Hieronimus.

"Most of the national network ownership and the large conglomerates, whether it is in newsprint, television or radio, really don't care about the content or the values so much as local owners. They really just care about how much money they make. And that's really the denigration of the media overall in our country," Hieronimus said.

"Mr. Mangione Sr. has made it possible for us who have a love of this community, to promote local nonprofits, to address local issues and to engage in community building."

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