Written by Kathleen McCarthy
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Talk radio is one of the few places in American broadcast media that give voice to "regular people." But because local programs have largely been replaced by nationally syndicated hosts, the format rarely provides insights into the thoughts, concerns, and opinions of a local area.

Perhaps this is what makes Jim Fisher, talk-show host for WOC 1420AM for more than three decades, such a valued contributor to the genre. Whether you agree with him or not, he is one of us.

The Jim Fisher Show, heard Mondays through Fridays from 2 to 5:30 p.m., is a rarity. Not only has he maintained his program for 31 years and counting, but his show continues to be a commercial success. Clients get on waiting lists to be endorsed by Fisher, who has final say on which local advertisers he will pitch for. And his show consistently generates local advertising revenues that compete with nationally syndicated heavy-hitters such as Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity, who also air on WOC.

In an interview with this Quad Cities icon, Jim was charmingly frank in his assessment of his own success: "I have been blessed or cursed with a certain voice. I have never applied for a job. The Armed Forces Radio & Television Service asked me to work a volunteer shift while I was enlisted in the military in Asia. I ended up taking the licensing test here in the U.S. in the 1960s for commercial broadcasting."

Fisher moved around working for various stations as a rock-and-roll disc jockey, happy as a clam in his chosen field and eventually landing at KCRG Channel 9 in Cedar Rapids to get his chops in television and radio.

It was in this role that Fisher enjoyed interviews over the years with mega-stars such as Elvis Presley, Dolly Parton, Karen Carpenter, and Perry Como. Accomplishments such as these come with serious bragging rights, to say the least. Yet Fisher is fairly grounded about it all, claiming, "We all put our trousers on one leg at a time.

"Everyone looks at you like you're special. That is the hardest thing to get over. Approach the microphone with the attitude that you are no brighter, wiser, or better than anyone else. People can then hear you and respond well."

Jim eventually moved to the Quad Cities market, further honing his skills as a broadcaster by switching from rock and roll to adult music, as well as weather, for WOC and Channel 6.

"Talk radio wasn't being done full-time in a market of this size," explains Fisher. "So I hosted a talk show on Sunday evenings that was successful enough that the folks running things decided to try the same format during the week for three-plus hours a day."

On January 22, 1980, Fisher launched his first daytime talk show, interviewing presidential candidate Ronald Reagan. "I interviewed Reagan many times," recalls Fisher. "You see, a call from WOC [to Reagan] was like a call from home." Reagan got his start in broadcasting at WOC, and was on-hand for the dedication of its new headquarters in 1988.

Imagine doing talk radio for 31 years. Fisher has an unparalleled perspective relative to social dynamics because he has been in constant contact with his listenership. When asked how he views the dramatic social changes that have occurred while he's been at the microphone, his response is unreservedly positive.

"Times are so much better now than in the '60s," he says. "I remember 'Burn, baby, burn' and watching Washington, DC, on fire in protest over the Vietnam War.

"We hid that we were veterans because the military was so reviled. We were told not to wear our uniforms while on campuses during the 1970s. Racial tensions were at an all-time high. I remember watching downtown Birmingham during the civil-rights march and seeing on the CBS evening news my country come unglued."

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