

# Behrend's WPSE alters talk format

Rivals WLKK and WEHN try to take a piece of the market

by Mark Owens  
The Collegian

Radio has always been one of those industries that does everything at once. At one time everything -- music, sports, news, bingo -- was on the AM dial. Then everyone discovered FM and made the switch, turning the AM band into the proverbial Twilight Zone.

Matters stayed that way until the advent of the talk/information format. That is where WPSE, Behrend's commercial AM station, comes in.

Last December, Burbach Communications donated the tower and AM 1450 dial position (which formerly belonged to WEYZ) to Behrend. Since then WPSE has made waves in the Erie market by offering the only talk, news and sports game in town.

Until now, that is. On Monday WLKK, which formerly broadcast country and western music, debuted its news and information format. WLKK has not only lined up NPC for news and the Mutual Radio Network (featuring Larry King, Bruce Williams and Rush Limbaugh), but features several local hosts talking about local events.

WPSE, by contrast, features primarily national programming with CBS and the American Radio Network.

"We saw this coming a couple of months ago," said Fred Ansivino, WPSE's general manager. "Right now we're trying our best to be as clean as possible and do what we do best -- talk, news and sports."

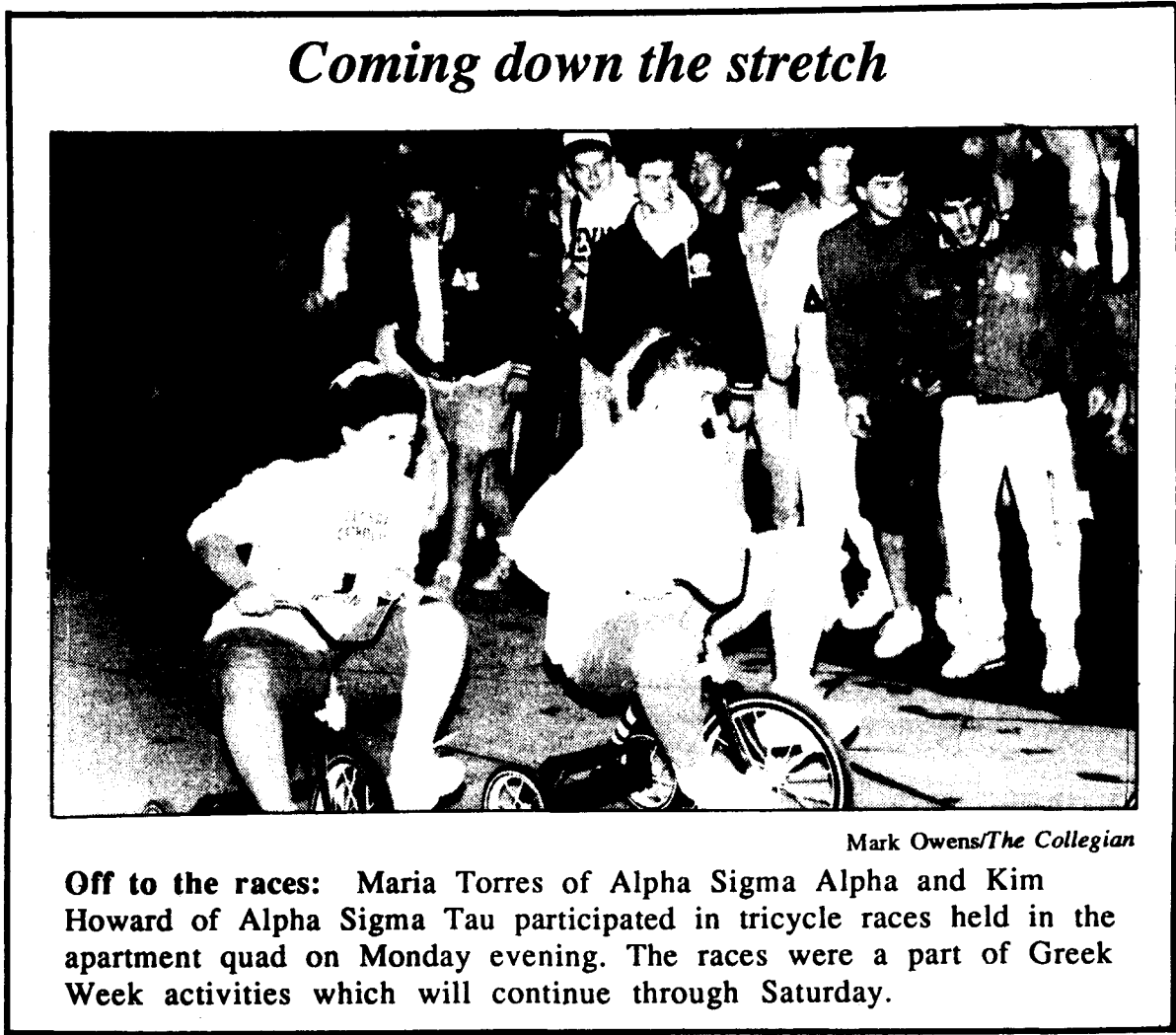
Part of WPSE's strategy for dealing with the new kid on the block is consistency, or "not departing from what we say we are," Ansivino said.

That means devoting the station to its format -- news, talk and sports -- and getting rid of anything that doesn't fit, including music.

"We were running a music show Sunday nights from 9 pm to 1 am, but the students decided to eliminate music because it didn't fit with the format, especially since WLKK is now using the news/information format as well," Ansivino said.

That development may not sit well with some people, who have come to expect WPSE to follow the traditional idea of a college radio station; playing music -- and lots of it. Ansivino, however, said WPSE is more the exception to the rule.

"People over 40 listen to AM, while people under 40 listen to FM. However, 80 percent of people who listen to radio listen



Mark Owens/The Collegian

**Off to the races:** Maria Torres of Alpha Sigma Alpha and Kim Howard of Alpha Sigma Tau participated in tricycle races held in the apartment quad on Monday evening. The races were a part of Greek Week activities which will continue through Saturday.

to FM," he said. "If you're listening to music, it'll be on FM because it sounds better. Music on AM will get beaten by FM music every time," he said.

That's exactly what happened in WLKK's case. Earlier this year WXTA (Country 98 FM) started their country/western format, leaving WLKK high and dry. "As soon as an FM plays your music, you're dead in the water," Ansivino said.

And right now the talk/news business is hot for WPSE, while music is not.

"Music was never our strong point," said Ken Bunting, WPSE student manager. "Not only would we be in the same market as the major FM stations, but the college music scene is already being served by Gannon (WERG 89.9), Mercyhurst (WMCE 88.5) and Edinboro (WFSE 88.9). We're in a position to do something different than music and make an impact in the market."

In fact, Ansivino points out that WPSE has a lot of advantages that other college stations don't.

"We're an AM station, which gives us a lot of room to work. We're also a commercial radio station, which lets us operate exactly the way other stations do -- a plus for students thinking about a career in broadcasting," he said.

Ansivino added that there are very few college radio stations in the country that have an AM station, and almost none with a commercial license. "We have opportunities here that very few colleges in the country have," said Ansivino.

WPSE was recently given the go-ahead to sell commercials, "which will let us train people in marketing -- something that no other college in the area is able to do," said Bunting. Edinboro, Gannon and Mercyhurst all have non-commercial licenses, which limit them to underwriting to fund themselves.

With commercials and a collection of national radio personalities that Ansivino says have a big following in the Erie area, WPSE hopes to fend off an aggressive WLKK and hang on to the majority of their listeners.

"Of course we're going to lose some people to WLKK; it's the nature of the business," said Ansivino. "Of course, it's important to note that we're not in direct competition with anyone in the market. They're out there to make money and survive. We don't have to worry about that, so we can concentrate on educating students in radio broadcasting and not the bottom line."

*The biggest thing is that students can get experience here...If you look for a job in broadcasting, they'll ask you for experience. If you don't have any, they'll ask you to come back when you do -- and no one is going to be able to take the time to train you. We, on the other hand will."*

-Fred Ansivino  
WPSE General Manager

The weak link in WPSE's armor is the local angle; they have none.

"Right now we don't have students to produce local news or other local shows that fit the format and that's going to hurt

us," Ansivino said.

"The biggest thing is that students can get experience in radio here. If you leave Behrend with a degree and look for a job in broadcasting, they'll ask you for experience. If you don't have any, they'll ask you to come back when you do -- and no one is

going to be able to take the time to train you. We, on the other hand, will. It's that simple," Ansivino said.

For the time being, WPSE plans on doing what they do best. "We can't control the competition, but we can always get better," Ansivino said.

Bo would know Behrend, but he doesn't read *The Collegian*.

# New PSU President Thomas visits Behrend

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scholarships and slightly rewording the recruitment procedures are important factors in recruiting and retaining students, stated Thomas.

The DuBois campus currently has less than 1 percent minority students. Thomas said that some areas in Penn State need more diversity than others.

"We should spend more time looking for unity," said Thomas, rather than "learning to cope with it."

Behrend Provost and Dean Dr. John Lilley said that Behrend's minority students constitute 10 percent of the student population. "We're getting about 10 percent minority students here at this time," said Lilley. "We can and want to always do better," said Lilley in reference to the number of minorities at Behrend.

Thomas said Behrend offers a unique opportunity because of its location near a manufacturing/industrial area.


"There is a serious problem with moving into a service economy," said Thomas. "There are times when the United States' economy looks more like a developing nation's than a developed one."

He went on to say that Behrend's solid manufacturing partnership with Erie is important to the Commonwealth and the nation's economy.

Thomas was also asked about the tradition of raising tuition every year for the past decade. He said underfunding by the state legislature greatly contributed to Penn State's financial problems. Thomas said the solution was either increased funding from the State legislature or a lowering of the national inflation rate by 5 percent as the only feasible means for reducing Penn State's educational price tag.

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