

Network boosts Iowa radio news

By DAVE RHEIN
Register TV Editor

A radio news network called Radio Iowa will begin supplying reports to a roster of 30 Iowa radio stations beginning July 1. The network is being created and operated by Learfield Communications Inc. of Jefferson City, Mo., the same folks who hold the radio broadcast rights to Iowa State University football and basketball, and who this season will begin distributing University of Iowa football games to a network of radio stations.

According to Steve Mays, general manager of Radio Iowa, the network will be based in Des Moines with a three-person news staff that will concentrate on covering state government. Six times each day it will distribute reports via satellite from Des Moines to its member stations for use on their local newscasts.

In turn, each member station will be contributing news coverage from its community to the Radio Iowa newscast in Des Moines. Learfield has operated a similar radio news network in Missouri since 1975 that has grown to 70 stations.

"We are not positioning ourselves to replace local news departments," said Mays of the network. Mays indicated, however, that one of the reasons Radio Iowa was created was in response to shrinking radio news operations. It also provides member stations with a Des Moines bureau to cover state government.

Here is how the network will work. At 6 a.m., 7 a.m., 8 a.m., noon, 4 p.m. and 5 p.m., Radio Iowa will send a four-minute news summary — including one minute of commercial time — to each affiliate. Just before and just after each of these reports, affiliates will receive a one-minute capsule news summary. It will be up to each affiliate to decide how to use the news reports.

Mays said he expects Radio Iowa to develop sports segments and special reports — such as coverage of Iowa political caucuses — when needed.

Dennis Sutterer, who has spent the last eight years on the news staff at WMT radio in Cedar Rapids, will be news director of the Des Moines bureau. One reporter will be Todd Kimm, who left KIOA in Des Moines to take this job. The other reporter position has not been filled. Mark Sierant, former sales manager at KIOA, will be sales manager for Radio Iowa.

Clyde Lear, chief executive officer of Learfield Communications, said Iowa "was a natural" for this kind of news network. He said Learfield will spend \$250,000 to get the network off the ground and expects Radio Iowa to be profitable in its second year of operation.

"We are a lot further ahead on this than we had scheduled," said Lear. "We are going to go on the air with some advertising. We didn't expect to do that." Lear said he expects as much as 70 percent of the advertising on Radio Iowa to come from companies within the state.

Learfield operates broadcast and distribution services in the areas of news, farm news and sports. Its Brownfield Network for agricultural news reaches 135 stations in Missouri, Illinois, Iowa and Nebraska.

But its biggest business is done in the world of sports on radio. Along with the Iowa State package (35 stations), Learfield owns the broadcast and distribution rights for the universities of Missouri, Kansas and Oklahoma State. It also distributes broadcasts to a network of stations for the University of Illinois and, starting in September, the University of Iowa (25 stations).

Learfield's biggest radio sports network is for baseball's St. Louis Cardinals at 110 stations strong. It also created the Kansas City Royals radio network three years ago, but recently sold it to Stauffer Communications.

Here is a list of Radio Iowa affiliates:

KLBA-AM in Albion, KASI-AM in Ames, KXOF-FM in Bloomfield, KCFI-AM in Cedar Falls-Waterloo, WMT-AM in Cedar Rapids, KELR-FM in Charleston, KCHE-AM-FM in Cherokee, WOC-AM in Dubuque, KSO-AM in Des Moines, WDBQ-AM in Dubuque, KEMB-FM in Emmetsburg, KFTX-FM



in Fort Dodge, KWGG-FM in Hampton, KIDA-FM in Ida Grove, WCAZ-FM in Keokuk, KLAL-FM in Lamoni, KMAQ-AM-FM in Maquoketa, KRIB-AM in Mason City, KILJ-AM in Mount Pleasant, KKAR-AM in Omaha-Council Bluffs, KBOE-AM in Oskaloosa, KBIZ-AM in Ottumwa, KMA-AM in Shenandoah, KSCJ-AM in Sioux City, KICD-AM in Spencer, KTLB-FM in Twin Lakes-Rockwell City, KNEI-AM in Waukon.

KMA's change of heart

The switch by southwest Iowa radio giant KMA from broadcasting Iowa State University sports to University of Iowa sports starting in September is a giant blow to the Cyclones and a giant plum for the Hawkeyes.

In the eyes of retired KMA general manager Andy Andersen, it was strictly a business decision, although he has had plenty of emotional reaction from his listeners.

"Eighteen years ago, I took a lot of heat from Iowa fans" when KMA switched from the Hawkeyes to Iowa State, said Andersen. "At that time, Iowa football wasn't going anywhere. Now at this date, the shoe is on the other foot."

"We have suffered through . . . struggled with Iowa State. It was not a financial disaster, but it ceased to be a profit-making venture for us," said Andersen. "We were having our difficulties. While our heart is in one place, our good judgment was someplace else."

Andersen, who retired April 30 shortly after making the decision to make the switch, said he was approached by Palmer Communications several months ago about joining the new Hawkeye sports radio network it was forming.

After a few weeks, Andersen said he saw the logic in the switch. Now KMA listeners will be hearing Jim Zabel call Hawkeye games instead of Pete Taylor call Cyclone games.

KMA's strong signal blankets the southwest part of the state and even roars into Omaha, which makes it a key station for university sports networks. Andersen said the switch was a decision he did not take lightly.

"We thought about what the fallout would be. And we've had a lot of heated exchanges from fans in the area," said Andersen, who added that the station has had more favorable reaction from Hawkeye fans than nasty words from Cyclones fans.

"We like to think we are part of the lives of an awfully lot of people in the four-state area here. People shouldn't take us for granted," he added, saying his comments were not a slap at Iowa State or Learfield Communications, which handles the Cyclones radio sports network. "We have a mind of our own and choose to exercise it."

Scribbles and scraps

• Teri Shell, who has been a reporter, anchor and news director at KCAU-TV in Sioux City the past nine years, has resigned effective June 26 to stay at home "and be a full-time mom" to her two children. Shell said her decision to leave was "gut-wrenching and very difficult" and added that she was leaving on good terms.

"If and when I decide to come back into the [TV news] business, I know I'd be welcome here," said Shell, who was named news director last November.

Succeeding Shell as news director will be Charlie Orbison, a former professor of communications at Morningside College who has been working at the station full-time as a reporter, anchor and assistant assignment editor since November.

• WHO radio has named Larry Cotlar manager of sports operations. Cotlar's duties will include coordinating all of WHO's sports programming. Also at WHO radio, the premiere of a monthly program titled "Call Governor Branstad" is scheduled Monday at 7 p.m. Connie Murad will be the host of the live call-in show.

• Best news of the week is the return of Mark Pearson as host of "Iowa This Weekend," seen on Iowa Public Television each Thursday at 7 p.m. and repeated Friday at 8:30 p.m. Pearson left Iowa last winter to take a job at Minnesota Public Radio, but IPT producer Duane Huey reports that he was eager to do the show again, and IPT is pleased as punch to have him.

Huey says Pearson commutes to Iowa each Tuesday to shoot wrap-arounds for the feature segments shown on "Iowa This Weekend." As a new twist this season, Pearson will be conducting mini-tours of Iowa towns when he isn't introducing feature segments on happenings around the state.

• Bob Saget, the funny guy on CBS' low-rated "Morning Show," can't be seen there anymore. As of June 1, the comedian is gone. He's working on "Full House," a planned ABC sitcom.

• "Late Show" pinch-hitters lined up by Fox Broadcasting in the wake of Joan Rivers' hasty departure include Martin Sheen (June 10), Frank Zappa (June 12), ex-MTV VJ Martha Quinn (June 19), Edwin Newman (June 22) and Malcolm Jamal-Warner (June 24). A Fox spokesman said the ones that click "will be brought back." "The Late Show With Martha Quinn"?



Mark Pearson



Teri Shell



The talented Martha Quinn