

CHRISTIAN RADIO STATION EXPANDS REACH

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Those who may have heard the powerful signal blasting into Broward County at 88.1 on the FM dial know that a previously hard-to-hear Palm Beach County station has increased its power primarily to reach Fort Lauderdale listeners.

“We upgraded our power to 50,000 watts and now have 3.5 million people under our signal from Fort Pierce down to northern Miami-Dade County,” said Donna Cruz, the program director for WAYF which goes by the name WAY FM on the air.

“We had a lot of hurdles and it took longer than we thought to receive permission to use the higher power,” Cruz said. “But from the first day we had calls from places like Hollywood and Plantation thanking us for our programming.”

The station broadcasts a mix of contemporary Christian music as a way of reaching youth and young adults.

“We are different than more traditional Christian radio station,” Cruz explained. “Many people call us seeker-friendly.”

Cruz said that the morning show that she co-hosts with DJ Brant Hansen from 6 to 9 a.m. has the “same fun and excitement of mainstream morning shows, with similar subject matter and presented in an inviting manner, but without the indecent material that you might hear on other stations.”

Cruz has a background in secular rock radio and Hansen came to the station with experience as a youth minister. “About a year ago I decided to get into a radio ministry,” she said.

“Our music is positive and encouraging, sprinkled with God’s grace,” she explained. “We try not to sound ‘holier than thou’ on the air and we don’t use a lot of Christian language. We just try to present a sensible way to God.”

WAY-FM’s program director said that the format is working. In the latest Arbitron ratings, WAY-FM placed 5th in the mornings among women listeners between 25 and 44, and in 7th place among the same audience during the afternoon drive-time period.

With the increase in power, the station has seen its audience grow, especially in Broward County. “Our teenage listening audience has grown 33 percent over last year and 26 percent among all listeners 12 years old and up,” Cruz said.

The Palm Beach County station is part of a national network of WAY radio stations headquartered in Colorado. Some of the station’s programming during the day and overnight is provided by the network’s studio facilities in Nashville.

The station operates in a designated “public service” section of the FM band where many public radio stations are also found. Stations in that section of the radio dial may not sell commercial messages, so must rely on underwriting by local businesses and organizations and other fund-raising techniques.

With that in mind, WAY-FM has scheduled a “share-a-thon” for February 23 through 26.

“February 23 will be a “Day of Prayer and Praise,” where we will focus on a different topic each hour,” Cruz said. Among the topics scheduled are Spiritual Heroes, Songs that have touched your heart, Your Greatest Blessing and Tell your own story.”

The next three days will be more focused on raising funds. Cruz said that the station has lined up 200 volunteers to help answer phones and to other chores connected with the fund raising project.

Cruz said that the station hopes to raise \$79,700 in monthly pledges and \$126,000 in yearly pledges during the share-a-thon toward the stations over all annual budget of \$1,082,400.

“Our staff members are very passionate about broadcasting with the same flair and fun as main stream stations but with a different message of how messed-up life can be without God’s grace,” she said.

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