

Biography of Marlin R. Taylor ...

written for his induction into the Philadelphia Broadcasters Hall of Fame – 11/20/2015

Marlin Taylor is best remembered as the “father” of the instrumentally-based radio format that became known as “Beautiful Music” ... which he originated in Philadelphia with the sign-on of WDVR 101 FM in 1963 ... a format genre he was still programming for SiriusXM Radio 52 years later!

It was 60 years ago that the Bucks County native gained his first paying job in broadcasting ... as the engineer for a year-long weekend remote DJ show on WTNJ 1300 AM in Trenton. In that eight-year period before being hired by David L. Kurtz as WDVR’s Station Manager and Program Director, Marlin continued at WTNJ in various roles such as board operator and minding its 1930-something transmitter until the Spring of 1958, when the military draft came calling. To avoid being sent to Korea to drive a tank on the 38th parallel, he volunteered to accept an extra year of service, which eventually led to being assigned to Thule Air Force Base in Thule, Greenland, as a personnel clerk. However, Marlin had other ideas and managed to talk his way into being transferred to the base radio station, KOLD. In that he was the only person on the base with any radio experience whatsoever – other than the sergeant who managed the operation – he became the evening DJ ... the first and only time he’s filled that role in these 60 years.

Possessing a pro-active spirit and a “can do” attitude, Marlin was always on the lookout for the next opportunity. It was while at his final post prior to being discharged from the military, Fort Meade in Maryland, that he discovered a new FM station, WHFS, was being built in the nearby Washington, D. C., suburb of Bethesda, Maryland. What was a young man to do who was in need of a job, was about to be married and wanted to be in radio ... yet did not have a college degree or a great deal of experience ... but to be positive and take the attitude that this small start-up operation could benefit from what he had to offer. He was right - the two engineers who were building the station were in need of a trustworthy individual to be responsible for day-to-day operations, do some announcing and to plan the programming for what was to be a limited-hours stereo station playing a potpourri of musical genres.

Two years later, this experience made him the perfect candidate when, in March 1963, he discovered the permit for another new FM, this one in Philadelphia, and sought out its owner, another engineer who was building a new station ... of course, it was Dave Kurtz and WDVR.

During the next three years, he and Jerry Lee grew WDVR into a successful station, both in ratings and profitability. At that point, Marlin became restless – it was time for a new challenge ... which led to Boston as General Manager & Program Director of the Concert Network’s two classical music-oriented stations, WBCN, Boston & WHCN in Hartford, Connecticut. This move did not prove to be an astute one ... but a year later, a new Boston opportunity presented itself.

In the Summer of 1967, Kaiser Broadcasting was launching a new FM station to be formatted similar to WDVR – WJIB - and Marlin was appointed Program & Music Director. WJIB was an immediate hit and letters to the editors of area newspapers declared it to be one of the best things to ever happen in Boston radio.

Eight months later, with WJIB already a major ratings success and Marlin having spent time in San Francisco addressing programming problems at sister station KFOG, Jerry Lee was encountering some

difficulties back in Philadelphia. So, exactly two years from his departure, he returned to WDVR/EZ101 as Program Director & Office Manager.

Making short work of cleaning up programming and internal operational issues, using EZ101's ratings success and being the first FM in the nation to bill a million dollars in a year as a platform, Marlin wrote to Arch Madsen, President of Bonneville International Corporation, pointing out that this same kind of success could be had at Bonneville's floundering New York City property, WRFM. In March 1969, he joined the station as General Manager. Using not much more than his programming skills and the FM dial card concept that had been so successful for WDVR, which triggered great word-of-mouth advertising, in seven months time WRFM moved from 23rd to 5th among all stations in the "Big Apple" Arbitron ratings ... beating out two entrenched like-formatted competitors!

Within a year, Arch Madsen would ask Marlin to provide his programming and related support to Bonneville's six other FM stations. To do this required packaging a library of music on tape and assembling a staff to manage distribution and provide guidance in overall operations ... so it became logical to offer these services to other stations as well, leading to the establishment in 1971 of Bonneville Broadcast Consultants, to syndicate the programming that had made WDVR, WJIB & WRFM the major successes they had become.

Over the better part of the next two decades, the list of client stations would reach nearly 200, with many in major markets and many of those ranking high up in the ratings. EZ101 would twice be a Bonneville-programmed station during that period.

By 1988, with changes occurring in the industry and the Company, Marlin elected to leave broadcasting to do some things he and his wife had been putting off for too long. While taking on some short-term radio-related programming and consulting projects, he was absent from the industry for much of the 1990's. However, the itch to take on, as Marlin was quoted as saying, "one more grand gig before I was too old to be able or care" began to fester. So, in 2000, when he was invited to join the new XM Radio satellite venture to create an aural documentary of the 1940's/Big Band/ WWII era, both musically and historically, he was ready.

In 2002, when XM Radio subscribers demanded there be a Beautiful Music channel, ala what had been so popular on radio in years past, Marlin added that format to his portfolio. In 2004, there came the demand for a Southern Gospel music channel, so with no one to be hired to manage the channel, Marlin took on that responsibility as well.

Finally, fourteen years after the launch of satellite radio, and more than half a century of doing what he loves best ... creating radio programming that brings joy to the hearts of his listeners ... with the arrival of his 80th birthday in August 2015, it became time to retire from SiriusXM Radio.

(Courtesy of Broadcasters Pioneers of Philadelphia)