

## Another One "Beached!" Contract of radio vet Dearborn not renewed



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Too many of radio's most talented and experienced people are "on the beach" these days. Now broadcast veteran Bob Dearborn has joined them in the ranks of the unemployed.

After two years as morning host of *Gold-based Soft AC* CKWR-FM, Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, doubling the audience share in the first ratings period and increasing it substantially again in the most recent Book, Dearborn has left the building and the community radio station's newly-elected Board of Directors says his contract will not be renewed.

They have received hundreds of e-mails from disappointed fans pleading for a reversal of their decision. Board members acknowledge the quality of Dearborn's work, his contribution and professionalism, but say economic circumstances have rendered him "out of our league." The station is experiencing a level of financial distress that is forcing them to put aside earlier, loftier ambitions while they consider a new direction for FM 98.5.

Dearborn is not the only casualty. The station is now without a General Manager, General Sales Manager, Program Director, News Department, Promotions Department, receptionist, and the Sales staff has been reduced to two people because of the cuts.

"The few survivors are nice, dedicated people," says Dearborn, "who are hanging on by a thread, trying to keep the place functioning while suffering the consequences of what some think was financial mismanagement by the previous Board and a lack of leadership (the Board doesn't manage, it oversees), then the problems were compounded by the economic downturn."

### **A long, successful career on legendary U.S. radio stations**

Before returning to his native Canada, Dearborn made a name for himself in American radio at legendary radio stations including WPRO-Providence, WPTR-Albany, WRTH-St. Louis, WIXY-Cleveland, WDAE and WPLP-Tampa, WTAE-Pittsburgh and WKNR-Detroit. He spent 16 years

on the air in Chicago with stints, spread over four decades, at WIND, WFYR, WJJD, WJMK and, most notably, six years at WCFL during its 1970s glory days as a Top 40 giant.

It was while at WCFL that Dearborn famously analyzed and distributed his interpretation of Don McLean's "American Pie." More than 100,000 copies of the written analysis were sent out and a recorded version was syndicated to stations around the world.

Additionally he was the host/producer of the first live, daily, satellite-delivered music show in radio history, "Night Time America," which for four years originated in New York City and was carried by 154 stations on the RKO Radio Network. Dearborn was also the first host/producer of the network's syndicated program, "Countdown America."

In the late 1990s, after half a dozen years bouncing back and forth between *Oldies* and *Nostalgia* stations, Dearborn spent five years as the program director/music director/morning host of KIXI-Seattle where he created a new *Soft Oldies* format that earned the station consistent Top 10 ratings, once reaching as high as #3 overall, #1 Women 18+ ... on AM! It is an approach that was quickly emulated by other stations and networks looking to modernize their *Nostalgia* formats.

"I'd still be there loving it to this day," according to Dearborn, "but my parents were at death's door and this only child had to do what was right, what was needed. So I left a great company (Sandusky) and a great city to take care of my folks during the time they had remaining -- just weeks for my mother, two years for my dad -- and have never regretted it."

## **International success**

Dearborn hosted the morning show on *Nostalgia* CHWO-Toronto for a year after his parents died but the stay was cut short by the station's financial woes and its decision to jettison a few salaries and expenses to stay afloat. He would like to remain in Canada and thinks it may be more likely now since the Canadian-American radio playing field has leveled somewhat in recent years.

"I originally left Canada for the U.S. because there were so many more radio opportunities there. I'd learned all I could in more than three years at my hometown station, CKOC-Hamilton. There were long lines around the block of people waiting to get into stations in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver," recalls Dearborn. "I was young, hungry, eager to grow, and just couldn't wait.

"The U.S. still has more stations, more good-sized markets," he continued, "but the economy there and radio consolidator's elimination of many live, local personality positions have sharply reduced the number of opportunities to almost Canadian levels. That's not to say that everything is completely rosy in Canadian radio, but the hole they've dug for themselves here looks like a very shallow pot-hole in comparison.

"They're both great countries and I'm at home in either one," says the dual citizen. "As always, I'll go where the great radio opportunity is. Maybe next time I'll find a home that's stable, on sound financial ground."

## **Retirement?**

Retirement is the goal for many people, but Dearborn isn't one of them.

"Not on your life! I tried it and found out I'm no good at it," says Bob. "We moved to southwestern Ontario with that idea in mind. Then this morning show opportunity fell into my lap and served as a reminder of just how much I love being on the radio. The people in this area are so wonderful, I would've stayed here for the rest of my life if circumstances had allowed."

While admitting that his appeal has "graduated" to the 40+ audience, he notes that most younger listeners are elsewhere today having chosen other technologies over radio, and he speculates that older listeners may become the medium's "bread 'n' butter" in the decades ahead, especially if radio doesn't figure out how to appeal to younger ones.

"Most radio stations today are spending a fortune they don't have, all chasing the same ever-shrinking sliver of the audience," observes Dearborn. "In the meantime, generations that have grown up on radio and still consider it important in their lives are begging for programming that appeals to them. Yes, it's a more difficult demo for radio to sell and, yes, the ad rates for the demo are lower, but all that can be offset by the reduced expense of competing in such an uncrowded field for a well-heeled audience that is so starved for attention.

"Somewhere out there is a station and audience for the kind of thing I do, that will value the experience and varied skills I bring to the table," says Dearborn listing qualities that have helped make his career longevity possible. "I hope they'll be impressed by my ability to adapt -- to any audience, format, management style, city, region or country -- and sense my enduring passion for radio, unwavering since starting my career as barely a teenager, that's kept me in the business for more than 40 years."

And counting.

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