Photo by Andre Ranieri

Gerry Kemp and Chris Stills have introduced the late-night program "The Vet Show" to share era music and related news with KAVE listeners on 95.3 FM.

Local broadcast serves veterans

Programmers give audience relevant music, news

By Tim Neff
Emerald Contributor

For war veterans living in Lane County, Sunday night at 11 may be the most important time slot on local radio.

Using the airwaves as a means to reach more than 44,000 local veterans, Gerry Kamp and Chris Stillwell fill their late night slot with a veteran-oriented mix of music and news.

They call it the "Vet Show" — a one hour program devoted to the interests and concerns of veterans, airing Sunday nights on KAVE, FM 95.3.

Kamp and Stillwell, both veterans of the Vietnam War, share the responsibilities of producing the show. Kamp handles the musical details while Stillwell produces the news.

Kamp, an adjunct professor who teaches one course at the University each summer, programs the music sets from his vast collection of Vietnam-era records. The show's format allows him to include songs that radio stations rarely touch.

"We play a certain range of music that you never hear on radio these days," Kamp said. "For example, you would never

hear Jimi Hendrix's '1983.' One, it's too long. And two, it's too 'out there.' So I'll play that song, the entire thing."

Although the show generally focuses on Vietnam-era music, Kamp strives to keep the segments fresh and upbeat.

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>
> — Gerry Kamp

"I try not to make the show really nostalgic," he said. "Even though most of the music I play is from 1965 to 1975, I'm just as liable to bring in a U2 song just to shake people up a bit."

Stillwell focuses his news segments on issues of particular interest to war veterans.

"I try to keep up on local issues as well as state and federal stuff," Stillwell said. "The county veteran's services office

barely stumbles along, and that's an issue that concerns us."

Stillwell also closely followed a resolution put before the state legislature during the last session that would have extended housing benefits to veterans of the Persian Gulf War, Panama and Grenada.

"They swept the resolution under the rug," he said.

For Stillwell, the apparent bias of the program's news toward problems faced by veterans is solidly based on fact, he said.

"I don't editorialize, but the facts speak for themselves," he said. "There is a definite pattern of neglect that needs to be addressed."

The combination of Vietnam era music and news for veterans has proved unique among radio shows.

"As far as we know, there are no other similar shows," Kamp said. "We've put the word out on what we're doing, and we've heard no word about other similar shows. We're unique and KAVE is unique for taking us on."

Kamp and Stillwell developed the idea for the Vet Show after seeing a replica of the Vietnam memorial wall on display at the Eugene Celebration in 1985.

"A group of us veterans were sitting at around midnight talking about our experiences," said Stillwell. "One of us said 'God, it would be great to do this on radio.'"

When they met a couple of years before, Kamp and Stillwell had immediately become close friends after discovering that they had both been "river rats" in Vietnam.

"It was unique to be both Navy and in-country with mud up to your knees," Stillwell said. "We were both 'mud Navy,' so we had a lot in common."

Between Kamp's vast record collection and Stillwell's prior experience as a news deejay for a San Francisco radio station, the idea of producing a show especially for veterans seemed natural.

"We went around to different stations in Eugene," Kamp said.