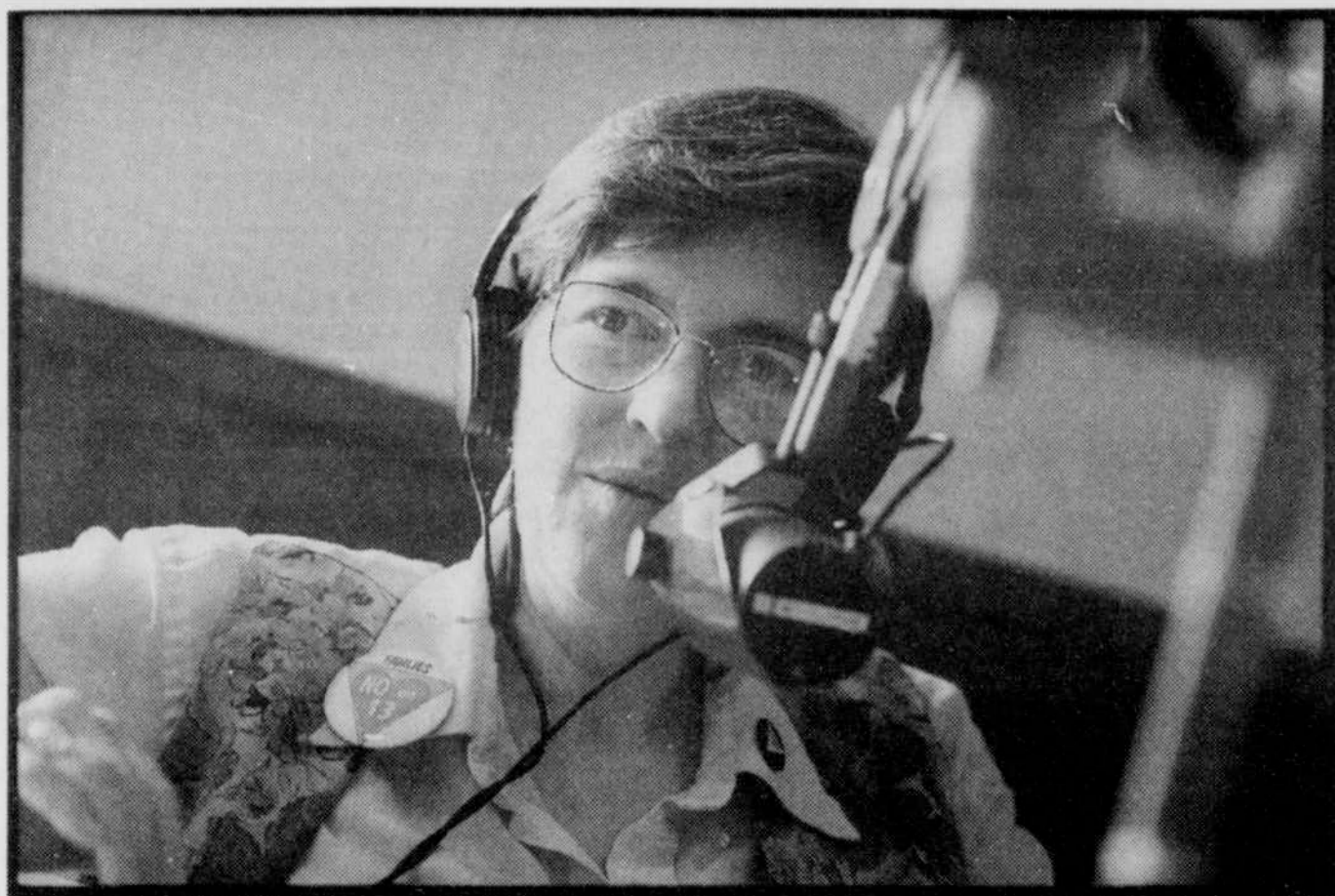


## Sense and civility

*KKEY Radio's Love Makes a Family may go national—  
can a hate-free talk show survive?*

by Inga Sorensen



Host Bonnie Tinker

Each Wednesday morning Bonnie Tinker rises early and makes her way to the studios of KKEY Radio 1150 AM, a Vancouver-based talk/sports station heard throughout Southwest Washington and the Portland metropolitan area.

From 7 to 9 am, she chats with guests and fields calls from listeners. What's so unusual about that, you ask? As host of *Love Makes a Family*, Tinker is one of just a few lesbian and gay commercial radio talk show hosts nationwide who specifically focus on gay and lesbian issues while on the air.

The program, which shifted to the coveted morning drive-time slot in 1994, celebrates its third-year anniversary this month, and Tinker recently received a \$5,000 grant from the Colorado-based Gill Foundation to develop a national syndication plan designed to bolster listenership of *Love Makes a Family* on a grander scale.

"We started this program in the wake of Measure 9. Back then I would get callers who knew very little about gay and lesbian issues," explains Tinker, an openly lesbian grandmother and long-time human rights advocate. "There were lots of comments then that reflected a great deal of ignorance—comments like 'gay men spread disease.' Now there seems to be a lot more general knowledge about gay people."

For those who have never listened to *Love Makes a Family*, the show has a down-home flavor and a calculated civility aimed at fostering awareness of gay and lesbian families.

Such a format flies in the face of much of today's talk radio, which is purposely crafted to generate controversy.

Instead of publicly lambasting a caller for, let's say, being a narrow-minded bigot, Tinker will employ her calming vocal tones in an attempt to find out why a caller feels the way he or she does.

She methodically guides the caller through a maze of reasoning, until his or her argument eventually crumbles into a pile of verbal and

logical gobbledygook. Vitriol is never part of the formula. Tinker simply—and subtly—encourages people to think through the issues for themselves.

"We really are trying to engage people in a constructive dialogue," says Tinker, who through her program and an organization of the same name strives to create broad understanding about lesbian and gay families.

"We still have a solid following of anti-gay callers, but many seem to be concerned with a wider spectrum of interests, such as the minimum wage issue and immigration. As the host, that change provides more of a challenge to me," she says.

Going national provides Tinker with another challenge.

"I ask myself: 'Can we sell this program nationally without ongoing on-the-air dogfights?'" she says. "We have to convince [station managers and the public] that we can."

*Love Makes a Family* is supported through grants and program sponsorship. "We are always looking for more sponsors," stresses Tinker, who says the May 8 program will address alternative insemination.

"I guess you could call it a lesbian Mother's Day show," she laughs.

Portland Metropolitan Community Church pastor Roy Cole and author Leslie Feinberg will be the featured guests on upcoming *Love Makes a Family* shows.

"I think things will heat up again as we begin to tackle the issue of same-sex marriage," she says. "Let's face it, we've come a long way, but there's still so much work to be done."

*Love Makes a Family can be heard each Wednesday from 7 to 9 am on KKEY Radio 1150 AM. Tinker encourages listeners to call in during the show. From Portland, call 222-5539; from Vancouver, call 693-5539. For more information about sponsoring Love Makes a Family, contact Tinker at 228-3892.*

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