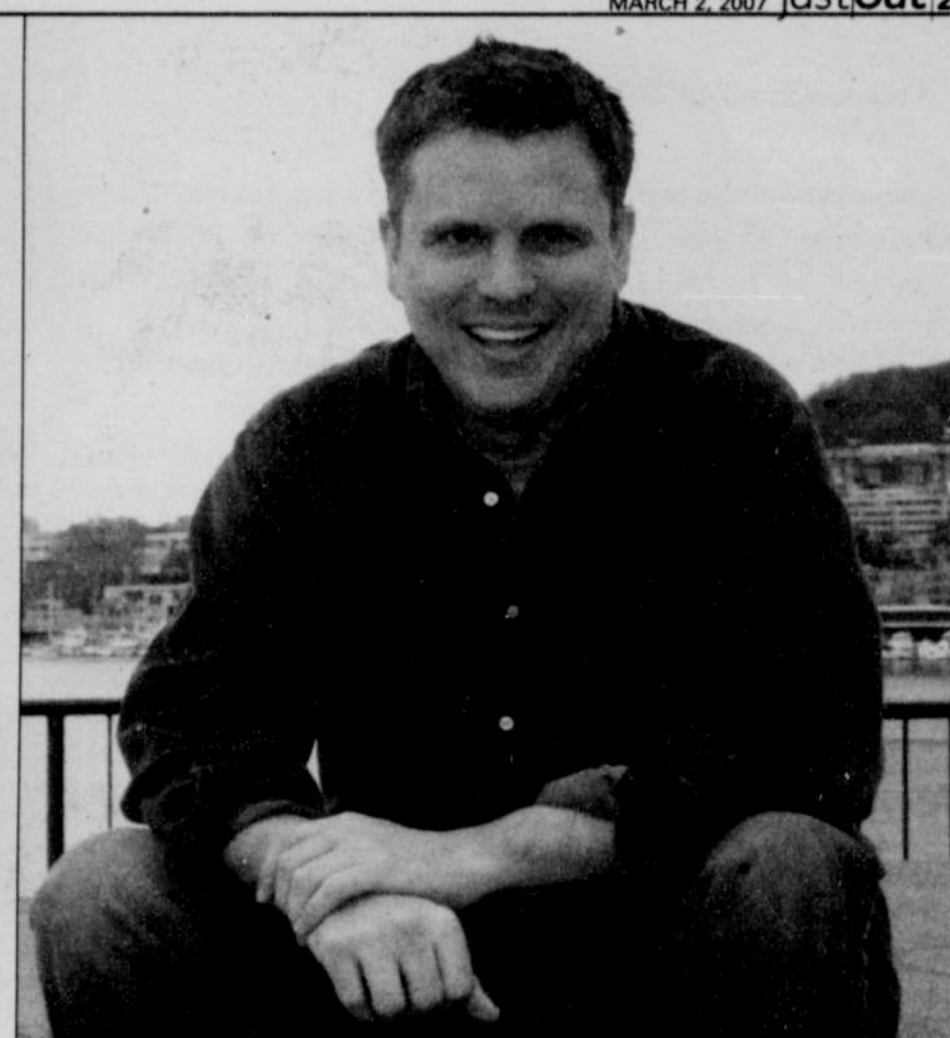




O'Neill and Elliott celebrate Valentine's Day by renewing the wedding vows of Kurt Jull (second from left) and Michael Teufel.

Elliott visits Lake Union during his stint in Seattle.

Lane says probably 90 percent of mainstream radio personalities who are gay are not out on the air, with the exception of KGNV, a dance music station in San Francisco. Carter is probably the most prominent lesbian on a show targeted toward a general audience.

"I think this example with Mitch will probably impact other stations and make it easier for more people to come out on the air," says Lane, who acknowledged that gay men are more likely to meet with opposition than their female counterparts. "There's a lot of homophobia out there and people have these stereotypes in their mind and when they just hear people who are people and just happen to be gay, that will help people to see that it's not that big of a deal."

Elliott explains that he never lied to his listeners in Seattle or Atlanta. "I never acted like I was currently in a relationship, but I would talk about 'my ex,' and I would talk about how I missed my ex's family, how I was really close with my ex's brother and my ex's mom and dad, and just had to be really careful to say 'my ex' instead of 'Patrick's mom and dad' or 'his mom and dad,'" he says.

After KLSY changed its format to cut back on banter between radio personalities, Lane recommended Elliott as a co-host for Daria O'Neill's afternoon slot on The Buzz. The format was similar to the morning show at KLSY before the cutbacks, with a lot of focus on personal stories and relationships, and music chosen by a music director based on research in the "adult contemporary" market. (Producer Ted Douglas describes the music on The Buzz as "what pop music has become.")

"There were many, many, many excellent applicants, but [Mitch] seemed genuinely interested in creating a dialogue and not sort of thinking about getting the next punch line in or what he was going to say that was funny, and of course his voice was very comforting and beautiful and excellently modulated," says O'Neill, who has been a favorite with Portland audiences for many years as a television and

radio personality as well as a player in The 3rd Floor sketch comedy troupe.

Elliott was immediately comfortable with O'Neill, and the two of them decided he would come out on their show, once he was officially hired at The Buzz. "I think without Daria I never would have done it," he says. "I felt so safe with Daria. She is so respected in this town and so loved by her listeners, and Daria's so nurturing."

O'Neill, who attended the same high school as Matthew Shepard in Casper, Wyo., has been a "straight but not narrow" ally for many years. The Reed College graduate has served as host of Basic Rights Oregon events and voiced her support for the queer community at every opportunity. She says she couldn't see how Elliott could not be out to listeners in Portland. "[Mitch] is a proud, gay man. I just

*"My face was flushed
and we were nervous.
We were watching the phones
because we didn't know
if we were just going
to be screamed at,
if some religious-right person
was going to call and tell us
we were going to hell.
We didn't know
what was going to happen."*

—Mitch Elliott

thought that it was kind of preposterous when he explained to me that he'd never been out on the air in a 20-year radio career." While she says she encouraged him to be honest with his new listeners, O'Neill stresses that ultimately the decision to come out was entirely Elliott's.

KRSK program director Jeff McHugh says that he didn't realize Elliott was gay when he was hired as O'Neill's co-host but that once he found out, the choice was clear. "I knew that if Mitch was going to be on the air, he was going to have to be out. That was the only [negative] thing in his demo is that he seemed kind of shallow, like there was something missing."

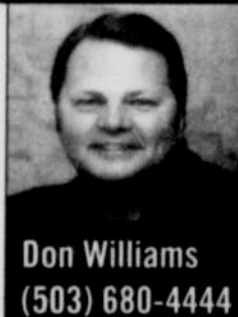
McHugh says KRSK's parent company, Entercom Communications, was totally behind the move. He stresses that although there was some trepidation at the management level, he never encountered any overt opposition to the idea of an openly gay host for a drive-time show targeted toward a general audience. This attitude of acceptance is pretty remarkable considering how few mainstream radio personalities are out (only a handful in the entire country) and especially considering Entercom is the fourth-largest radio broadcasting company in the United States and the largest radio company in the country that focuses only on radio.

Lane, who had helped coach Carter at the time she came out on The Bert Show in Atlanta, brought his expertise to the table as the team at The Buzz considered how to reveal Elliott's sexuality to the listening audience. "We didn't want to hype it too much, but we did want people to notice that it's part of who he is," says Lane. This is how the team came up with the idea of "The Mitch Test."

For Elliott's first few weeks on the air, O'Neill and Douglas, who also appears on the air, kept track of Elliott's ambiguous use of pronouns and

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