

KPHP - The Making of Portland's Home of Praise

by Ruth Heberling

Nestled between the West Hills and the Willamette River in an obscure brown building at 4700 SW Macadam Avenue, behind an almost hidden entrance, rest the deceptively calm offices and studios of Portland's "Home of Praise!"; 1290 on the AM dial. As the sun sets behind the trees, 1290 is still honoring the One who never sleeps. When silence gathers along each street, KPHP continues to broadcast the good news of the One who never stops speaking.

Three years ago, 1290 was "dark," in radio-speak. KLVS, the now defunct all-Elvis music station had disbanded. Crawford Broadcasting Company, headquartered in Detroit, Michigan, began to evaluate the need in Portland for a new station targeting the Christian community. Teams from the home office began to seek out the Christian leaders: Joe Aldrich, Bill Ritchie, Ron Mell. They soon discovered Mission Portland, a unique ministry designed to help coordinate local needs and ministries. CBC bought the station in March of 1991.

"All we had, literally," says David Harms, General Manager of KPHP, "was a piece of paper from the FCC stating that we had a license to broadcast on the 1290 wavelength and a lease on three radio transmitters west of 205 by Clackamas. That was all we had." No offices. No studios. No staff. Just a handful of promise.

There were only three stations in the area targeting the Christian community at the time. KPDQ ran mostly ministry and Bible teaching programs. KBVM, from the University of Portland, broadcast mellow Christian and secular music along with Catholic services. Fledgling KLove was airing contemporary Christian music.

Harms moved into a Portland Motel 6 in November that year, leaving his family in Detroit to finish the school term. His first official day on the job as General Manager of Portland's newest radio station, he assessed his needs—a typewriter, pens, paper, stamps. He filled the hours of daylight and dark listening: to the existing radio stations; to potential advertisers; to



David Harms

the needs of local ministries. For many weeks, each Sunday would find Harms visiting various churches, standing in the foyer between services and asking questions. What do you need in a radio station? What needs are you having met now? What needs aren't you having met now?

"The thing I really love about Crawford broadcasting," says Harms, rolling forward in his chair and removing his wire-rim glasses, "is that we have no pre-set ideas about format. We're not a cookie-cutter operation. We have 15 radio stations around the country, and they are all very different. Each station is tailored to the needs of the community. The Chicago station plays mostly black gospel music. In Denver, it's 24 hours of music. St. Louis is an all-talk format. Birmingham plays southern gospel music. Buffalo carries a very traditional music format. They're all different. When we come in, it's not 'We're going to do music,' or 'We're going to do talk.' We find out what the people want."

The format combining contemporary Christian music, Bible teaching, and talk shows was developed. Staff was hired. Offices were leased and modified. The

fateful moment came at 6 AM, January 6, 1992 when Matt Williams, the morning show host, flipped the switch and KPHP came alive with prayer, praise, and music.

"The first half hour we were on the air," reminisces Harms with enthusiasm, "I was driving down I-84, taking the loop on 205, and back up I-5 to the studios, just to listen. I had been working on putting this station together from total scratch for two and a half months, 20 hours a day. I was driving around, feeling good. The broadcast was sounding good. I was pretty excited. And just as I headed down 205 around Division Street, the still, small voice of God said, 'You didn't do anything.' And I couldn't argue with that. God had built His own program."

This Christian radio station takes more than talent, initiative, equipment, and courage. The primary quality required in each staff member is a heart open to the Savior's leading and guidance. The general manager is not alone in his devotion to God. Sandy Snavelly reflects, "Working at a Christian station forces me to 'Walk my talk.' There is never a day that goes by that I'm not aware of the need to be close to the Savior. If I don't spend time with the Lord