

Waco's FM Radio Station Once Home to the 'Golden Sound of Beautiful Music' Celebrates a Golden Anniversary

KWTX-FM celebrates 50 years of entertaining Central Texas listeners in 2020.

KWTX-FM's inaugural broadcast was Dec. 7, 1970. The new Waco FM station at 97.5 MHz was owned and operated by KWTX Broadcasting Company, the licensee of KWTX-TV (Channel 10) and KWTX-AM (1230 kHz). All local radio and TV programming originated from the company's Broadcast Center at 4520 Bosque Blvd. in Waco.

KWTX-FM's transmitter and tower were located along I-35 near Lorena, Texas, a few miles south of Waco. The station transmitted at an effective radiated power of 71kW. Programming was sent from the Waco studio to the transmitter site by a microwave link licensed by the Federal Communications Commission as Auxiliary WAL 23.

Throughout the 1970s, the station aired easy-listening music in stereo with limited interruptions from 6 a.m. to midnight. Instrumental selections from albums by Percy Faith, Montovani, Ray Conniff, Ferrante and Teicher, Andre Kostelanetz, 101 Strings, plus many other similar musical artists were broadcast to listeners throughout Central Texas. The station also carried national news on the hour from the Mutual Broadcasting System. The local FM announcers gave the time and temperature on the quarter-hour and a short headline news report and weather forecast every half-hour.

Dave South, former KWTX radio program director and Texas A&M play-by-play sportscaster, recently recalled a few of the obstacles faced before and after the first broadcast.

"We put the station on the air with a very limited music library," South said. "I had gone to Dallas a number of times begging the record distributors for any help they could provide, which wasn't much."

However, the station received programming help from an unexpected source. South received a letter from a man in Europe asking if the radio station played easy-listening music. The man's father was an orchestra leader who had recorded 10 or 12 albums.

"He sent those albums to me," South said. "We played just about every cut on each LP, and that increased our music library by 30 to 40 percent."

South said station management would come into the control room occasionally and draw a line with a red grease pencil through album cuts they didn't want to hear again.

"Lots of red circles became a part of our lives in FM," South said.

On-air announcers also had to cope with working inside a small confined space, sometimes for up to six hours. The FM control room wasn't much larger than a closet and crowded with equipment and storage shelves.

South said that it was often difficult to find someone willing to work long part-time hours for not much money – and who liked to listen to slow instrumental music.

“Our only full-time announcer was Clarence Garnes,” South said. “Clarence was a former radio guy and had a great voice. He was in his late 70s and smoked like a chimney. He didn’t make much money, but that was OK with him, because he was retired, and his wife had a good job at Baylor University.”

Many FM radio hosts brought “Beautiful Stereo Music” to Central Texas listeners for over a decade until the format changed in the early ’80s to personality DJs playing contemporary hits 24 hours a day.

A few other noteworthy changes to KWTX-FM have occurred. A new broadcast tower and transmitter facility was built near Moody, south of Waco, in 1979. FM power increased to 100kW in 1986. KWTX AM/FM/TV moved to a new facility at 6700 American Plaza in 1987. Both KWTX radio stations were sold to Gulfstar Communications in 1996 and are now owed by iHeartMedia. Today, KWTX AM, FM and other Waco iHeartMedia stations are located at 314 W. Hwy. 6.



KWTX-FM--Former announcer Bill Castello in KWTX-FM control--circa 1979

KWTX Radio to Start FM Broadcasts Monday

KWTX Broadcasting Company, owners and operators of KWTX-TV, Channel 10, and KWTX-Radio, 1230 kilocycles, has announced that KWTX-

FM will begin operations Monday, Dec. 7, at 6 a.m.

The new stereo FM station at 97.5 on the FM dial will have an effective radiated power of 71,000 watts. KWTX-FM will broadcast 18 hours per day, 6 a.m.-midnight, and will be the most powerful FM station in this area.

According to Frank Fallon, manager of KWTX-AM and FM, programming plan are for the "Golden Sound of Beautiful Music" with limited interruptions. 12/6/1978

KWTX-FM inaugural broadcast--Waco Tribune-Herald--Dec. 6, 1970



KWTX-FM--Promotional business card--circa 1979

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