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Deja Vu

Is a Top 40 Format In Future for KHIP?

By Joe Livernois
Herald Salinas Bureau

HOLLISTER — In the revolving-door world of modern radio, even Hollister is not a secure home.

And for the crew at Hollister's own KHIP-FM — known as Head-quake Earthquaters on the radio dial — uncertainty prevails again. Call it *deja vu*.

It wasn't four years ago that the crew at KHIP, lone-wolf crusaders against pre-packaged radio programming, packed their bags at KFAT, the cosmic country radio station that made Gilroy famous.

KFAT called itself the "No Bull-bleep Station," and it was probably the last radio station left in California to play the eccentric tunes of such artists as Kinky Friedman and his Texas Jewboys, John Prine, and Commander Cody and his Lost Planet Airmen.

The KFAT anthem was called "Moose Turd Pie."

Rock Programming

The KFAT crew, a tight-knit group of self-described "radio personalities," suffered much grief — as did FATheads up and down the

have an alternative commercial media," said Ms. Airheart last week.

"Our format is that we don't have a format," said Sleepy John, a relative newcomer to the FAT-HIP scene. "The only things we stay away from are rock 'n' roll, classical music and jazz."

As a result, in a single day listeners of KHIP set might hear straight C&W, zydeco, Mexican norteno, bluegrass, cosmic country, cowpunk, satirical country, country rock, folk music and what Sleepy John calls "Hard Core Cornography."

"We do pursue the new and the offbeat," said Sleepy John. "You won't hear Lee Greenwood and Dolly Parton on KHIP."

Dolly Parton is not forgotten on KHIP, though. Sleepy John likes to play a song called "Dolly Parton's Hits," which, according to the tune, "are bouncing up the charts."

Break-Even Month

Ms. Airheart, interviewed last week in the KHIP studios (located in in the basement of the old Hazel Hawkins Memorial Hospital), said that the station was "rounding the corner," profit-wise, and had its

Central Coast — when the station owner died, another outfit took over, kicked out the FAT format, and began broadcasting everyday humdrum rock 'n' roll.

The new station played the Top 40 format designed for "contemporary mass appeal" that so disgusts FATheads.

The rueful headline in a major San Francisco daily newspaper the day of KFAT's demise read: "Making Gilroy Safe for Barry Manilow."

For almost two years, former KFAT "personalities" kicked around aimlessly. Amy Airheart wasted her honey voice off-the-air for several non-profit FM stations. Felton Pruitt hung out at a Monterey rock station. Uncle Sherman worked for more mainstream country stations.

The bunch got back together about 17 months ago, however, when Ms. Airheart and Uncle Sherman approached the owner of KHIP, a foundering rat-hole of a station that could not be heard much beyond San Juan Bautista. She convinced the owner, Vern Miller of Cupertino, that the ex-FAT folks could turn his station into a radio legend.

KFAT Reunion

Everybody was happy. Of the 15 airshifts, 10 were filled by former KFAT deejays. Amy became KHIP's general manager and soon the airwaves between Santa Cruz and King City were full of the sometimes-relevant, often-irreverent music, the kind of music that made KFAT hip.

"The main statement we are making is that it is important to

first break-even month last month.

"We've lost lots of money," said Ms. Airheart. "But after 1½ years, we turned it around."

KFAT was lots of fun, in an anarchic way, but the rap on FAT was that alternative programming is never profitable. Ms. Airheart said that HIP was proving the skeptics wrong.

Nevertheless, Ms. Airheart was demoted last month and she resigned last Monday, taking 700 of her personal records that she had loaned to the studio with her.

Meanwhile, rumors are rampant that Ms. Airheart's replacement, station manager, Mik Benedict of Capitola, could change the programming once again. The station is moving its sales and administrative offices to Salinas in September.

Benedict said that he will decide on the future of KHIP's programming by Monday.

"We want to make a professional operation out of it, especially the sales department and the administration," he said. "There will be a lot of changes."

He will not say what that means for the KHIP format.

Liz Castillo, an advertising saleswoman for KHIP from Salinas, said that she, for one, prefers the musical format as it is.

Ms. Castillo came to KHIP from the ranks of the "canned" stations. "It was real competitive there," she said. "Everyone was running around trying to sell numbers. The big emphasis was on Arbitron ratings.

"Here we sell something that's unique."

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