



Alternative KPIG buys the farm

By Paul Rogers
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Much to the chagrin of Bay Area bluegrass fans and devout lovers of irreverent country music, KPIG radio has decided there's just too much month at the end of the money.

The tiny Watsonville station, which built a cult-like following at 107 (oink) 5 FM around such songs as "Free Mexican Air Force" and "Quiche Woman in a Barbeque Town," will abandon its format next week in favor of Top 40 or classic rock satellite service.

"It's strictly financial. There's no other reason," said co-owner Laura Hopper on Wednesday. "We really believed this would work but we've gotten ourselves into a hole we just can't get out of."

For many Santa Cruz County listeners, known as "piggies," KPIG's alternative play lists, loose disc jockeys and advertising parodies provided a

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KPIG banks on Top 40 bailout

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creative oasis on a radio dial dominated by mainstream homogeneity.

Traditional country songs from the likes of Merle Haggard and Johnny Cash shared air time with selections from the Allman Brothers to the Grateful Dead, Elvis to the Austin Lounge Lizards.

But the style its disc jockeys called "pure pork" just didn't bring home the bacon. Citing a relentless decline in advertising revenues, Hopper last week fired most of the station's dozen disc jockeys and had a satellite dish installed on the roof to tap into nationally syndicated programming.

The porcine call letters will be retained. KPIG's cartoon logo — adorning bumper stickers from Volkswagen microbuses to several Santa Cruz police cars — will go.

"There are a lot of people around here who love this kind of music, but somehow it just doesn't

translate into advertising dollars," said Leigh Hill, president of the Santa Cruz Bluegrass Society.

D.J. Felton Pruitt said the Loma Prieta earthquake hurt many local businesses who used to advertise on "The Pig." Started in 1988 as the offshoot of the then-defunct KFAT, 3,000-watt KPIG was not able to reach many of the listeners between San Francisco and Gilroy who followed the old 18,000-watt station, he added.

Pruitt and several other KPIG disc jockeys, including "Sleepy John" Sandidge, are trying to find a new home for their program-

ming style on several other Santa Cruz stations. Until they do, however, the loss of KPIG as a local station could affect the already ailing Santa Cruz club scene.

Steve Kritzer, a Los Gatos-based musician whose mandolin, guitar and banjo shows have been a fixture in Santa Cruz, said he relied on KPIG for air play and advertising.

"KPIG was the only station that really supported off-the-wall stuff and advertised it," Kritzer lamented. "There's not that many outlets to hear independents like me who aren't on the Billboard Top 100."