



STORY AND PHOTOS BY RICK BUSSLER

SPINNING GOLDEN OLDIES

“Let’s let it roll...” From a small intimate studio on Owatonna’s south side, veteran radio broadcaster Todd Hale introduces and spins yet another Golden Oldie from his collection of Big Band music.

Yes, the voice of Owatonna has been officially retired from the radio business for 30 years. However, that is not stopping him from jumping behind the controls and microphone to do his weekly Big Band Show on KRFO, the AM station he once owned with other partners.

He may be 80 years old, but Hale shows no sign of letting go of the show that has filled the local airwaves for decades. He pulls from a collection of cassette tapes and vinyl records at his side ready to fill the 45-minute time slot that airs twice on Sundays, once at 8:15 a.m. and again at 6 p.m.

KRFO Brand Manager Paul Shea says the station is blessed to have someone of Hale’s caliber still on the radio. “Having Todd Hale is invaluable with all the years of talent he has,” Shea said. “It’s truly a pleasure to have him. The amount of work he puts into the show is really incredible.”

Shea said the old adage “no news is good news” applies to Hale’s show. While they may not receive a lot of feedback at the station, Shea points out, “If the show is not on, we definitely hear about it.”

True to Hale fashion and symbolic of earlier radio days, he utilizes a handy cassette tape recorder to aide in spinning some of the oldies. He also uses a similar recorder to record announcements, or “barkering” as he calls it, for the Steele County Fair during fair week. He has been the voice of the fair for 27 years.

On KRFO, the show is rich with big band music from the 1930s. Some of the favorites he plays include Clyde McCoy, Harry James, Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, Artie Shaw and Hale’s personal favorite, Guy Lombardo.

“I like the rhythm and I like the sound,” Hale says of Lombardo’s music. “He used to be on TV and I always watched him. He is one of my favorites.”



Veteran radio broadcaster Todd Hale feels comfortable behind the microphone at KRFO in Owatonna. Hale hosts a weekly show featuring Big Band music from the 1930s. He says the show is a trip “down the line of yester years of big bands.”

During a recent taping, which takes place usually on Wednesday mornings prior to the Sunday airing, Hale played “The Best of the Big Bands.” Those oldies included One O’Clock Jump by Count Basie and his orchestra and Two O’Clock Jump by Harry James and his orchestra.

Midway through the show, Hale spun Clyde McCoy’s Sugar Blues from 1935. “We haven’t had this one on for a long time,” Hale reflected.

With Hale being the sole person in the studio doing everything from finding the hits to spinning the records and hosting, the show isn’t always perfect. While the vinyl was spinning, Hale noticed the music cut out momentarily. “For some reason, this cuts out,” he said. “I think it’s in the needle assembly. There’s a little glitch in there.”

Another oldie played on this particular show was “Does Your Heart Beat for Me?” Recorded by the Russ Morgan Orchestra in 1936, Hale is particularly fond of this song because it was the theme song played at the closing of the Monterey

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Todd Hale
Big Band Show Host

Ballroom in Owatonna in 1976. Hale recalls KRFO broadcast live from the Monterey with Morgan’s entire show. “We were all live and kickin’,” Hale shared. “It was the last big band that came to the Monterey,” he added.

In the middle of the show, Hale reads a commercial spot on hearing from the show’s only sponsor, Amy Swain Hearing. Hale knows the show isn’t a huge source of revenue for the station.

“Hello everybody to the neighboring communities,” Hale interjects midway through the program. “Glad to have you as well proceed down the line of yester years of big bands.”

Hale has a pretty extensive collection of hits in the studio, but he says he’s always open for donations

if people have records sitting around that they don’t want any longer. He noted he’s not particularly interested in vocal music.

There have been a variety of hosts for the show throughout the years. The show began in the early 1980s, according to Hale. In those early years, Pink Allen joined Hale on the show. After Allen became ill, Armin Rezac hosted the show. Hale stepped away from the show and was replaced by Bill Reizenhauer, who himself played in a big band. Jerry Peters eventually came on to join Rezac. Following Peters’ death, Hale came back to solo the show. He has been doing it for the past few years.

“It’s a trip back in musical time,” Hale says of the show. Asked whether the

pendulum will ever swing back to Big Band music, Hale said, “Doubtful.” He added, “Nobody can afford to transport a whole band and the ballrooms are diminishing rapidly.”

For Hale, hosting the show is out of love for big band music. The station does not compensate Hale for the show. “I do it as a hobby,” Hale said. “No matter what kind of day I’m having, this music relaxes me and makes for a better day for me.”

Hale doesn’t have any idea what the future will hold for the show. He admits Big Band music is “totally out of their regular format” on KRFO. “I hope they never decide to stop running it,” he said. He added AM radio is always facing “an uphill battle” with programming.

After graduating from Brown Institute in the Twin Cities, Hale got his start in radio as a staff announcer for KRFO in 1959. “Back then, we were playing these tunes all the time,” he recalls. He admits he never really planned on staying in Owatonna, but two years after joining

KRFO, the opportunity came up for him to become a partner in the station. There were three partners from 1961 to 1989.

Hale said he has always been attracted to radio. “I enjoy the creativity of the program,” he said. “I felt I provided a need in town,” he said, adding he was the “early morning man” at sign-on for many years.

Even after being away from radio for several decades, Hale seems to be a natural behind the microphone. “Getting behind the mic brings back a lot of memories of my days in radio,” he said.

As Hale ends the show, he tells listeners, “It’s great having you with us on the Big Band Show. Enjoy the week and have a great one.”

Hale turns away from the microphone and says, “There it is, completed. Another one in the books. Not the best. I go through some of them without mistakes, but today we had some crazy things happen.”

Perhaps that’s the reason Hale felt the need to play “I’ve Got a Feelin’ I’m Fallin’” by Benny Goodman and his Orchestra.



Hale looks back at a portion of his Big Band music collection in the studio.



Hale has dozens of vinyl albums to choose from for music on his Big Band Show, which airs weekly on Sundays at 8:15 a.m. and 6 p.m.