

After a half-century, Alpine radio stations change hands

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(photo by WALT FRERCK)

New station owner Martin Benevich gets some control board pointers from Ray Hendryx.

ALPINE – Alpine's two radio stations are under new ownership.

Ray Hendryx, president of Big Bend Broadcasters Inc., the parent company of KVLB AM-1240, and Rio Grande Broadcasting Company, parent company of KALP FM-92.7, said the sale of the two companies was completed Monday.

The new owner is Alpine Radio, a limited partnership headed by Martin and Patricia Benevich of Alpine. Tom and Val Beard, part of the ownership of Rio Grande Broadcasting, will also be part of the company.

Hendryx, whose family has been in the radio business in Alpine since 1947, said it is very fortunate that the radio stations will remain in local hands. While this will be the first venture into the broadcasting business for Benevich, he has run a successful local business, Big Canyon Television, for the past 30 years. He has also been active in civic affairs, serving in a number of capacities, including the Alpine Chamber of Commerce board of directors and the city of Alpine Parks Board. His wife, P.J., is a longtime teacher in Alpine public schools.

Hendryx will remain with the broadcast operations while the transition takes place. The transfer of the station licenses is pending approval by the FCC. Benevich started putting an acquisition plan together when word filtered out that the stations were for sale a year or so ago. "I didn't want to see the stations sold to some big syndicate" and broadcasting fit into his plans to promote Alpine and the Davis Mountains and Big Bend Country. "I like to do things for the community, and I believe I can help promote Alpine and area businesses."

The deal was much sweeter since Hendryx and his family had established a half-century of solid broadcasting with years of public and community service, concise news reporting, and lots of goodwill.

"We are really thankful to Ray for all the work he has done at KVLF and KALP over the years and all the help in getting this sale done," Benevich said. "We have big shoes to fill" and Ray has a place at Alpine radio for as long as wants."

The beginning of a new staff is already in place. Mike Martini, the morning radio announcer on KALP-FM has more than 20 years of broadcasting experience.

"Our plan is morning classic country and progress to more contemporary country in the afternoon," Benevich said.



(photo by WALT FRERCK)

From left, sportscaster Derek Daly, Ray Hendryx, FM announcer Mike Martini, and new station owners Patricia and Martin Benevich.

Sports broadcasting will continue to be a bedrock of local programming, Benevich said, and also new to the sports desk is Derek Daly, a recent college graduate whose enthusiasm will overcome his emerging broadcasting experience.

He replaces longtime Alpine broadcaster Jerry Sotello, the "voice of the Bucks and Lobos" for more than 25 years. Sotello and his wife Ida have moved to Fredericksburg where Sotello is now a radio announcer for KNAF AM-910.

Eventually, Benevich plans to have more live programming and talk shows with all- local announcers and phase out programmed music.

Travis Roberts has agreed to a weekly history program, Benevich said. Likewise, Leo Dominguez will continue with the Ritmo Latino music show weekday evenings, and the G Man, Gilbert Valenzuela, will continue with his Texas music, Americana and Blues program on Sunday afternoons.

"I think Leo's planning a special Mother's Day show," Benevich said.

Music wise, more local bands and musicians will also be featured, Benevich said. "You can get music everywhere now – from the internet – but we want to give the flavor of the Big Bend with news and information."

He said the "morning format works well, so the plan there is to just tweak

it.”

Benevich noted that this endeavor is a marathon and not a sprint. “None of the changes will happen overnight but over time.”

For the 61-year-old Hendryx, who first climbed into the seat behind the control board at age 13, the decision to sell “was a long and hard thought process.” Family concerns were a big factor, he said, but he also wondered what his father, pioneer broadcaster Gene Hendryx, would have done. “He would have sold, plus I’ve had all the seven days a week I need.”



Gene Hendryx at the helm of KVLf.

(photo by GLENN BURGESS, courtesy of the Archives of the Big Bend, Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library, SRSU)

KVLf went on the air on February 27, 1947 and Gene Hendryx, then Sul Ross State College student recently back from the World War II Pacific theater in the U.S. Marines, joined the staff a short time later.

KIUN-AM Pecos radio station owner Barney Hubbs and journalist Jack Hawkins founded the station. By the mid-1950s the station ran into financial problems, and Hubbs and Hawkins were “tired of putting money into it so they told dad to turn it around or shut it down” Ray Hendryx recalled. “Dad worked out a deal to get a piece of the action and took control in 1955.”

Interestingly, one of the first things Gene Hendryx did was open a studio in Marfa, somewhere along North Highland Avenue. But getting the telephone lines to work well between the Marfa and Alpine studios proved problematic. “It didn’t last long,” Ray Hendryx said.

Another Gene Hendryx venture was KVLf TV in 1963, with studios at the

radio station. It signed on at 5pm with a newscast, had ABC prime time programming after that, and signed off at 10pm with a news program. The TV station lasted two years.

About that time, Gene Hendryx was elected the area's state representative and that took time away from his broadcasting. He served three terms from 1962-1967.

The KALP- FM went on the air in 1986.

Ray Hendryx recalled that when he first followed his father's footsteps into radio in 1967, the first major news story he had to report was the six-day war between Israel and Egypt. "News came in on an old UPI teletype wire machine" and he read those reports live on air.

He worked at the family station until he graduated from Alpine High School and then enrolled at Texas A&M University. "But my grades were so good they invited me not to come back." By then the war in Vietnam was raging and his conscription lottery number was three. "So I enlisted in the Navy, and went to radioman school." Like his father, he served in the Pacific, on Guam, on a destroyer and on an aircraft carrier from 1972-1976.

When he returned to Alpine, he returned with his wife, Rita, and their first child, and has been at the radio station ever since.

"It's been a really wonderful and educational experience," Ray Hendrx said, "and I hope in some way the station has become a part of listeners' lives." Benevich said he hopes to continue in that tradition.

It's the same telephone number for Alpine radio, 432.837.2144, and there's a new email: alpinetxradio@gmail.com. The station also broadcasts news and sports shows at bigbendradio.com.