

This is the third in a series of interviews with arts, cultural and community leaders who provide outstanding resources to the residents of Western New York.

The Voice of Reason

Brian Brown-Cashdollar and Ray Marks Discuss WHLD 1270 Radio

BY ROBERT HIRSCH

This February Brian Brown-Cashdollar, CEO of WHLD 1270 radio and Ray Marks, General Manager, launched a new progressive commercial radio station in Buffalo. From their current offices on Delaware Avenue next to Spot Coffee they discuss their vision for their new voice.

Robert Hirsch: Where did you first get the idea to start a progressive radio station?

Brian Brown-Cashdollar: It was during the first Gulf War. I was living in New York City and listening to WBAI, where I heard things that nobody else was discussing. But I was going off to the Peace Corps and was not able to follow-up. When I returned to this area a few years ago I got involved with local peace activist Dr. Tom Potts in getting *Democracy Now* hosted by Amy Goodman on the air. Through successful fundraising we were the first to get this program onto a commercial radio station and this planted the seed for what you are hearing today.

RH: Describe WHLD's mission.

BBC: We call the format independent news and progressive talk radio. We intend to provide a global, humanistic, democratic perspective towards the news, public affairs, the arts and cultural programming that exemplifies journalistic freedom and integrity while creating a local dialogue of diverse viewpoints.

RH: What do you want the new radio station to do?

BBC: The press chooses not to cover important stories in a real way. Locally we can see this in the issues involving Love Canal and Hickory Woods. Basically news and information that needs to get out there because it affects people's everyday lives gets filtered, much in the same way that callers to talk shows are filtered before being allowed on the air. We want to give as honest a rendering of the local, national and international news as we can. One way or another, we are all

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RH: As CEO do you dictate the content of the shows?

BBC: No. I'm not setting an issue specific agenda. I don't have a list of topics that I insist be covered. I'm not shy about expressing my ideas, but I try not to intervene into the content of our shows. Our people are responsible for the content of their own shows. What I want is honest coverage of any topic.

RH: How did Ray Marks become the general manager?

Ray Marks: I've been in commercial broadcasting for 39 years and I came out of retirement about a year ago to work with Brian to bring progressive programming to Western New



L-R: Brian Brown-Cashdollar and Ray Marks.
Photo: Jim Bush.

York because I was fed-up with the one-sided viewpoint of commercial radio.

RH: Explain your motto: The Voice of Reason.

RM: The Voice of Reason means we are open to our callers, we do not screen our callers. Most stations screen people. This is extremely deceiving because when you hear the product you think everyone is at the same wavelength. It is a false reading because people with different viewpoints are not allowed to talk. We are offering an open dialogue

that is not heard in commercial broadcasting. We are a locally operated station, supported by local investors who want to tell the stories that are not being told or printed. By the way, Tracey Brown-Cashdollar, Brian's wife, created the motto.

RH: What is an example of a local story that isn't being fully told?

RM: This morning we were talking about the closing of the St. Augustine Center, which is awful and nobody is doing anything about it. The east side of Buffalo is totally ignored. But it doesn't matter to us where the story originates — Amherst, Cheektowaga, the Southtowns — we are going to cover it, but not at the expense of the people of the east side who are suffering miserably.

RH: What about national issues?

RM: We have callers who disagree with the present national administration that the economy is great, or other callers who are fed up with the state of our medical care. We want to address these issues. Who should pay for health care? Should the employer, should the government? If not, then who? Medicaid costs are skyrocketing and why?

It is because people need it. What are we going to do? Cut that away from the people too? There needs to be a national debate and we want people in WNY to be heard.

RH: What life experiences do you bring to the station?

BBC: I bring my management experience. I've run non-profit organizations. For the past five years I was the fiscal administrator of WNY Council on Occupational Safety & Health and I plan to run this station as if it is a non-profit. I have brought investors onboard and bring my ties to the labor and activist communities. Plus I am an activist on labor and media issues.

RH: Describe your partnership with Ray Marks, which seems to combine oomph and experience.

BBC: I have deep respect for Ray and he is highly regarded for his knowledge about radio by people in Buffalo. I also know what I know, and what I don't. When it comes to the day-to-day operation of a radio station I knew I didn't know how to do that. I didn't want to "play" at radio; I wanted to take the best shot at being successful. That meant finding someone with the experience and understanding of what we wanted to achieve. After I met Ray, I told our investors that we either needed Ray Marks or someone exactly like him to run the station. This wouldn't be happening without my chutzpa and Ray's expertise to carry this out.

RM: We are a very interesting team, which includes Alex Blair of our morning show. We have been able to meddle together. We have a chemistry going with our entire crew because we are in it for the right reasons. This is a family operation and we believe in what we are doing, in having respect and loyalty for one another, and for where we are going.

RH: What are your immediate plans?

RM: We are moving to the Tri-Main building on Main Street where we are constructing a state-of-the-art facility.

BBC: We'll be there this month.

RH: How are you different from the mega media?

RM: We are locally operated and intent on building a type of radio that has not been heard anywhere in over 20 years. We have only heard one side of the story. Now we are going to give voice to the other side.

RH: How are you going to vie with satellite and public radio?

RM: Satellite can't provide any local favor. We have a different style and pacing than the NPR product. We are faster paced because people are busy, especially in the morning. We have very good Air America programming including Al Franken and Randi Rhodes. Plus an awesome lineup of Pacifica Radio programming that has not been heard here. In the future we plan to become predominantly local. There used to be 13 AM stations in Buffalo doing all kinds of different formats so we think there is plenty of room in this market for diversity and competition.

RH: Who is your target audience?

RM: By reaching out and being visible in the community people will pay attention and allow us to maximize the number of listeners in all demographics.

BBC: We want to break the mode of who listens to talk radio. We are creating a new type of radio by melding Air America, Pacifica and local talk, which ironically is really old time radio that is community oriented.


RH: Will you target specific issues?

BBC: Yes, we will be setting time aside for community access.

RH: Tell me about WHLD's unique programming plans?

BBC: Judy Einach, who ran as a Green Party candidate for mayor of Buffalo, has a show on Saturday night at 8 p.m. and for Woman's History Month is planning to do re-enactments of women's suffragette plays. Roxanne Amico is putting together a local interview program in which she will talk with local people. The first one will be with photographer Milton Rogovin who will be reading selections from his autobiography. Ray, who teaches at Buffalo State, will be leading an internship program here to help train new talent. We will also be offering Podcasting. We are considering doing spoken word programs, such as a book club. We hope to do arts and local music, too.

RH: What's the feedback so far?

BBC: It's only been a few weeks, but the response has been overwhelmingly positive and much greater than we anticipated. 

For more information contact:
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