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Editor

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Contributors

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- "No Milk Today" ■ Play-by-Play Action ■ Staying With the Music ■ Covid Clean

WTCC's tower sent strong signal across town

By Anthony Pilla '55

I joined the Radio-Television Workshop in 1952. That's what the Radio Club at Teacher's College of Connecticut was then called. I became president (general manager) of the workshop the next year and my goal was to make WTCC, 640 AM on the dial, a more powerful college



The original WTCC radio station and tower located near the present Memorial Hall.

broadcasting radio station.

From its first years, WTCC operated from a gray building near today's

Memorial Hall. I appointed George Anvanetaki, '54, a World War II veteran, as chief engineer. He converted our workshop into a real radio station!

George told me we needed a tower to transmit our signal. I noticed the back end of our campus had a storage section full of surplus World War II equipment with a very large tower lying on the ground. George said, "Tony, go get that tower!"

There was a very tall tower lying on the ground.

I approached a nearby construction crew and convinced them to dig a big hole next to our station, install the tower in the ground and anchor it with concrete.

Our WTCC staff, led by George, ran a very long cable from the top of the tower to a large tree at the end of the campus. This antenna allowed WTCC to broadcast all over campus and into the surrounding New Britain neighborhoods. It was a big improvement from broadcasting through a telephone line that connected the studio to a small transmitter placed in a campus building.

Since America at that time was on the verge of rock'n roll music, we began playing those songs thanks to New Britain's WHAY AM station. I visited WHAY often and usually returned with stacks of donated records. WHAY also donated equipment to WTCC.

Gradually, rock began to replace some of the regular WTCC music. Disc jockeys played the popular tunes of the time, big band and crowners like Frank Sinatra. 78s were common records, but LPs were becoming popular. I had a classical music show from 8 to 9 p.m.

WTCC also covered sports and Herbert (Herbie) Welte Jr., '55, was our play-by-play announcer. Herbie was the son of TCC President Herbert Welte. Dr. Reginald Swann, a psychology professor, was our faculty adviser.

In 1955, the year I graduated, Eddie VanDuzer took over as WTCC station manager. The station remained in the gray building and later relocated to East Hall. Eventually, the building was removed.

Anthony Pilla is a retired high school social studies teacher, author of two books, commentator on current events and an international traveler. Originally from Wallingford, Conn., he earned a masters degree from UConn and taught in Meriden, Conn. and Plainview, New York.

Editor's note: From its founding in 1947 until WTCC aired in November 1949, the Radio Club performed drama, comedy and variety shows on WKNB New Britain and WDRC FM. Nick Klym '51, a World War II paratrooper, wired and launched the station and was the first general manager. WTCC 640 AM became WCCS 670 AM in 1959 and WFCS 90.1 FM in 1972.



Radio Club trailblazer Anthony Pilla delivers an announcement over the WTCC airwaves in 1953.

WTCC broadcasted over a small campus

By Anthony Pilla '55

Classes at Teachers College of Connecticut were held in the Administration Building (now Davidson Hall) in the early 1950s. There were three semesters per year and tuition was \$7 per semester plus about a yearly \$25 student activity fee.

As more students attended TCC more space was needed so the college used a school in downtown New Britain for English and social studies classes and ran a shuttle bus.

**Marcus
White
Sunday
brunch... to
meet the
women.**

There was a temporary row of wooden dormitories on campus for veterans where Maria Sanford Hall is now located. All other men lived off campus.

I rented a room in a home on Eddy Glover Boulevard. Women lived in Marcus White Hall, the only dormitory on campus, and the men's cafeteria was located in the basement.

The weekly highlight was the Marcus White Sunday brunch where you got to meet the women. It was a dress up event, jacket and tie. Women had their own dining room on the first floor. It was pretty upscale, with table cloths and place settings and at times we were able to socialize there as well. Visiting was quite regulated.



Making Sunday brunch memories, a jubilant group leaves Marcus White Hall in 1954 along with their newest friends. From right, Anthony Pilla; Raymond Wach '55 (Wach roomed with Anthony); and Angelo '54 (last name unknown). The women, unfortunately, couldn't be identified.

I had a friend in Marcus White who let me keep some clothes in her room so I wouldn't have to walk all the way back to my place to change. One day, I stopped by to change and when I walked out, the dorm director who monitors the entrance looked at me and said, "Weren't you wearing something

different 10 minutes ago?" When she learned about my friend's good gesture, she snapped: "Jane, don't you ever do that again. You know it's against the rules!"

East Hall was the student center. It had a snack bar and lounges to relax and hang out between classes and eventually housed the WTCC studio. Memorial Hall was the athletic center and lots of social events were held in its gym. The building was located where the current Memorial Hall stands. The only other campus building was the power station with its smokestack.

The favorite student gathering place was the College Spa just off campus on Stanley Street. The bar and lounge was part of the old Belvidere Plaza that was later destroyed by fire.

Across the street from Memorial Hall was Arute Field and a parking lot where the present Student Center now stands. There were homes on Wells Street and the land surrounding our few campus buildings was mostly woods and fields.

An evening at WTCC

The Radio Club is a busy place and that was no different in 1957 except then the station only operated evenings. Members enjoyed the camaraderie and high fun quotient that's passed on to each new generation. Broadcasting skills never change, just the equipment. From left: taking a listener's call; recording a promo with a boom mic; very basic studio -- no cart machines, tape decks or room (Behind the mic, an Excelsior bakelite AM radio functions as a monitor); rummaging through the record library and finding a Sarah Vaughn album; and sharing a shift as one DJ cues a record. Unfortunately, none of the staff could be identified.



WFCS's 24-hour groove

By Steve Strinie '86

Forty one years ago seems like a long time, but to me it feels like yesterday when WFCS came up with a new publicity campaign.

I was a member of the radio station back then and the staff was looking for a way to garner interest for the station and to be in the public's eye or in this case -- ear.

It was April of 1980 when the huge campaign was set into motion. Huge compared to the stature of our humble 35-watt college radio station. Herman's Hermits and the Radio Club were going to be made famous at CCSU and beyond.



Lead singer Peter Noone of Herman's Hermits performs in this mid 1960s photo. Noone reached out to WFCS during the station's publicity stunt.

The plan called for playing the group's "No Milk Today" for 24 hours with just a few brief breaks while the Magnecord reel-to-reel tape deck was rewound and readied to play back. I remember "No Milk Today" as somewhat of an annoying song. Hey, anything would be grating on the ears after nearly 500 spins.

While the studio was manned by staff for 24 hours, the station recorded over 100 phone calls. Soon, throughout the campus, students opened their dormitory windows and blared the station from their stereos. Local papers, including The Hartford Courant, reported on the event and even Herman's Hermits somehow got wind of this. Perhaps the most exciting thing about the stunt was that Peter Noone, the group's lead singer, contacted the station.

The damage was done, but the plan paid off.

Now, I'm sure it wasn't long before all this was forgotten. But for a time, WFCS was put on the map at no cost to the station, except for some worn out grooves in a particular record which is still on file in the album archives today.

Long live vinyl and 107.7, WFCS.

Steve Strinie is a retired land surveyor residing with his wife, Elaine, in Massachusetts and North Carolina. Returning to the WFCS airwaves in 1991, Steve remained involved with the station and continued his occasional shows until Covid 19 eliminated most live programming.

WCCS sports brought play-by-play action

By Mike Hodis '75

"We were thinking of broadcasting Central football games. Would you be interested?" With those words, then-Program Director Pete Ostopchuk, launched me on one of the great adventures of my lifetime.

It was 1970 and, at that time, the station at Central Connecticut State College was WCCS, 670 AM, broadcasting through telephone lines to regional transmitters located in the dormitories around campus. But we were soon to become a broadcast FM station reaching a good part of Connecticut as WFCS (From Central State.)

Our first play-by-play broadcast team consisted of myself, Doug Mihalik, who had played football for Stamford (Conn.) High School, and another Central student and high school buddy of mine, Tom Thibodeau (NOT the same one who coaches in the NBA).

Our first broadcast was on Sept. 19, 1970. Central played at Kutztown State College of Pennsylvania and won 22-0. This was 51 years ago and it was a distinctly low-tech time -- no cell phones, no internet, no personal computers, etc.



WFCS's first play-by-play crew. From left, Tom Thibodeau, Doug Mihalik and Mike Hodis. Central basketball was playing St. Anselm College at Manchester, New Hampshire. Central won, 85-74.

...the play-by-play teams at Central had put in an average of about 50,000 miles per year on the road.

The broadcasts were accomplished by the WFCS business department, under Jim McManus, ordering a telephone to be installed in the press box or gym of the school which the Blue Devils were playing. It was a telephone line with a regular black desk

telephone connected to it. We would call the main telephone number

at WFCS, unscrew the mouthpiece and clip connecting leads to our mixing board. Thus the game broadcast was one long, long-distance telephone call.

We would drive to the football games and travel on the team bus to basketball games. One of the first jobs the three of us had when we would arrive was to find where the telephone had been installed at the opposing team's facility. If it wasn't a secure location, the sports information staff at the school we were visiting might lock up the telephone from the line to keep it secure, and we would need to find someone to find it and unlock it.

Even so, things might not go flawlessly, such as the telephone company in another

state that had a policy of limiting long-distance calls to two hours. In the middle of our broadcast of a basketball game, a sweet, Southern-accented female voice suddenly cut into our broadcast. "Your time is up." The line went dead, though we were able to reconnect with the station after a few minutes.

Tom left Central after a year and was replaced on the broadcast team by Scott Czerkas.

Chief Engineer Joe "The Big Z" Zareski upgraded our equipment to a compact package, including inputs for tape cassette recorders, allowing us to play interviews at halftime -- and even theme music! The travels of the WFCS play-by-play team took us as far north as Orono, Maine; as far west as Erie, Pennsylvania and as far south as Towson, Maryland.

Among my fondest memories were broadcasting Bill Reeves breaking the CCSC career scoring record in basketball, Central's 6-3 win over a very good Maine team in football, and the Central baseball team's win over St. John's University. In this last case, Central's baseball field at the time was where Ella Grasso Boulevard is now. It had no press facilities, but "The Big Z" came through for us again, stringing wire from the press box at the football field so we could power up and broadcast.

As our time together at Central drew to a close, I figured out that the play-by-play teams at Central had put in an average of about 50,000 miles per year on the road and had broadcast over 100 events.

It was one of the happiest times of my life and taught me a lot of things that I called upon later in life, as well as allowing the campus and the state to follow Blue Devil teams.

That's what college radio should be about.

Mike Hodis is a retired financial planner and investment analyst who resides in West Hartford. After WFCS, he worked in both news and sports for WNTY in Southington, Conn. and WSUB in Groton, Conn. as well as reporting for the West Hartford News. He currently writes, paints and tends a herd of cats.

Still promoting after all these years

By Randy Shamber '84

I was nervous as I got ready to do my first Bong. After all, it was my first time on the air at WFCS in the spring of 1982. As the clock struck midnight and the Rolling Stones "You Can't Always Get What You Want" seemed to never end, I cued up the next LP and then announced that Jesse Colin Young would fill the next hour of music for our Midnight Bong special. And from that point on, music was my life.

Once behind that mic, and surrounded by thousands of alphabetized albums, they could not pull me out of that studio. I became promotions director in the fall of 1983 and remained in that post during my senior year. I oversaw all the free tickets that came in from the Agora Ballroom to Toads Place. And when tickets couldn't be given away on the air, I usually took them for myself. The highlight? Seeing Stevie Ray Vaughn blow the

I had no experience in this business, but it was my time at WFCS that stood out..

roof off Toad's Place before he became a household name. I was able to sit on the side of the stage on top of an amp crate. Really incredible.



Randy Shamber performs in ShamRock's adult rock band program during the "Shammy" awards ceremony. "Like the Grammys, except much more awesome."

In 1992, I moved to San Francisco in search of a fresh start and found myself answering an ad in the newspaper looking for a marketing and sales manager for a musical instrument company. I was hired for a division of Gibson Guitar to sell instruments to guitar stores. I had no experience in this business, but it was my time at WFCS that stood out in the interview. A big part of the gig, even today, is the ability to talk passionately about all kinds of rock music. I have been a sales rep in the musical instrument business now for over 20 years and I love selling guitars, amps and pro audio while talking about music.

In 2008, my wife and I opened ShamRock School of Music in our hometown of Pompton Plains, N.J. We offer lessons on all kinds of instruments plus vocals. We give kids of all ages (and even adults) an opportunity to play live on stage in a real rock band. We have given over 75,000 individual

lessons! My experience as promotions director and involvement at WFCS has been integral to the success of our business.

I do a ton of managing various classes and bands. We do a great deal of work in the community. I learned that skill while at WFCS, by making sure the station was involved in everything on campus. All of our ShamRock concerts are fundraisers for local causes. And of course, when we perform at our concerts and events, I serve as the emcee. I'm extremely comfortable with that mic!

I'm grateful for the experience I had at WFCS. I thank Evan Kramer and the late, great Sue Gifford for pushing me to become a broadcaster. Yes, I was nervous and apprehensive, but once I did that first Bong, well, everything just felt right.

Editor's note: Midnight Bong was a weeknight hour-long feature artist show from midnight to 1 a.m., on 98.1 at the time. The Bongs for Feb. 18 - 22, 1984, for instance, were: Kiss; Simple Minds; Boomtown Rats; Traffic; and Johnny Winter. On the air, Evan Kramer was "Evan in the Evening," Sue Gifford was "Sue Hamilton," and Randy Shamber was "Uncle John."

Covid can't stop the music

By Garrett Copeland, '22

While the pandemic was an unfortunate speed bump in WFCS's operations, I'm happy to report we've been able to host live shows since the 2020 fall semester, thanks to the WFCS staff as well as Sue Sweeney, Student Center associate director and faculty adviser Gil Gigliotti. They all worked hard to create health and safety protocols. Among them, using microphone covers, disposable gloves and sanitizing wipes when working in the studio along with an hour-long "buffer" between shows to sanitize the equipment.

Since the studio is a small place, person-to-person contact was limited. We requested that disc jockeys not have guests attend their shows. DJs have been

understanding and have found creative ways to have guests through Zoom or traditional phone interviews.



Garrett Copeland on the board during a recent show. Fleetwood Mac's "Make me a Mask" might be a good selection.

The Student Center required all members to wear masks while inside the studio. It was a learning curve for some DJs, myself included, to deliver a show while wearing a mask. All the protocols paid off since nobody caught Covid at WFCS.

Complying with all the procedures meant limiting the number of shows, but after having no shows in summer 2020, most DJs were ecstatic just to get back in the studio.

That first semester back we operated with only five shows a week with our automation taking most of the load in between. Our staff used this extra time to promote WFCS to the limited students on campus and it paid off. Over the 2020 spring semester we recruited several new club members.

I have to credit our conscientious DJs and station staff for supporting these changes and staying committed to WFCS.

Editor's note: Garrett Copeland, the Radio Club's newest general manager, joined WFCS in 2019. His goals include rebuilding the broadcast schedule, adding more DJs, creating helpful literature for future WFCS staff and launching a website to connect social media and digital broadcasts. Garrett is a dual business major in management and marketing and plans to work in broadcasting or the music business.