

Lake 102 will be missed by its loyal listeners

J.K. Murphy

In every community there are elements that help bring it together.

I've always felt the local newspaper is one of the primary organizations that keep the community close by keeping it informed. Newspapers play watchdog, but they also play cheerleader. They bring good news (Eagle Scouts, student honors) and bad news (obituaries, police reports). But it's all information that is necessary for a community to know itself and take care of itself.

Another player that helps a community bond in these same ways is the local radio station.

Often in competition for audience and ad dollars, newspapers and radio are like cats and dogs, two completely different species attempting to do many of the same things (provide news and entertainment while turning a profit).

In other, smaller communities where I have worked, radio stations had a news department that was out after the same stories as the newspaper. Radio has a big "scoop" advantage because it can broadcast instantaneously. They'd use cutesy slogans like "First to get the news, first to get the news to you." That was a burr under the saddle. But the papers' news staffs were generally larger than that of the station, meaning we could cover more stories more thoroughly. We used to chide our competitors by stating their news budget was 25 cents a day (the cost of the newspaper back then.)

Truth be told, the competition made us both better news outlets. But I generally felt disgust whenever the radio news reporter showed up at an event, stuck a mike in a few faces to get some local comments and call it journalism.

Yet for as different as the two mediums are, radio and newspapers accomplish many of the same things. Once you get past competitive jealousies, a mutual respect often develops. And both play a role in strengthening community.

That's why there is a void in the spot that used to be known as Lake 102.3 radio. WLKQ FM is still on the air, but business opportunity translated its programming into Spanish.

Over the last several years, Lake 102 held on to the ideals of a community radio station, despite being on the fringe of a huge Atlanta metro market. Where else could you tune in a Friday night high school football game? The Shaggin' Wagon, Lake's nickname for its portable studio used for live remote broadcasts, became a mainstay at grand openings and festivals just about every weekend. And as its name suggests, the station worked hard at becoming THE radio station people tuned in when enjoying Lake Lanier.

Listeners grew accustomed to the local deejays. They played an eclectic music mix that could be enjoyed on the boat or on the beach or on your commute: John Curran in the morning, Charlie O'Brian mid-day, Joe Thomas for the afternoon drive, Captain Craig Kelley on Saturday mornings, Huey Lewis on Sunday mornings, Chris King doing weekends and sports, Jay Black and Billy Gazdik calling sports and traffic reports from Naki Frierson. In between, oldies music with a multi-generational appeal, local advertising and public service announcements filled the gaps.

More than a year ago, this newspaper and Lake 102 collaborated on an afternoon newscast. At eight minutes past the afternoon hours, Post Reporter Sheri Kasprzak relayed the latest from our newsroom to Lake listeners. It was a collaboration much different than the competitive relationship I'd experienced in the past.

WLKQ makes the move to Spanish less than a year after Columbus-based Davis Broadcasting Inc. bought the family-owned station for \$5 million-plus. For President Greg Davis, it's all about numbers. The Latino influence continues to grow in WLKQ's broadcast footprint in Gwinnett, Hall, Barrow and Jackson counties. Hispanics make up about 11 percent of the Gwinnett population. The county also ranks high in Hispanic buying power, according to recent economic studies. WLKQ becomes Atlanta's first Spanish station on the FM dial.

So Davis' decision will likely prove to be a shrewd business move. That brings the oldie Lake 102 fan little solace.

While the frequency lives, Lake 102 is gone. It will be missed by its loyal listeners and the community.