

The History Of Radio 2RDJ-FM

The morning of November 5th 1983 saw the culmination of over 8 years work by a dedicated group of enthusiasts. For it was on this day, at 7.00am, that 2RDJ-FM started broadcasting on its frequency allocation of 88.1 MHz.

The original idea of establishing a community radio station was formulated by my friend, Warwick Madden, and myself following our "Saturday night over dinner discussions" in late 1974. Warwick suggested that we write a submission to see what transpires. The creation of the submission itself took us all of four Saturday nights and a lot of discussions [should I say friendly arguments] before the finished product came off Warwick's typewriter. We both studied it for two further Saturday nights and had some interesting discussions and arguments when completing the final edit. The finished product, which numbered some 18 closely typed pages, was very pleasing to both of us and we decided that the best person to critique our weeks of hard work was Kent Broadhead [*now deceased*], because of his experience as a semi-professional broadcaster.

On the following Sunday afternoon, we decided to take the submission to Kent Broadhead's place of work, Diamond Traders Gem Gallery near Town Hall Railway Station in Park Street, Sydney City. After a little friendly chat we produced the submission and asked Kent if he would read it. Inquiring what it was that he was being asked to appraise, Kent asked Warwick and me to leave it with him, suggesting that we go.

After dinner, Dorothy curled up in her favourite armchair and spent the next hour studying the suggested ideas for establishing a community radio station. Kent, Warwick and I retired to a granny flat in the Broadhead's back yard, which had been converted into two functioning radio studios.

It was Dorothy's suggestion that a steering committee be established to carry out a feasibility study on whether such a project would secure government backing and a possible licence. We agreed that a copy of the submission should be sent to the Department of Media for their comments. Our submission was posted on 7th March 1975.

As Dorothy had suggested, a steering committee was formed on 3rd July 1975. It consisted of myself, Warwick Madden, Geoff Goque, Kent Broadhead, Dorothy Broadhead, Mark McDonnell, Harold

Siepmann, Dorothy Siepmann, Garry Delmege and Julie Finch-Scally. Warwick Madden was elected to the position of Chairman of the "2RDJ-FM Radio Steering Committee" and Dorothy Broadhead was elected its Minute Secretary.

One of the first things the committee found was that there was no provision in the Broadcasting and Television Act, at that time, for the issuing of community broadcasting licences. This made the members more determined than ever to push ahead. The Steering Committee, under the Chairmanship of Warwick Madden, called for a Public Meeting to establish 2RDJ-FM Community Radio. The Public Meeting, which was convened by Mark McDonnell, was held in the Burwood Public Library on October 15th 1975 at 8pm.

Due to the lateness of the hour; the amount of business still to be discussed; and answers to be found, the Public Meeting had to be adjourned to be held on 23rd October 1975 within the Concord Memorial Hall at 7.45pm. During this second half of the Public Meeting Warwick Madden was elected 2RDJ-FM's first President, Dorothy Broadhead it's first Secretary and Dorothy Siepmann it's first Treasurer.

From there onwards the members of 2RDJ-FM Community Radio continually lobbied the Federal government to convince them of the necessity and practical benefits of public broadcasting.

All attempts to persuade Canberra to amend the Broadcasting and Television Act to include public broadcasting seemed to be falling on deaf ears until the establishment of the PBAA – Public Broadcasting Association of Australia. The PBAA [*now the CBAA*] brought all aspiring public broadcasting groups under the one umbrella and created a lobby group with greater 'clout'.

Between 1975 and 1982, 2RDJ-FM carried out a number of test transmissions from the studios in the Broadhead's back yard and at our new home, on the first floor of the Woodstock Community Centre in Burwood.

Our first test transmission, held in March 1976, was a resounding success thanks to the organising skills of Dorothy Broadhead and Julie Finch-Scally. Erecting the transmission mast in the Broadhead's back yard was another story. The effort of erecting the mast required some special "skills". These included - plumbing skills to join up the sections of the tubular piping mast; carpentry skills to make the

anchors for the guy wires on the dividing fences between the Broadhead's property and their three neighbours; and, finally, the sheer brute strength of our volunteers to help pull the completed mast skywards, securing the guywires to the anchors on each fence and the fourth anchor on the Broadhead's outdoor toilet.

No amount of words could ever adequately describe the hard work and effort that was put into the infant 2RDJ-FM by Kent & Dorothy Broadhead, Warwick Madden, Harold and Dorothy Seipmann and our group of 30, or so, very dedicated volunteers.

Two further test transmissions were carried out. Our second test transmission was again from the same location as the first test Transmission, the Broadhead's studios. This occurred in August 1977. The third, in March 1980, was from our new studios on the first floor of Woodstock at 22 Church Street Burwood NSW. For the third test transmission we used a makeshift aerial which was lashed to the chimney above our office area.

These test transmissions were designed to allow the Department of Communications to conduct Radio Broadcasting Field Strength Tests to determine our signal strength within the five inner-western municipalities of Ashfield, Burwood, Concord, Drummoyne and Strathfield [roughly the entire Lowe electorate].

These special weekend broadcasts required a tremendous amount of organising to bring a group of unfamiliar volunteer presenters together ensuring that they had at least some degree of broadcasting skills. This is where Kent Broadhead, with assistance from Julie Finch-Scally, Warwick Madden and Dorothy Broadhead, crammed the practicalities of operating a studio mixing panel and its associated equipment [microphones, tape recorders, cartridge players, etc.] into minds of our unskilled volunteers.

Credit must also go to the then Technician, Harold Seipmann, who worked night and day to ensure that our Woodstock studios were ready in time for the third test transmission.

Our lobbying of the federal government continued whilst we had our weekly (Friday) radio workshop sessions and monthly meetings.

In early February 1982 the Liberals were on the campaign trail getting ready to contest the 1982 federal elections. The Mayor of Burwood,

Alderman Phillip Taylor, was contesting the election as the Liberal candidate for Lowe.

The then Minister for Communications, Ian Sinclair, toured the Burwood area as part of the Liberal electoral support team. During the tour Alderman Taylor invited Mr. Sinclair on a conducted inspection of Woodstock, which was described as the best community activity facility in western Sydney. This inspection included the 2RDJ-FM studio complex on the 1st floor. Mayor Taylor, obviously impressed Mr Sinclair to the point where the Minister said to him "If there is anything I can do for you and the Lowe electorate please let me know." Alderman Taylor replied "As a matter of fact there is." Alderman Taylor then outlined the plight of 2RDJ-FM, emphasising that, under the then broadcasting legislation, there was no provision for an aspirant public broadcaster to be issued with a permanent broadcasting licence. Mr Sinclair said that he would look into it when he returned to his office in Canberra. A few months later a notice appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald calling for applications for 9 C-Class Public Broadcasting Licences in the Sydney metropolitan area.

Following a public hearing on 5th September 1982 by the Australia Broadcasting Tribunal [*now the Australian Broadcasting Authority*] we secured our "C" Class Public Broadcasting licence. The following 14 months involved the erection of a 100-foot mast adjacent to the Woodstock building, which required council approval, as it was "smack bang" in the middle of a residential area. There was also one other difficulty - the fact that the Woodstock building is heritage listed. We sought the approval of Burwood Historical Society, the National Trust of Australia and the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales. After some discussions between Burwood Council, the historical organisations aforementioned and ourselves we finally got planning permission and the "go-ahead" to arrange for the purchase and erection of the mast.

With the assistance of Burwood Municipal Council, who constructed the concrete foundations, the mast was eventually erected in the middle of a clump of trees at the eastern end of the Woodstock building. To some extent these trees obscured the mast and prevented it from detracting too much from historical nature and appearance of Woodstock, the original home of W C Penfold, the founder of the well known Sydney stationery firm bearing his name - W C Penfold.

Our area, within the Woodstock building, was formerly known as the Caretakers Flat. This comprised a lounge-room, a small eat-in kitchen,

three bedrooms and a bathroom. It was decided that the two smaller bedrooms would be our studios and work commenced on soundproofing these two rooms. However, Burwood Council was not too impressed when they were advised that we intended to use egg cartons as soundproofing. They thought that this would be an "eye sore" and would detract from the overall appearance of the newly restored building. They decided that a properly structured frame and carpeted walls would be more suitable. Burwood Council workmen also created a double-glazed communication window between the two rooms, which are now known as Studio A and Studio B. The third and larger bedroom, which was at the other end of the Caretakers Flat, became our Transmitter Room.

To bring our what was then "hi-fi equipment" up to broadcast standard we hired the services of a radio technician from South Australia, Mr Lee McPeak. With the assistance of our own our technical volunteers, Lee set to work installing a new RME mixing panel in Studio A together with two new Technics broadcast turntables, microphones and Revox reel to reel recorders. We also managed to secure some second-hand Sparta broadcast cartridge players.

Following the installation of the new equipment in Studio A, a number of internal simulated broadcasts were carried out to familiarise potential users with the studio use and to prove that the equipment actually worked. These broadcasts became known as Radiothons. The signal went no further than a monitor speaker in the lounge room [which is now our office area]. Nevertheless, members approached these Radiothons with all the enthusiasm and fervour as if they were broadcasting to the world.

*Now we have arrived back at the point where we started,
7am on 5th November 1983*

At the time of going to air, the co-operative had 60 financial members, paid \$9,495.80 for the NEC transmitter and exciter, \$2,416 for the James Watt mast, \$1,742.60 for the Hills 2 Bay FM antenna and \$515.28 for the cable between the transmitter and antenna.

Kent Broadhead passed away in 1985 having seen our dream fulfilled - radio for the people, by the people. Nobody worked harder to get it all up and running and to where the station is today.

When the original licence application was made, there was no provision for stereo and the extra expense of stereo studio equipment could not be justified - and there was little, if any, pre-loved equipment available. The only stereo equipment apart from the record pickups to be used for many years were the Revox tape recorders - wired for mono.

In the latter part of 1990, after much investigation and costing it was decided to bite the bullet and convert to stereo. It was discovered that there was no problem with the licence and a loan for the new equipment required was negotiated with Metropolitan Credit Union at very competitive rates. As the first step, an order was placed with PKE for a stereo panel for Studio B in August 1990. Modifications were also required to the exciter and a new limiter had to be installed (this had to be replaced anyway due to a major fault) before stereo transmission could begin.

The panel installation was completed in September 1990 with Greig Sheridan (ably assisted by Glen Andersson) doing the technical work and Bob McMinn overseer and carpenter.

The second panel for Studio A was ordered in December 1990 and duly arrived in February 1991. Studio A was closed for installation of the new panel on March 15 and re-opened on March 24. A special "Going Stereo" Dinner was organised for May 4 1991 when the stereo switch was flipped by Dr. Bob Woods, Federal Member for Lowe at 9pm.

The next big step for 2RDJ-FM was the installation of a satellite receiver dish and the associated hardware - this was supplied as a grant from the Community Broadcasting Foundation. 2RDJ-FM had to install the dish and get the system working. The purpose of this was to receive programmes direct from the CBAA thus replacing the cassette delivery. As well, the BBC could be received directly and put to air as required. The equipment was installed (after some negotiation with Burwood Council) in May 1993 with the appropriate modifications made to the panels in the studios. A unique computer controlled system was also installed at the time to enable unattended recording of selected programmes. At this stage we entered the digital world with the acquisition of our first DAT recorders. The ability to receive signals from a satellite prompted the suggestion that the satellite facility could be used through the CBAA (who had, and still do have, control) for broadcasting from our studios.

Prompted by the promise of great returns (financially) we installed a landline to the CBAA studio and started live broadcasting of the weekend Rugby Union football matches every Saturday over the satellite using an Optus supplied and sponsored mobile telephone. These weekly broadcasts started in May 1993 and continued for the rest of the 1993 season. Our football commentator was Matthew Lemma, a young enthusiastic volunteer broadcaster who has now moved on to be employed in a country commercial radio station. Thus began our adventure into community radio network programming.

The 1994 and subsequent Rugby Union seasons could not be broadcast due to technical and logistic problems. To make network broadcasting life easier, in July 1993 we arranged for the construction of our third studio [Studio N] by the then Manager of Woodstock, Mr Reg Seagrave, who "moonlighted" as a handy man. This studio, in our large transmitter room, was to be used as the base for satellite broadcasting of selected pre-recorded station programmes as well as a news and dubbing studio. Studio N was completed and commissioned in October 1993. This studio now houses our off-air recorders. These recorders record everything that is broadcast over 2RDJ-FM. The recordings are kept for six weeks for legal reasons.

Early in 1994, after some consultation with CBAA, we commenced weekend overnight programmes from midnight to 6am Saturday, Sunday and Monday mornings - we were providing a "sustaining service" to Community stations around Australia via the ComRadSat network. A little later we were connected to the satellite for the entire weekend from midnight Friday to 8am Monday. Some of this weekend time has subsequently been whittled away but the bulk of our weekend programming can still be heard around Australia and there is a large interstate following to some of the "Midnight to Dawners".

We can but guess what the future holds - we are bound up with the future of Community Radio generally - the whims of the Government, the views of the Broadcasting Authority and the inexorable march of technology.

*Written By P Vincent Murray
(Co-Founder of Radio 2RDJ-FM)*