

Station speaks to growing community

The Register - Guard - Eugene, Or.
Author: Matt Cooper The Register-Guard
Date: Jan 31, 2005
Start Page: B.1
Document Types: General News
Text Word Count: 1107

Document Text

(Copyright 2005 The Register-Guard. All rights reserved.)

With passion and humor, "La X" opens the airwaves to a Hispanic audience

It's the morning show at "La X," Eugene-Springfield's new Hispanic radio station, and hosts Polo Diaz and Mary Salvatierra have opened the lines up for calls from listeners.

Six lines light up. As one is answered, another starts blinking red. It's the morning call-in rush hour, and the hosts can't keep up - they may get 50 calls in an hour.

"It is like this every morning," Diaz said. "It's a need that the people have, to communicate."

This is KXOR 660 AM, which bills itself as Lane County's first 24-hour Spanish-language radio station. With Hispanics booming across America, it's no surprise that Hispanic radio has arrived here. What's surprising is the passion of the listeners and the man behind it, developer John Musumeci, one of Eugene-Springfield's most colorful, if not controversial, newsmakers.

KXOR, which launched Nov. 4, is one of two stations - the other is the liberal-leaning KOPT 1450 AM - under the banner of Churchill Communications, which is owned by Suzanne Arlie, Musumeci's wife. He also operates Eugene-based development firm Arlie & Co.

While the station can't count its audience, it said listeners have called in from as far north as Vancouver, Wash., Newport to the west, Coos Bay to the south and McKenzie Bridge to the east. There is a sizeable potential audience in the county: The number of Hispanics grew 12 percent from 2000 to 2003, accounting for 5.2 percent of the population in 2003, or 16,600 people.

General Manager Robert Conklin won't say whether KXOR is making money. But sales managers Phil Polter and Rebeca Urhausen said the station reached its 18-month advertising projections in three months, thanks to 30-plus Anglo and Hispanic businesses trying to reach a Spanish-speaking audience that generally prefers radio to TV and newspapers.

Eugene-based American Mattress, which has run ads since December, has seen more Hispanic customers, salesman Casey Brazil said. "We ask every single customer, 'How did you hear about us?' Most of the Hispanic customers are saying, 'radio.'"

Arbitron ratings aren't available for KXOR, but the signs are good for Hispanic formats nationwide: Last summer, they claimed 9.2 percent of listeners during any 15-minute period, up from 6.8 percent five years earlier and matched only by the rise of urban music, said Jessica Benbow, Arbitron spokeswoman.

Hispanics also listen to their stations longer, tuning in for more than 22 hours a week - well above the 19-hour norm for listeners of all radio categories.

Sagrario Gutierrez of Eugene is no exception.

The 30-year-old Gutierrez, who makes massage tables at Custom Craftworks in Eugene, wakes

up to "La X" at 6 a.m. and listens throughout her workday until 5 p.m., every day of the week. She used to call the station daily but felt guilty for hogging the lines - now she calls every couple of days.

"I've been here for almost 12 years and I wasn't able to tune the radio in and listen to something in Spanish," said Gutierrez, who finds "La X" to be stress-relieving. "They talk all day and they play music and just to listen to everything, it just helps."

Help is one of the priorities of the station's "dynamic duo," Diaz and Salvatierra, who host the morning show, "Prendidisimo" - Spanish for "fired up" or "hooked."

The station has news, weather and music, and plans soon to be broadcasting Mexican soccer games and providing Spanish play-by-play for University of Oregon or Oregon State University sports.

But the morning show is the bread and butter: KXOR's family-oriented approach prohibits "narco corridos" - songs that glorify drugs, violence and female degradation - and the veteran Diaz and newcomer Salvatierra pride themselves on quick-banter chemistry that avoids vulgar themes and sexual innuendo.

The team has fun - Salvatierra recently shaved off Diaz's moustache on the air to settle a bet - but they also discuss alcoholism, domestic violence or the ways that Hispanic slang can be misinterpreted for humor or offense.

Listeners always join in, calling in numbers that can jam the lines. The need to communicate, to connect, can be especially powerful for the many immigrants sentimental for home, said Urhausen, and this interaction is the reason that "Prendidisimo" is the station's most popular offering.

On a recent segment - "moments of hopelessness," perhaps an unusual topic for a morning radio show - an emotional man called in, reluctant to speak until Salvatierra coaxed out his story: He was unemployed and unable to support his son, in Mexico, who had health problems.

"He said, 'I need a job, I can't find one, I don't know where to go,' " Salvatierra said. "We hadn't even hung up the call when we had two calls from people to offer him a job."

"Polo and I have a commitment to do something for the community," Salvatierra continued. "It's a forum for people to call, to give their experiences, but more so, to connect with whatever resources there are in the community - counseling, medical services, information in general. We want to create that bridge."

Behind it all is Musumeci, a man whose business and political moves have often run on the front page.

A Massachusetts native who moved here from California with his wife, Musumeci was at the center of one of the biggest ongoing development stories in Lane County, selling land in Springfield to PeaceHealth in 2001 for a planned relocation of Sacred Heart Medical Center.

He also was a member of the so-called "Gang of 9," which skewered liberals on Eugene's City Council that year with paid cartoons in The Register-Guard. More recently, Musumeci's company proposed to redevelop the headquarters of the Eugene Water & Electric Board - despite the fact that EWEB is in negotiations to sell to Texas-based Triad Hospitals Inc.

Musumeci planned the Hispanic station for almost two years, he said, to diversify his company's investments and because he kept hearing that there was a dearth of local radio programming and that Hispanics, in particular, weren't being served.

Musumeci said he and his wife are at a point where their motive is no longer money, but

enhancing the community. He's found it fulfilling, he said, to give a voice to an emerging population.

Hispanics "are a powerful group that have many statements to say - economic, commercial and political," Musumeci said. "They now recognize that they have arrived. And everybody is seeing this now."

[Illustration]

Caption: Polo Diaz and Mary Salvatierra listen to a caller on their morning talk show, "Prendidisimo," on Spanish-language KXOR 660 AM, known as 'La X.'

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.

Abstract (Document Summary)

It's the morning show at "La X," Eugene-Springfield's new Hispanic radio station, and hosts Polo Diaz and Mary Salvatierra have opened the lines up for calls from listeners.

This is KXOR 660 AM, which bills itself as Lane County's first 24- hour Spanish-language radio station. With Hispanics booming across America, it's no surprise that Hispanic radio has arrived here. What's surprising is the passion of the listeners and the man behind it, developer John Musumeci, one of Eugene-Springfield's most colorful, if not controversial, newsmakers.

Polo Diaz and Mary Salvatierra listen to a caller on their morning talk show, "Prendidisimo," on Spanish-language KXOR 660 AM, known as 'La X.'

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.