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ILLUSTRATED NEWS

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CITIES READY FOR ALL NEWS?

Other stations have tried and failed, but Lee Zanin believes fervently that his WWTC has finally hit on the formula for a successful all-news radio format.

Backed up by NBC radio's new "News &

Information Service," WWTC-AM radio will eventually become, Zanin declares, the single most important medium in the Twin Cities for fast-breaking local, national or world news.

Already, WWTC is broadcasting 20 hours of news and news features and General Manager Zanin tells us why he's so glad to be out of the music format and strictly into news.

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ALL NEWS

WWTC gives it a try

by LARRY ADCOCK



AT ONE O'CLOCK on the morning of June 18, the sign-off announcer at WWTC-AM radio gave us listeners out here our clue to the radical format change that would greet us at broadcast resumption time, just four hours away.

"That's all, folks!" the announcer clued us slyly.

Then he dropped the phonograph needle on the turntable that would shortly be ripped from the booth, and WWTC radio, as we all knew it, faded off the air to the lyrics, "It's the last song I'll ever play for you . . ."

That, friends, is what you call low-key.

AND NOW WWTC, the station that sounded a whole lot like WCCO minus the hog reports, is one outlet in an ambitious NBC-inspired coast-to-coast network of all-news radio stations.

For the past month, WWTC has been broadcasting 20 hours of news and news features a day on a 5 a.m. to 1 a.m. cycle. Local news, weather and commercials are wedged between brisk network features and top-quality national/international dispatches from NBC's new "News & Information Service (NIS)" based in New York.

This is the third time around for all-news radio in the Twin Cities. WWTC follows some spectacular flops at such a format — the 1960-61 attempt by WMIN-AM (now station KEEY, specializing in all music) and that try by little KDAN-AM last December and January, a 500-watt, St. Paul-based station that couldn't be heard this side of the river.

BUT THIS TIME, WWTC has the enormous assist of an organized, national network. The daily NIS news budget is crammed with very

listenable items and has already demonstrated an excellent professional capacity.

If you were listening to WWTC a few weeks ago when that jumbo jet crashed at New York's Kennedy International Airport, you were actually involved with the policemen and firemen working the tragedy and you knew about the reports of lightning and the wind chill factor four five hours before the 6 o'clock report on the television.

(On the other end of the range, Friday morning's NIS included a two-minute item on why your kitchen knife blades grow dull when slicing tomatoes.)

LEE ZANIN, WWTC's general manager, began the top-secret planning for a conversion to all-news format fully one year before NBC announced in the trade mail that NIS would be available to local stations.

"I found that people are tuning into FM radio for music. The audience for AM music will eventually die out. At WWTC, we've got an AM-only situation. So, we'd have to be changing our format somehow, and eventually we decided to go the all-news route."

Zanin reasoned that the one factor in common among all Twin Cities radio stations, including the formidable WCCO, was news programming.

"NEWS DRAWS everyone, you see," said Zanin. "Everyone, from rocker stations to the KSJN types and through all the middle-roader music and personality stations."

And so, Zanin began a series of secret, out-of-town meetings with executives of five all-news radio stations around the country — in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, San Diego and Phoenix — to research and plan the marketing and broadcast techniques he would have to adapt to the Twin Cities.

The final two months were the worst, as Zanin recalls, because he had to deny inquiries from media writers and fellow broadcasters about WWTC's intentions.

One day in May, Zanin was seen by a Minneapolis radio executive entering the NBC building in New York and by that time, everyone in the business had solid suspicions that WWTC would soon be hard to dance to.



Bob Bundgaard (above) broadcasts at WWTC during the afternoon drive time. Tom Myhre (below) looks over the wire in the control room of the Twin Cities' only all-news radio station.

NOW THAT ALL that intrigue is behind him, Zanin is very excited about his station's prospects of becoming THE news source on those really hot news days that pop up periodically.

"Let's say we have a tragic tornado going out on Lake Minnetonka," Zanin said. "Right now, I can get a car out there with equipment that will give as good a sound reproduction as if we were broadcasting right here in the studio."

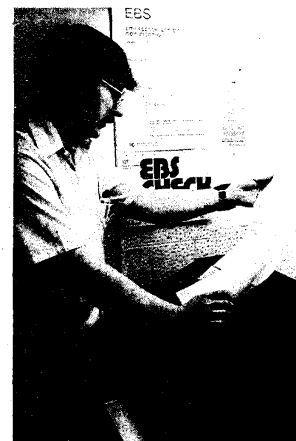
But, right now, the news staff is slim. Tom Myhre and Ken Trimble are the morning drive-time men; Bob Bundgaard and Jim Stewart are on the air for the afternoon drive-time; and Robert Berglund is the evening news man.

If the all-important ratings book due in December shows that WWTC has made significant listener gains, however, that staff is sure to expand and Zanin's vision of WWTC as THE source of spot news in this town should come true.

RADIO IS, after all, the fastest news communicator. There is no concern for visuals, certainly, as in television; and radio broadcasters don't worry about how a story will look on the printed page. It is a swift, direct access medium that can grip its audience like nothing else. Remember being glued to your radio last August when Dick Nixon resigned the presidency?

Zanin is happy to report that WWTC's month-old all-news format is already receiving "terrific cooperation" from major news sources like Mayors Hofstede and Cohen and Gov. Anderson — and, most importantly, from the listeners.

"When we switched formats, I



expected about 400 letters or so from irate listeners. I got about 40. And we're getting two and three letters a day from listeners out there who are very happy with our change. Two or three letters a day to a radio station is pretty good, by the way. People don't tend to write radio and television stations, you know.

"AND I'M VERY pleased with the official cooperation we've been getting. Cooperation with a special kind of news station, you see. We like immediacy. We like getting people on the air live, at the moment. That's what we're all about.

"We put a call up at Moorhead the day Anderson was touring the



Jim Stewart, WWTC afternoon drive time broadcaster, confers with general manager Lee Zanin. Zanin's other broadcasters include Ken Trimble, Bob Bundgaard and Robert Berglund.

'I know we can do it. And the good thing about it is that we don't have to knock over WCCO to become a big success story.' . . . Lee Zanin

Red River Valley flood area, and he called right back and we had him live from some phone booth up there, half a day before the TV stations were back in town with film," Zanin said.

"I love this news format," he added. "I can't tell you how glad I am to be out of the music field. I was really sick and tired of it.

"The most boring thing in the world for me was to sit down with my music director and figure out the top 20 tunes and who would like this and who would like that."

THE PERSONNEL cut by Zanin in the format switch have, for the most part, found other jobs. And Zanin is helping those who aren't yet employed find work.

Glen "Big Daddy" Olson will soon be broadcasting locally, Zanin said, and John Hines is already working for KSTP. Only Bob Allen remains unemployed, and Zanin is waiting for word on a job for him.

Meanwhile, back at WWTC, Lee Zanin shapes what he is confident will become the most important medium for fast-breaking news in town, the Twin Cities version of WINS in New York or WTOP in Washington or WBBM in Chicago.

"I know we can do it," Zanin declared. "And the good thing about it is that we don't have to knock over WCCO to become a big success story here. You can't knock over WCCO anyway. You have to do something different, something entirely different. And that's what we are."



Now that all the intrigue is behind him, Lee Zanin is excited about his station's prospects of becoming THE news source in the Twin Cities.
