

The Story of WSTB-FM

Written by Bob Long, General Manager (Updated April, 2012)

The Beginning (1971-1972)

The story of WSTB radio begins in 1971 when the Streetsboro City Schools Board of Education applied for a broadcast license from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The concept of having a radio station in the high school was the brainchild of then Streetsboro Superintendent Lowell Myers who later became Superintendent of the Maplewood (JVS) Career Center. Myers was a big fan of vocational education. This was one of his favorite vo-ed programs, so he wanted to move WSTB to Maplewood. But, by that time, the station was such an integral part of the Streetsboro High School educational program, the Board of Education said *no way*, and kept the station in Streetsboro.



In 1971 the school newspaper "The Word" mistakenly referred to the new radio station as WSTS

It was at the Board of Education meeting on July 8, 1971 that the ball officially started rolling. At that meeting the board authorized an application to the FCC for a broadcast license at 91.5 MHZ at 250 watts (330 watts ERP). The total cost of the project was \$57,148.64. The school paid out \$14,523.93. The State of Ohio paid the rest under vocational school grants. The original facility was constructed by Kent State University's Chief Radio Engineer Tony Liberatore. It included a single broadcast studio along with a 2-bay horizontal-only antenna mounted on a 40-foot guyed tower located on the roof of the Junior High School building.

The FCC granted the license to the school district on March 23, 1972. The station was signed on the air from its Streetsboro Junior High studios with Charles Ackerman as teacher and station manager.

Why was station, a high school vocational program, located at the Junior High? Apparently because there was no room in the High School. The station eventually did move its studios to the high school building in August 1985. The transmitter and antenna were moved to the same location in March 1992.

Actually, Ackerman was not the first person hired to run the radio station. That honor belonged to Jeffrey Tucker, a then recent graduate of Kent State University. This was his first full-time teaching assignment. However, Tucker died suddenly on January 20, 1972, just two months before the license was issued.

The Formative Years (1972-1981)

During its first full year of broadcast (the 1972-73 school year), WSTB signed on the air at 8am and signed off at 6pm. The daily programming included a morning show called "Tradio" where listeners could call and "swap and shop" for various items. After that it was a variety of NPR programming, easy listening and classical music, children's programming and news, followed by

country and oldies music. Up until 1976 students rarely went of the air live. The broadcast day was mostly taped shows produced either locally or by National Public Radio (NPR) so that students could attend classes. In fact, with only one existing studio, WSTB actually signed off the air for two hours every afternoon so that students could use it for production work.

In the years that followed, the station underwent management changes just about every year: Gerald Friedberg (1973 replacing Jeff Tucker), Mark Hile (1973-74), and Steve Jones (1974-75). A bit of stability finally came to WSTB in 1975 when William Weisinger took over as manager. With the station being part of a vocational program, Steve Foltin was also hired on with State Vocational funds as Director of Operations. This lasted for three years until the State pulled back on vocational education dollars and began leaning toward regional vocational school districts.

In the fall of 1976 the station was transformed into a real student-operated program. Weisinger dropped all imported and pre-taped programming. For the first time, music, news and other programming was totally produced and voiced by the senior student staff. To ease the public into this “radical” change in programming, the broadcast day was broken into four segments, beginning with an adult “middle of the road” format, followed at 10am by country, Top 40 in the afternoon, with a few hours of album rock before evening signoff. Students attended public meetings to collect news and combined it with a variety of other sources including newspapers and the local commercial station. All sports coverage was directed and announced by senior Vince Koza.

The following semester the station settled in on an adult Top 40 format, conceived and directed by senior Keith Teicher. This era also marked the end of the afternoon sign-off for production work. Liberatore and Weisinger scrounged together enough pieces and parts to create a rather crude, but nonetheless functional, production studio.

During the summer of 1977 the station’s third musical format was developed, targeting an unserved segment of the adult market. That Fall *Golden 91* debuted featuring pop tunes from the 1950s and 1960s. During this time the station gained a lot of listeners since there were no other oldies stations in the market. In the late 1970’s when the State vocational moneys were cut, Station Manager Bill Weisinger elected to head to San Diego and KCST-TV. Steve Foltin became the full-time station manager and instructor. Chief Engineer Tony Liberatore resigned a few years later with Weisinger returning from the west coast to become the station’s engineer.



A Time of Change (1981-1991)

In October 1981, Bob Long, who had just finished an 8 year career as News Director at WKNT AM/FM, the local commercial radio station (now WNIR-FM), came to Streetsboro as class instructor and General Manager replacing Foltin. In the fall of 1982 Long changed the format to contemporary pop music. The first two “current” hits played on the station were “Land Down Under” by Men at Work and “Space Oddity” by David Bowie. This format lasted until 1991 when the format changed to metal and the station became known as 91.5/V-ROCK.

During the 1980s' major technical changes took place. The first came when new superintendent John Carney walked into the station and asked why it was located in the Middle School...since it was actually a High School program. So, in August 1985 the studios were moved to the high school while the transmitter and antenna remained at the Middle School. The station was actually off the air from August until March 1986 while the studio construction project was completed. Since this was only supposed to be a temporary arrangement for about two years the connection between the two locations was made with a series of three cables connected to utility poles and run along the rooftop of the Middle School. One was an audio line, a second was a transmitter control cable to turn it on and off, and a third was a video line to allow the studio operator to read meters. Since the transmitter was old, it would not support remote meters. A video camera was placed on a tripod in front of the meters with the video sent to the High School studios where it was viewed in Master Control on a black and white television monitor.

While the station had previously aired football and basketball games, high school sports took a new turn in the 1980s with the advent of high school baseball and college hockey broadcasts. On April 19, 1983 WSTB aired its first-ever Rockets baseball game live from Streetsboro City Park. Students Chuck Blostic and Jeff Skonieczny handled the play-by-play. On October 22 of that same year WSTB began regular broadcasts of Kent State Ice Hockey live from the KSU Ice Arena. The broadcast featured the Kent State Flashes hosting Humber College. KSU student Jeff Kunes handled the play-by-play with Streetsboro student Chuck Blostic providing color.

In the 1990's WSTB began a transition that would eventually bring it more listeners and notoriety than the station had experienced in all its previous years. The changes that occurred during this decade would place WSTB on the map as a legitimate radio force in the Akron market, recognized by commercial broadcasters in both Cleveland and Akron.

The V-ROCK Era (1991-1999)



The original V-ROCK logo was an upside down anarchy sign. The station was often referred to as "Upside-down anarchy rock."

On August 27, 1991 WSTB signed on the air as "91.5/V-ROCK" playing classic rock in the morning and contemporary metal during the afternoon and evening. The identifier "V-ROCK" was selected as a way of marketing the station following a morning breakfast meeting in May with incoming Program Director Mark Robison and Operations Manager Kevin Corrao. After Robison proposed the format and GM Bob Long approved it, brainstorming resulted in a series of marketing concepts. Robison wanted to use a snake as the station mascot with the slogan, "The V is for venom...the rock is for you." However, considering the times, it was determined that this was a bit harsh and would probably not go over well in the community. The final decision to use "V-ROCK" was actually a bit of marketing, playing off the image for a former Cleveland metal radio station called Z-ROCK. The thought was that people would associate V-ROCK with Z-ROCK and assume it must be a heavy rock and metal station. It worked!

Around this same time, major technical changes were in the works. In March 1992 the transmitter and antenna were finally moved to the High School. On March 30 the station signed on using a new 100-foot tower located just outside of the studios. On the tower was the station's

first antenna with circular polarization. This 3-bay antenna would provide listeners with better reception in their cars and on portable radios. On May 25, WSTB went stereo.

On September 21, 1992 the format was adjusted do to audience response. Gone was the classic rock in the mornings. The station identifier now became “All Metal, All Day!”

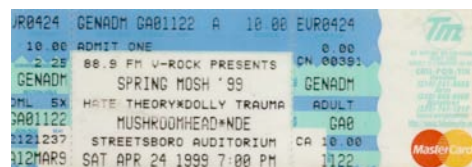
Up until this time, WSTB would sign off the air during the summer months, just after Memorial Day, and then return to the air during the first few weeks of school in September. However, the audience demand was so persistent with the new metal format, that in the summer of 1993, WSTB abandoned the summer sign-off and remained on the air. Do to the legal liabilities of using high school students in an unsupervised setting the station was manned by recent graduates, interns from the Ohio Center for Broadcasting, and student volunteers from Kent State University and the University of Akron. The broadcast day generally went from 7am until 12midnight Monday through Saturday.

The next two years were quite stable as the audience continued to grow. That all changed, however, on May 9, 1995 when the FCC granted WSTB a construction permit to change frequency to 88.9 MHz so that it could initiate a power increase to 1,000 watts. A new antenna was installed on the morning of July 10 with the station signing on the air for testing that afternoon on 88.9 MHz. The next day, July 11, the official sign-on occurred with the station known as 88.9/V-ROCK “The Underground” at 175 watts pending arrival of the new 1,000 watt transmitter. The transmitter arrived nearly two weeks later and at 9am on July 27, 1995 “The Underground” signed on the air at 1,000 watts ERP.

It took several years for the market to accept the metal format, but once it did, the station developed loyal fan base of some 8,000 listeners. On March 8, 1997, V-ROCK sponsored its first rock concert featuring five regional metal bands. It was called “Cleveland Metal ‘97.” The concert, held at the Odeon Concert Club in Cleveland, sold out (1,000 guests) within 15-minutes of the box office opening.



The tide began to turn for V-ROCK in 1999. With school board approval, WSTB attempted to sponsor a live concert in the high school gym. The metal show called “Spring Mosh ‘99” was to feature four local bands including N.D.E., Dolly Trauma, and Hate Theory with the Cleveland area band Mushroomhead as he featured attraction. The school board approval was given in October 1998 and planning began immediately thereafter. However controversy soon began to reign down on the upcoming show in January when promoter Mike Kuhstos (a former WSTB air personality and Promotions Director) received an e-mail from a local church pastor who promised attempts to get the show halted. The protests by local church leaders and members resulted in extensive media coverage on Cleveland area television stations and newspapers and well as national wire services. Late night TV show host Jay Leno even commented on it.



Amid all of this controversy came a change in Streetsboro City law. As the protests mounted by the religious groups Mayor Sally Henzel came under pressure and announced that she was canceling the show for safety reasons. As in many communities the mayor also acts as Safety Director, so this was within her scope of power. City Council however took exception. They felt that if the Board of Education thought it was OK to have the show, and since there was a lot of community support in favor of it, then the show should go on. Council then voted to change the city law removing the mayor from any safety control of events on school property. Thus, the show was back on.

As concert week approached, with the show still on schedule, tragedy struck at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado on April 20 when two students took their high school hostage killing and wounding several classmates. These acts of violence lead to a series of copycat threats at high schools across the nation including locally. By Friday, police and FBI agents in Portage and Summit counties were busy checking out a series of threats by students to “Columbine” their schools. Following an afternoon of meetings with Streetsboro School officials and student staff members from the radio station, Spring Mosh ‘99 was canceled for safety reasons.

The controversy, however, did not end there. In the months that followed, at the request of the Board of Education, a task force was formed to study the V-ROCK format and recommend any “necessary” changes. The task force included members of the school administration, radio station staff members, high school student council members, community representatives as well as the local religious leaders who were originally opposed to the concert and now the radio station’s format.

For the station, it appeared that the writing was on the wall. The V-ROCK “All Metal, All Day” format was about to become a thing of the past.

The committee was scheduled to hold its first meeting in August, 1999, but in June of that year, General Manager Bob Long and student Operations Manager David Pastiva met over breakfast to discuss a format change that would allow the student staff to determine the future direction of the radio station. At that June 29 meeting a decision was made that WSTB would abandon the metal music format and switch instead to a modern rock/alternative format. Just a few months before this the Akron/Cleveland market had lost its only modern rock/alternative commercial station leaving tens of thousands of listeners without a radio home.

On July 10, 1999 88.9/V-ROCK signed off the air. The date was chosen to coincide with a V-ROCK support concert scheduled for Cleveland by local bands the night before. It was decided that the station did not want to interfere with that show, so the announcement was made the following day...returning any donated moneys to the local bands that had performed the night before. Another reason for the sudden summertime sign-off was so that the changeover in the music library and station identifiers could occur during the summer rather than in the fall when the student staff would be busy with school work, fall sports, and band.

The Sunday Oldies Jukebox (1997)

In the midst of the V-ROCK era, WSTB finally moved from a six-day-a-week to a seven-day-a-week operation. On November 30, 1997 a new Sunday format took the air. (Prior to this, the station was only on the air Monday through Saturday.) It was called “The Sunday Oldies Jukebox” and featured pop songs from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. The format was programmed by former Station Manager and Director of Engineering Bill Weisinger. Air personalities were adult volunteers from Streetsboro and nearby communities. Over the years the format developed a significant adult audience looking for an alternative to the commercial oldies station in the Akron/Cleveland market. Weisinger passed away in November 2010. Sunday air personality Rick Drotleff was then named as Program Director.



The AlterNation Era (1999)

What should the “new WSTB” be called? Since the marketing concept of V-ROCK worked so well, the staff wanted to make sure the new format received equal treatment. Staff member Shawn Horton proposed a concept, along with the original “orb” logo. He figured that using the identifier “AlterNation” would tag WSTB as an alternative format station and also open the door to some interesting marketing concepts. The AlterNation was adopted and on August 30, 1999 WSTB signed back on the air as “88.9/The Alter-Nation.”



Thanks to the approval of the Board of Education, in mid-September the station took delivery of a new automation system (BSI WaveStation). Technology Director Dan Kuznicki, a junior student staff member, unpacked the boxes and within three days was ready to put the system on the air. It was on September 23, 1999 that the station actually signed on the air 24x7. No longer would WSTB sign off during the Christmas/New Years break, during Spring Break or at any other time. If it hadn't been considered so before, WSTB had now become “real radio”.

It didn't take long for the AlterNation to draw the interest of local bands. On Sunday, June 4, 2000 the “WSTB Radio Benefit Concert” was held outdoors at the Midway Drive-In Theater in Kent. The show featured Three Miles Out, Trip Man Dead, Mint, and Strip.

Changing with the Times...Technology

A technology infusion arrived in the year 2000 with WSTB receiving a grant of \$50,000 from the State of Ohio for an equipment upgrade. The money was granted by the state legislature thanks to the efforts of Streetsboro City Councilman Pete Buczkowski and State Representative Ann Womer Benjamin. The check officially arrived on August 10 when Representative Benjamin presented it to General Manager Bob Long at the regular monthly Board of Education Meeting. The funding was used to create a third broadcast studio in the radio station classroom. This studio was used for off-air DJ training as well as on-air productions. About half of the grant moneys went to upgrade computer technology allowing for five student workstations in the studios and four additional workstations in the classroom. The studio workstations were combined with a new modular office arrangement to create workspace for the student

administrative staffers. The classroom workstations were all networked back to the studio to allow the future staff members to get “off-air” training using broadcast software.

A major change to the station’s broadcast coverage area arrived in the Fall of 2003. Armed with a \$30,000 grant from the City of Streetsboro, WSTB began broadcasting from an antenna in Kent on November 1st. The tower lease agreement reached with WKSU-FM allowed WSTB to use their tertiary antenna located on campus. The increased tower height (from 125 feet to 374 feet HAAT) resulted in a coverage area that tripled the potential audience. The signal can now be heard from Cleveland to Canton and from Youngstown to Medina.

Amid the increase in technology, annual operating costs began to skyrocket. In 2001, under the leadership of Director of Engineering and Sunday Oldies Jukebox Program Director Bill Weisinger and senior student Dan Kuznicki WSTB held its first-ever on-air membership drive. That first year it was called a “Beg-A-Thon”. Since then the annual membership drive has become the primary funding source of WSTB allowing it to cover nearly all of its expenses and improvements with no money from the school district budget.

Charity Concert collects food and cash

On December 28, 2007 The AlterNation held its biggest charity event to date. OVERLOAD 2007 was the station’s effort to collect food and cash for the Portage County Foodbanks. Four local bands took the stage from 6pm until 10pm that Friday night: Ecliptic, Drop to Zero, Amplexus, and Bonk. In total, 769 non-perishable food items and \$1,171 were donated to help fight hunger in Portage County.

“Off the air”

At 6pm on October 13, 2008 at the direction of the district superintendent WSTB was taken off the air. The licensee was investigating what it felt were “disturbing photos” on one of the radio station computers. All of the station computers were removed from the studios including those used for on-air purposes. All staff members were locked out of the station while the investigation continued. After the investigation proved that there was nothing criminal in the photos, it took nearly three weeks to get the station back on the air. WSTB returned to the airwaves at 5:30pm on November 13th.

Fire in the gym

At 5:26pm on Tuesday, June 1, 2010 a million dollar fire was reported in the Streetsboro High School gymnasium just down the hall from the WSTB studios. With the station running on automation, it continued to pump out music until 7:15pm when the fire department turned off the natural gas line to the school, thus rendering the station’s emergency power generator useless. WSTB returned to the air three days later with a recorded information loop from the transmitter site in Kent. At 2:55pm on Monday, June 7 programming returned to the air from the studios with music. DJs and voice



tracking resumed the following Sunday. Late in the day on Wednesday, June 23 the staff was evicted from the studios and moved to the school technology offices on another part of the campus after there was concern that the wall above the radio station might collapse because of fire damage. When school resumed in August the studios were moved to a modular trailer unit on the west side of the high school campus and continued to broadcast live and with voice tracking from that location until Thanksgiving weekend when staffers returned to the studios in the high school building.