



From on-air performance to spinning tunes and operating various computers and other instruments, KEOM-FM trains students for careers in broadcasting.

On the Air

For news, sports, traffic, and weather, Metroplex listeners tune to high school radio. BY GARY D. FORD

Music plays, a computer screen blinks constantly, and nimble fingers turn dials and slide levers that control what helps get tens of thousands of people to work and through their busy days. There are lots of tasks to perform quickly, but it's all done skillfully at this Dallas-area radio station operated by high school students.

On this particular Tuesday morning, Nathan Henderson and Rob Quigley “run the board,” seamlessly weaving news, weather, traffic, and music. Here in the studios of KEOM-FM in Mesquite, Texas, students such as Nathan and Rob learn the basics of radio and earn high school credit, all while playing a host of tunes.

Hits From High School Owned and operated by the Mesquite Independent School District, KEOM provides a fun learning opportunity each year for about 50 juniors and seniors from five high schools in the district who take Radio I and Radio II classes. Nearly 200,000 listeners tune to 88.5 on their radio dial to enjoy Top 40 music from the seventies, along with a variety of informative programs on topics ranging from arts to cooking to nature.

As listeners tune to the oldies while going about their daily tasks, the station faculty—instructor Brenda Wagoner, station manager Peggy Brooks, Shondra Tharp, and Connie Hale—guide students from classroom lectures to hands-on work in the station's production and on-air studios. They introduce them to older radio equipment, such as reel-to-reel tape and cartridges, or “carts,” both in use even before the music the students play was created. Some see their first vinyl records here—a technology whose popularity was waning when the school district founded the station in 1984.

KEOM Goes on the Air Dr. James Griffin, a history teacher at the time who admittedly knew little about radio, was selected as the station's founding director. Brenda joined, too, and together they learned the art and technology of the medium. *➔ turn to page 10*

“We had to jump in there and sink or swim, just like the kids do,” says James, who retired last year. “We learned hands-on, and that became the basis of our curriculum.”

Students such as Brittney Bass take the classes. “I’ve always been interested in journalism,” she says, “but I didn’t enjoy magazine-type journalism. I wanted to try broadcasting.” So do all kinds of students. Some arrive as chatterboxes, while others are painfully shy...until they’re on the air. The microphone, Brenda reports, may change a personality with the flip of a switch.

“It’s fun to watch kids come out of their shells,” James says. “They improve, they blossom.”

Peggy adds, “The recurring theme that we hear over and over from parents and students is that this program instilled confidence in their children’s communication and writing skills.”

Some go on to media careers. They include a television reporter in Florida, a producer for CNN’s *Larry King Live* in Washington, and radio personalities around the nation. One is Jake Daniels, who often returns to chat with the students about broadcasting careers. “The whole staff is great,” Jake says. “You are learning in a real studio. You are talking live on the air and learning the basics and equipment that are used industry-wide. You get the biggest leg up on the competition.”

“They’re Still Kids” Meanwhile, note faculty members, the students have changed little since the station went on the air 25 years ago. “They are more sophisticated in a lot of ways, but they’re still kids, with the same insecurities. They come in just as scared,” Brenda says.

They have changed, however, in one major way, she says. Technology has already taught them well. “A lot of the kids have computer programs at home for recording, audio, production, and editing. They’re easier to teach how to use our equipment because they’re so familiar with it.” ●

Listen Up

KEOM is on air 24 hours a day. Among other programs, listeners love *MISD Sports Page* with Sports Director Steve Glenn. Kim Lovett informs listeners about local arts and cultural events on *Deep in the Arts of Texas*. For other programming, visit www.keom.fm.

