

Clay's Corner for December 2010

Seasons Greetings to all –

I am writing this on Thanksgiving day due to work commitments the next few days.

Our Local WCM (bad weather guy at NOAA) Ted Buehner, has been telling us for some time that La Nina' is getting stronger. Rough translation...could be a nasty winter. After an early November heat wave, where the temps in Seattle were in the lower 70's, we were all starting to wonder. Then came a nasty windstorm that caused just about every generator in the area to get a lot of exercise. Punch # 2 was record setting cold temperatures only 20 days later. Whew....And winter has not yet officially started!

On the day of the windstorm, the power at the West Tiger Site I have been involved with for years, went off about 530 p.m. This is not unusual, as the power frequently fails in the area East of Issaquah. I did as I normally do. I reported the outage to PSE. Over the next few days I found myself getting very little sleep with several trips to Tiger and Cougar repairing things and getting diesel coming up the hill. It all finally got back to something closer to normal with only a few things on the to-do-list when the weather turned cold. I managed to get off the mountain just before the afternoon drive mess in town. Now with all the snowfall we are likely looking at sites like West Tiger and South Mountains becoming snow-cast only for who knows how long.

Erling Manley checked in and reported the power had failed on Mt. Constitution, placing off the air some broadcast TV facilities, like KBCB that don't have Aux Power. Understand that KTBW on Gold Mt. was off for similar reasons. Several TV translators were off due to lack of power too. To the south, KCKA was off for a while. They too don't have aux power.

In talking with those that distribute diesel, several told me that they were 'slammed' with requests from those that do have generators to come top off their tanks. One of the local TV channels ran a story about Bainbridge Island where many homeowners have generators. What many of them apparently did not anticipate was that the local gas station that was out of power also was unable to fill their gas-can.

This all leads me to think that should we really have a protracted power outage that many stations and citizens are going to be suffering. So how long can your facility run without re-fueling? My suggestion, create a relationship with a couple of suppliers so that you will be at the top of their list when you place that call.

For those of you that work in nice warm offices or studio facilities....Now you know why you have the best jobs.

I'm supposed to head to Kennewick on the 29th to help install a new transmitter on Johnson Butte. Understand from talking with Jer Hill, that the road to that site is impassible due to drifts that, potentially, will keep the truck hauling in the new rig from getting there. Are we having fun yet?

Apparently the FCC is shortly going to start the ball rolling in their effort to re-claim broadcast spectrum with an NPRM. We will have to wait and see if they start proposing

what some have called 'Repacking'. The thought of being forced to change channels is not something that any TV station owner wants to have to go through. The pressure to create spectrum for this new shiny object called 'Broadband' is huge. The FCC is caught between a rock and a hard place.

Now that we have gone through the NTSC/ATSC conversion it's interesting to note that Digital TV penetration is now estimated to be 85%. Wonder what percentage of TV and computer users are still looking at a CRT? I have to admit, suddenly those big, bulky displays are starting to look a bit funny.

As you all know, the SBE Board of Directors, in their recent meeting in Madison, WI, re-aimed the Society's efforts to deal with EAS. For the 10 years that I chaired the EAS Committee, we became increasingly engaged with the 'regulators', i.e., FCC and FEMA. That has now changed with SBE's re-focus of its EAS work on helping the Engineer in the field. Feeling that there is still a lot of work to be done, several former SBE EAS Committee members have formed another organization. You can check it out at <http://eas.radiolists.net/>. There is also a Remailer you can subscribe to if you wish. The FCC is going to be dropping an NPRM regarding EAS Rule Changes on us, any day now, thereby giving this new entity a lot to do.

Some are saying that the FCC has a heart after all, after it cancelled a fine for KQBE-FM over in Selah. Apparently there were some public file issues during their license renewal. The station has now been sold to a new firm and has become KYKV-FM in Ellensburg. The company demonstrated financial hardship, and the FCC backed off. One of the major reasons they did was they were very up-front and honest with the FCC.

On the business side – The RAB reports that radio revenue is up about 5% in Q3 as the economy continues to find its legs.

Business is good at Sirius/XM with the news that they are nearing 20 million subscribers.

Things are even better at our local broadcast company. Fisher reports Q3 revenues are up 38%. I suspect that a bunch of that was political advertising.

Over the years we have seen AM radio's market share slowly decline compared to FM for a number of technical reasons. Better fidelity and stereo transmission. AM has become the home of news, talk and sports stations. Reversing the tide, Seattle's own KVI has switched from its long format as a conservative talk format, back to music (Oldies). Not much of that going on! Meanwhile, KIRO –FM picked up the late night Coast to Coast AM program. Hmmm ...An AM program on FM....OK.

Salem is, perhaps, seeing an opportunity here by adding conservative talk to their KLFE (AM 1590). 1590 only has a fraction of the coverage of 570.

Cord-Cutting is starting to create some attention. This is what they call it when a viewer stops being a cable or satellite TV subscriber. The number of subscribers that are doing this is starting to create some attention. I have to wonder if this is being driven by the cost for TV delivery or could it be driven by the economic situation? With an increasing portion of Joe Sixpack's budget being spent on ever-higher speed Internet service, one has to wonder if that's a factor too. Perhaps the convergence of the TV and the Internet

connected computer will really take place. I suspect that these now mainly stand-alone devices are certain to undergo many changes in the next few years.

HD Radio continues to make baby-steps toward greater acceptance with the announcement by Ford that they intend to offer it in their Focus. Ford has been someone unique with their electronic features. HD-R still has many fence sitters in the broadcast industry waiting for a huge increase in public acceptance. HD-R suffers from a huge lack of devotion to content by radio owners. In this market we have seen stations with great HD multicast signals, put on foreign language programming treating HD Radio's HD-2 and 3 streams very much as they would SCA's years ago. HD Radio will likely succeed in the long run...however it's going to be a long and slow procession.

Then there is the guy that was watching Dancing with the Stars and did not like how the voting was going and shot his TV with a shotgun. The set's owner, as it turned out, had some other issues. I do recall seeing a bumper sticker in Seattle that said 'Shoot your TV'....Likely not related.

A station that I was with for 19 years is being sold. KKMO (It was KMO when I was there) is being sold by Salem to Sea Mar Community Health Center for 2.7 million. No official word on what they will program. However, rumor has it they will continue with Spanish. The station operates with 5,000 watts, full-time, non-directional using a 180 foot shut fed flagpole at Browns Point. One of my better ideas if I do say so.

Remember John Franz? Until John left the PNW he was the Chief of KVOS-TV in Bellingham. John recently dropped me a note explaining that he has a new job, Director of Operations for FOX TV Stations. He added that the Fox O &O's are moving their master control operations to Las Vegas.

Recently I wrote about that huge data center Microsoft built in Quincy, WA. Did you know that this Quincy in our state was named after Quincy, IL, home of Harris and BE, makers of broadcast equipment?

Looking back a bit --- KDKA recently celebrated its 90th birthday. And 75 years ago, Major Armstrong demonstrated wideband FM.

Congratulations to Milford Smith Jr. (who?), otherwise known to his friends as Smitty for winning the 2010 Radio World Excellence in Engineering Award. He joins an exclusive club whose members are talking about having dinner together in Las Vegas next April.

Anyone know if someone has the list of Seattle area call letters that the late Chuck Morris used to keep? Here's another call from the past - KFKF, formally used in Bellevue is now in Kansas City.

Well my friends, that's it from this end for this month.

May you all have a wonderful Christmas and the best of everything in 2011.

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