

HISTORY

The history and expansion of WHO Broadcasting Company from its beginnings on April 10, 1924 as a 5,000-watt radio station is a fascinating story. It is a story that reflects a growth in staff size, facilities and the very best in broadcasting service to the public...one striving for continued quality and responsibility in its programming.

WHO was originally owned by the Bankers Life of Des Moines when radio was still considered novel, with stations broadcasting without individual identification. Eventually, the station was asked to choose call letters. "WHO" was chosen by the company's manager in response to inquiries of "Who is this?" and "Who are we listening to?" In 1930, Colonel B. J. Palmer, noted for his progressive thinking, purchased WHO Radio and plans were made for expansion. In 1933, WHO was granted an increase in its operating power to 50,000 watts, making it one of the few stations in the country with such a vast coverage area. The extension in power enabled WHO to reach the entire Middle West and far beyond. Mail was received from Maine and Louisiana, remarking how clearly the signal was received.

To better reach the needs of its far-reaching audience, the WHO Radio News Bureau was created, bringing a professionally-staffed, fully-equipped news department to the public in 1935. Because 25% of all Grade A farmland was served by WHO's extended signal, the station then established the country's first farm news department. Although it started as an experiment in 1936, the Farm Service Department quickly became a model for others in the radio broadcast industry.

Early listeners to WHO Radio were tapping their feet to the Iowa Barn Dance Frolic, a local program of music and comedy on Saturday nights. WHO's first Sports Director, President Ronald Reagan, did play-by-play broadcasts of University of Iowa football games from 1932 to 1937, as well as "re-creations" of baseball games from within the studios. On the scene reports from newsmen Jack Shelley and Herb Plambeck during World War II, brought first-hand accounts to the homes of thousands. And the origination of "National Soil Conservation Days" provided listeners with agricultural updates and know-how.

After 63 years of service, WHO Radio continues to maintain its high standards, with comprehensive, award-winning news coverage and programming. 21 updated farm reports are heard daily, and listeners are able to hear discussions with guests and experts. Increased sports coverage, ranging from high school and college athletics to professional, brings the best in sports to our listeners.

WHO has always prided itself on its involvement with the lives of Iowans. Although much has been written here of the past, the future holds even greater responsibility.

In 1948, WHO was joined by its "sister" station, WHO-FM. Broadcasting on the FM frequency, the station offered high school sporting events, updated newscasts and music. As times changed, so did the role of FM stations. In 1973, new all-stereo equipment replaced the old and the station changed its call letters to KLYF. Adult Contemporary music can be heard on KLYF 100 FM 24 hours a day in homes, cars, office buildings and stores.

On April 26, 1954, WHO-TV was authorized to telecast on Channel 13 with maximum power. Since its beginning, the station has been affiliated with the NBC network. Early viewers saw local live programming featuring many of their radio favorites...Slim Hayes, Jack Shelley, Bill Austin, the Buckaroos, and Herb Plambeck. "Romper Room" with Miss Nancy and Duane Ellett and Floppy kept the youngsters entertained. Network programming was primarily in the evening, and offered viewers such shows as "Groucho," "Dragnet," and the "NBC News" with Chet Huntley and David Brinkley.

As equipment became more sophisticated, the public was able to see events of national interest. WHO-TV's first remote broadcast was on August 10, 1954, from West Branch, Iowa, where former President Herbert Hoover celebrated his 80th birthday. The program was fed through WHO equipment to the NBC network.

Improving and extending the broadcast signal to a larger area then became a goal. In 1972, a new 2,000-foot tower and transmitter were constructed in Alleman, Iowa. The new equipment projected WHO-TV's coverage to a 90-mile radius of Des Moines in central Iowa.

With an eye to the future, property at 1801 Grand was purchased and groundbreaking ceremonies held on April 10, 1981. Now, our beautiful three-story structure, containing more than 65,000 square feet of office and studio space on 2.5 acres of land, houses WHO Broadcasting Company and the corporate offices for its parent company, Palmer Communications, Incorporated. The occupancy of the new building is yet another milestone in the fascinating history of the company, and opens more doors for future growth and added service to the community.

WHO Radio, KLYF-FM and WHO-TV 13 take pride in their past and are committed to providing the best broadcast service possible in years to come.