



## Sandler's Passion Brings Her Back To Radio

By her own admission, there aren't a lot of other places where Nicole Sandler could have ended up. A 20-year radio veteran, Sandler was concentrating on her production and voice-over company, Virtual Radio Services, when she was named director of programming at Northeast Broadcasting in March. "One of the reasons I got out of radio was because the kind of radio I do is very specialized," she says. "I could do other radio, and have, but my heart is really in triple-A. It's a niche format, and there aren't that many stations. The ones that are there, in this era of consolidation, are more and more voice-tracked, there's fewer people, it's less creative, and more business [driven]. That's not necessarily a bad thing; it's just the way the industry has gone. There were fewer and fewer opportunities to do the kind of radio I know and love."

Northeast owns 12 stations, including suburban Boston's WXRV (the River) Haverhill, Mass., and WNCS (the Point) Burlington, Vt. Northeast's Stephen Silberberg and consultant Keith Cunningham, Sandler's former boss at triple-A KACD Los Angeles, had taken the River 0.8-1.4. Sandler says that Silberberg "realized to continue making progress, he needed somebody in-house with a programming background to [infuse] a new perspective and some new ideas."

After KACD, "I did the small-market [thing] in Taos [N.M.], where she programmed triple-A KTAO) and realized that that's not where I wanted to be," Sandler says. "With this, I have a

top 10 market in Boston, but I also have [stations in] New Hampshire and Vermont. I get to play with the big boys.

"Steven presented me with an opportunity to do my kind of radio in a great town, and these jobs don't come up often," she continues. "I have the best of both worlds in that I'm 30 minutes outside of Boston, plus I have the advantages of small-town life, because I'm living in Salem, N.H."

"The deal maker was that Steven Silberberg said that his measure of success is doing great radio," Sandler adds. "He believes that if you put forth a good product, good radio will follow. And after years of working for Clear Channel and going through so many [station] sales and so much consolidation, I was really looking forward to working for a small company."

Sandler's first challenge at Northeast is to increase station synergy. "We have really good people in place at all the stations," she says. "We're in the communications business, and it's really about keeping the lines of communication open. The Point and the River are very closely aligned formatically, but they've never communicated and used the synergy that's in place to share. We've got a couple of really good triple-A stations here in New England. One of my goals with these two stations is to get them to work more closely together. For example, we have Widespread Panic coming to the River to do a live performance. I

want to give that to the Point as well. There's no reason that they can't run that. Thankfully, I have people in place at the stations that are really doing a good job, so I don't really need to manage them. I can just enhance what they're doing and be another resource to help make the product better. They've all been in place for so long that they just need some fresh ideas and new blood."

### TRIPLE-A COULD WORK ANYWHERE

Sandler thinks that commercial triple-A could work in any market, especially Boston. "Triple-A is radio for intelligent adults," she says. "And

because there are so many colleges and universities in Boston, there are a lot of intelligent adults here that are open to music. There are two commercial triple-A stations thriving here... Historically, we tend to be the little guys though, so we need to do more to get noticed."

Sandler says that part of the reason for the format's low profile lies in Arbitron's methodology. "A lot more people listen [to triple-A] than Arbitron reports. Our listeners are intelligent, professional adults. When someone calls them at dinner time and asks them to participate in a survey, their first reaction is to hang up the phone. Our listeners don't historically participate in these types of surveys, so we're severely underrecognized... That's a problem inherent with this format."

That said, Sandler states that "without a doubt, triple-A breaks records. We started Norah Jones, and the record began selling. The label

saw the sales and started working it to other formats. But if it hadn't been for the initial airplay, that wouldn't have happened. It's the same thing with John Mayer. The other formats don't glom onto these things until there's progress being made somewhere else. We're the format that takes chances.

"Then you have heritage artists like Bruce Springsteen, Tom Petty, and Peter Dinklage that are core artists that don't have a home at other formats anymore," she adds. "A lot of classic rock stations will only play the older library material. When I worked at [classic rock WBGG] Big 106 in Miami, *The Rising* came out and they wouldn't play anything from it. They played classic Springsteen and that was it. Triple-A is the format you can go to to hear that album, but we're also the station you can go to to hear Norah Jones, which was the album of the year." Sandler cites Jason Mraz, Sam Roberts, Rhye Miller, Nickel Creek, and John Eddie as current acts with the potential to expand beyond triple-A.

At the same time, a lot of the singer/songwriter sound that has been core to triple-A has again been appropriated by top 40 and adult top 40 radio, with the exception that the new acts are often much younger. Such artists as Vanessa Carlton, Avril Lavigne, and Michelle Branch don't have much utility for Sandler. "Age really has nothing to do with it," she says. "We played Shannon

## MONITOR PROFILE



NICOLE SANDLER

Director of Programming  
Northeast Broadcasting

'[Radio has] too many directives coming from the top and not enough teamwork'



10 A.M.

The Police, "Invisible Sun"  
Tori Amos, "Taxi Ride"  
Led Zeppelin, "Thank You"  
Five for Fighting, "Superman (It's Not Easy)"  
Sublime, "What I Got"  
U2, "Mysterious Ways"  
Jack Johnson, "The Horizon Has Been Defeated"  
Marc Cohn, "Walking in Memphis"  
Afro Celt Sound System Featuring Peter Gabriel, "When You're Falling"  
The Rolling Stones, "Shattered"  
Coldplay, "Clocks"  
Melissa Etheridge, "I'm the Only One"  
Goo Goo Dolls, "Here Is Gone"  
Shelby Lynne, "Life Is Bad"

## Q: Has the \$27,500 indecency fine against WKRK Detroit prompted you to take a closer look at what your jocks say on the air?

**Tim Richards, PD, WKQX (Q101) Chicago:** "Yes. We understand the FCC is watching this more now than ever. We have had our legal counsel in from Indianapolis to meet with the entire morning team. The goal is to try and define what the line is so that there is no question [about] what we can and can't run. I won't say that we are perfect, but we are making the effort. No one here wants to see any more FCC fines."



RICHARDS

**Keith Hastings, PD, WAAF Boston:** "Of course! Anyone who does not interpret this as a very clear message from the FCC to tone it down is living on borrowed time. If 'locker room' content is part of your presentation, you've just been sent a very clear message, sealed with a \$27,500 kiss."

**Scott Jameson, PD, WRZX (X103) Indianapolis:** "Because of this specific fine handed down in Detroit, no. But we always try to keep the airstaff up to date on the guidelines and possible ramifications of broadcasting anything deemed indecent. When there are high-profile fines handed down, we sometimes review them and discuss why they were interpreted as indecent by the commission. We're sometimes surprised how stupid people are who do these things. You really have to screw up to get fined. It just isn't smart."

**Tim Sheridan, PD, KRQC (the Dam) Omaha, Neb.:** "Not really. The only time that something like [that] would come up would be in morning drive. Since I'm on the morning show, my co-hosts already know the limits. We don't need to be near-obscene to be entertaining."

**Alan Smith, PD, WOCL (O-Rock) Orlando, Fla.:** "Not really with us. We've had a good understanding of where the line is for a long time. But anytime something like that happens, especially in your own company, it kind of makes you step back and ask, 'What did they do?'"

## PROMOGANDA

AN OVERVIEW OF RADIO PROMOTIONS

### Six Months' Rent And A Mattress, Too!

Heritage WKLS (96 Rock) Atlanta has joined the reality radio craze by promising to marry off morning team the Regular Guys' sidekick "Southside" Steve Rickman. Married by Atlanta contestants/would-be-brides have submitted bios and pictures to the station's Web site, and listeners will vote on who the 28-year-old Rickman should marry. The winner not only wins Rickman's hand in marriage but she will also be the co-recipient of a free mattress, six months of rent-free living in an apartment, and a settlement should the two separate. Since Rickman won't meet the lucky lady until they're

engaged, the chances of separation aren't all that slim.

Active KRXX (98 Rock) Sacramento, Calif., has raised \$6,500 for a local charity through sales of its *Sacramento Rocks Vol. 9: Who's Next* CD compilation. The disc, which was released last August, features 23 local bands, and the money benefited the Mustard Seed School for Homeless Children. Meanwhile, one band on the CD, **Die Trying**, has landed a deal with Island. Other previously unsigned bands featured on earlier *Sacramento Rocks* compilations include **Papa Roach**, **Oleander**, and **Soul Motor**.

Curfman, and she's 14. But it's about getting down to what's real. John Mayer is real, Shannon Curfman is real, and Avril Lavigne is manufactured. We are playing her at [one of Northeast's adult top 40s], though. It's a case-by-case basis. I don't just want to play a song because it's a hit song. I want to play a great song from an artist that's really an artist. I don't want to feel like it's somebody who's manufactured. I want to believe that it's coming from them and it's real.

### THE ULTIMATE RADIO JOB

"The radio I'm doing right now is exactly like the radio I got into the business for," Sandler continues. "It's a small company, and I'm able to program great music with the directive to be adventurous, creative, and great as my mission statement. Unfortunately, that's not the goal of the radio industry right now. It's very Wall Street-driven. And I understand the need for that, but that's not what I got into radio for. I got into radio because I was passionate about radio and music. I have my ultimate radio job in a great city, doing the kind of radio I love, playing the music that I'm passionate

about. And I get to go out and find new artists that I believe in and help start their careers. By that same token, the reason I resigned myself to getting out of radio is that these stations don't exist on a mass level anymore. Instead you have [Clear Channel chairman/CEO Lowry] Mays saying, 'We're not in the business of playing music, we're in the business of selling advertising.' I understand that, but the way we'll sell our advertising is by doing great radio."

Sandler plans on using her experience to educate the on-air and programming staffs at Northeast, but she wants to learn from them as well. "We will nurture new jocks and try to cultivate them," she says. "Also, I don't want to come in here and dictate what we're doing—I want everyone's feedback. I [have] walked into a place that has a lot of passionate people; they love the music and their stations. I want everyone involved, and I want it to feel like a team. That's something that has been missing in radio in the post-consolidation era. There's too many directives coming from the top and not enough teamwork. That's what I hope to create here."