

“Take it easy, play it safe, and be careful.”

The traditional closing words of “Dr. Max” Hahn, who hosted a children’s program on WMT-TV in Cedar Rapids from 1961 to 1981.

4 | For The Children

They were clowns, cowboys, and space travelers, steamboat captains, doctors, and puppets. They showed cartoons, interviewed guests, and took pratfalls, all to keep generations of Iowa’s young people entertained—and along the way, to teach them valuable lessons, as well. They were the hosts of children’s programs on radio and television.

Mention names like Dr. Max or Floppy, or places like the house with the Magic Window or Romper Room, and Iowa’s baby boomers will still get a far-off look in their eyes, and smile as they remember the time they spent with these daily broadcast visitors to their homes.

In the early days of television, every station had a local children’s program in the late afternoon. But long before, many radio stations also sought to entertain the youngest members of the audience.

Cedar Rapids radio station KWCR, owned by the Cowles family of the *Des Moines Register & Tribune*, featured the husband-and-wife duo of Doug and Jackie Grant reading the “funny papers” on Sunday mornings—long before Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia read the comics to children during a newspaper strike in New York City. When KWCR moved to Des Moines, the concept moved too, with the “Sunday Funnies” becoming a regular feature on the *Register’s* KRNT radio in the 1940s. Various staff members contributed each week. When the show became a daily feature, the afternoon comics were acted out live on the air by a young announcer named Bill Riley and a Roosevelt High School student named Cloris Leachman.

In the fall of 1946, thousands of Iowa children began yelling out “Hey, Bob!” It was the start of a five-year run that proved the power of radio.

The previous year, the head of the Des Moines safety council approached KRNT management with an idea for a children’s program called “Hey, Bob,” with “Bob” standing for “be on the beam” or “be on the ball.” Riley was asked to host the show.

“If we could teach children safety the fun way, and have them enjoy yelling ‘Hey, Bob’ when someone is jaywalking or something,” Riley said, the message had a better chance of getting through. A rather grotesque-looking dummy was the physical presence of “Bob”—to this day, Riley still has “Bob” in his Clear Lake home.

The first show was aired in the fall of 1946 at the KRNT studio, with seating for 50 children. The program was designed to be fun; children threw pies, blew up balloons, competed in bubblegum blowing contests, and the like. The show was such a success that by the next week, the elevators and studios in the building were jammed. By the third week, the program was moved to the Paramount Theatre, and soon the 1,300-seat theater was regularly filled to capacity.

“One year, I remember driving to the Paramount Theatre, and it was 11 below zero and the line of children waiting to get into the theater went clear around the corner and a block up the street,” Riley said. For the presentation of big shows, such as the Ice Follies, the program would occasionally be moved to the larger KRNT Theatre, which seated 4,200 people, but even that was not large enough at times.

For a dairy month promotion in June of 1949, the local dairy sponsor reported giving away 10,000 cups of ice cream—more than 4,000 to those in the theater, and another 6,000 to those who were waiting in line but had to be turned away at the door.



Duane Ellett and Floppy of WHO-TV delighted central Iowa children for parts of four decades.



The notorious star of the “Hey, Bob!” radio show of the late 1940s.

But while the power of the “Hey, Bob Safety Legion” was strong, and the program received many national awards, it proved to be no match for television. By the fall of 1952, the show had left the KRNT radio airwaves.

By that time, central Iowa children had been exposed to the house with the “Magic Window,” the longest continuously running children’s show in American television history. First taking to the air in 1951, the program was seen on WOI-TV in Ames for 43 years. The producer and host of the program for all but the first three years was Betty Lou Varnum, the versatile WOI staffer who at various times also hosted a teen dance program and public affairs shows, and coordinated the station’s election coverage.

The program occupied some of early television’s prime real estate. For example, in 1953, the program aired at 5 in the afternoon, just after Gabby Hayes and Howdy Doody, and just before the Lone Ranger. The show included syndicated programs such as “Tales of the Riverbank,” featuring the adventures of Hammy Hamster, and cartoons such as Felix the Cat. But it was the projects and crafts made with snubby-nosed scissors (as opposed to pointed ones which could hurt young children), along with the interaction between Varnum and her puppet friends, that made the program unique.

Gregory Lion, Dusty the Unicorn, and Catrina Crocodile lived in the Magic Forest, and interacted with Varnum to help introduce the animated features. They would help draw open the curtain, with Varnum calling out to “turn on the motor, turn on the lights” of an unseen projector so the feature could be shown.

Thousands of Central Iowa children learned how to use construction paper and glue, thanks to the Magic Window. But showing a young audience how to make things was not easy. “One of the things I found difficult in the beginning was working upside down and backwards, and now it’s gotten to the point that I have to read maps that way,” Varnum said.

From the day Channel 9 signed on in Sioux City, in March of 1953, the Canyon Kid was there. For 32 years, Jim Henry presided over the Canyon Kid's Kartoorn Karnival.

"I guess the purpose of the show was to entertain children. Along the way, I wanted them to get some sense of how to live right, like be kind to your friends, obey your mother and father, those kinds of things," Henry said.

A native of Brooklyn, N.Y., Henry was stationed in Sioux City during World War II and decided to make the area his permanent home. When Channel 9, then known as KVTN, went on the air, the station was looking for a children's host. He had been active in community theater and thought, "This is all brand-new. They don't know any more about it than I do."

He decided the best format for the program would be to emulate a kids' club in an average backyard. He'd be the "president" of the club, with 15-20 children live on set each day. The easiest costume to come up with was a simple Western shirt and jeans, and he called himself the Canyon Kid. The station liked the audition, but thought they could come up with a better name for the show. In 32 years, no one did.

For the first month of the show, Henry sported a cowboy hat and a string tie, but those parts of the costume did not last. One thing that did last was his rather heavy Brooklyn accent. How did he account for a cowboy having a Brooklyn accent? He freely admitted to the children that the accent did not come from the canyons out west, but rather from the canyons created by the tall buildings in New York City.

An estimated 75,000 children appeared on the program over its three-decade run. Henry says he is amazed that people will still recall verbatim what they said on the show decades before, and remember what happened to them the day they appeared on the Canyon Kid program.

While the Magic Window and Canyon Kid were pioneers in

Iowa children's programming, programs designed for children were a part of early television in eastern Iowa, as well. Just three months after the station went on the air, WMT-TV premiered Miss Ruth Anne's School in January of 1954. The program lasted only two months, making way for cowboy Marshal J, who, along with his horse Nugget and dog Rascal, kept children entertained for nearly six years. When the Marshal rode off to continue his television career in California, Channel 2 officials were looking for a replacement. They asked a longtime community theater performer named Max Hahn if he wanted the job.

Hahn was no stranger to broadcasting, having performed in radio theater in the mid-1930s on both KWCR and WMT radio in Cedar Rapids. He was working on the night shift as a printer at a local firm at the time, and agreed to take on the TV duties in addition to his regular job.

"They didn't know what to call me. They didn't want a ship's captain or cowboy," Hahn recalled in a 1981 interview. Then someone at the station decided he should be called "Dr. Max." "Gee, that sounded awful. Dr. Max? I thought it was a terrible name for a show," he said. Regardless, on January 23, 1961, complete with safari jacket, Dr. Max the world traveler debuted on Channel 2. It was the beginning of a 20-year run.

Other stations in the Cedar Rapids/Waterloo market tried children's programming of their own. Sheriff Steve hosted a show on KCRG, and KWVL had Captain Jet, but they were no match for the good doctor. In 1963 and 1964, for example, the Dr. Max Show exceeded the ratings of the other two combined. One promotion, a Mickey Mouse coloring contest, netted 25,000 entries from four states.

For a time, Dr. Max was on for 60 minutes in the morning with a program designed for young children, and for another 90 minutes in the late afternoon with a program designed for older, school-age children. Foghorn Leghorn, Deputy Dawg,



Eastern Iowa children spent mornings and afternoons with Dr. Max and Mombo on WMT.

Huckleberry Hound, and other “colortoons” appeared on the “magic board” for children to see.

Early in the show’s run, an off-stage noise accidentally carried over the microphone. To cover for the noise, Max blamed it on an unseen character, “Mombo.” For a while, anytime something would go wrong on the live show, Max would simply blame Mombo.

After a while, children started writing in, asking to see Mombo. Hahn called upon a community theater friend, Fred Petrick, to appear a few times on the program as Mombo. Petrick devised a clown character, who was simply supposed to sit at Dr. Max’s feet to satisfy the children’s curiosity about “Mombo.” But the children were still not satisfied. They began writing, asking for Mombo to talk. Soon, the two or three guest appearances became a run that lasted the length of the show. Mombo began doing magic tricks, and the duo made thousands of personal appearances across the state, at community events, store openings, parades, and the like.

A unique concept in local children’s programming was Romper Room. The program, which appeared in a number of markets across the country in the late 1960s, was the brainchild of a Baltimore couple who devised a basic outline for what local Romper Room programs around the country should do each day, but provided no full script. The concept allowed national marketing, including the sale of merchandise such as “romper stompers” and “posture baskets.” In eastern Iowa, “Miss Bonnie” was in charge of the classroom on KWWL-TV 7, while central Iowa children watched “Miss Nancy” on WHO-TV 13. Each day, the Romper Room teacher would hold up a “magic mirror” which could “see” the children watching at home. She would then call out various children’s names; such as, “I see Bobby, and Sally, and there’s Jim.”

While the specific name and character played by the children’s program host may have been different, the premise was the same at stations throughout the state. Quad Cities children grew up with the Cartoon Showboat, which aired on WOC-TV from 1964



“Miss Bonnie” Noonan and the KWWL Romper Room classroom in Waterloo in the mid-1960s.

to 1974. Four different captains piloted the Showboat during its decade on the air, including “Cap’n Ernie” Mims, who was the last. For a time, WHO-TV in Des Moines aired “The Lucky 13 Ranch” program, playing off the interest in “cowboy movies,” which were popular at the time.

In Mason City, Bart Curran presided over “Bart’s Clubhouse” from 1958 to 1976 on KGLO-TV. According to Curran, the set and premise was simple. “It was like an old-fashioned clubhouse kids would build in the backyard,” he said in a 1994 interview.

When KTIV-TV went on the air in Sioux City in 1954, “Commander Four” was there to contact Buck Rodgers or Flash Gordon and bring their adventures to the northwest Iowa audience. Hosted by Red Quilleash as the commander, the station brought the old movie serials back to life for a new audience. The station’s “Space Legion Headquarters” would send cards to children to decode with “secret decoding devices.” The messages would provide guidance such as “ride your bike carefully” or “drink your milk.”

Bill Riley made the switch from radio to television on KRNT with, among other things, the Breakfast Club, which aired for a

half-hour at 7:30 a.m. weekdays. The club claimed 40,000 children as card-carrying members. Riley also hosted an hour-long Variety Theater program in the afternoons, featuring standards such as *The Little Rascals*.

Puppets were popular, particularly in central Iowa. Captain Redbeard and his sailor sidekick, Seasick, hosted *Kadipus Land* on KDPS-TV (later KDIN-TV) in Des Moines in the 1970s. But without question, for more than 30 years, the most popular puppet on Iowa television was Floppy.

Created by WHO announcer Duane Ellett, Floppy made his debut in the mid-1950s on a program called *Pet Corner*, which was designed to help find homes for shelter pets. By 1957, Floppy had his own show, with Duane providing the “personality” behind a wall. The on-air foils for Floppy’s jokes were a series of young female co-hosts. Before long, however, Duane and Floppy were back on camera together and became one of Iowa’s great two-man stand-up acts, with very little change in format over the decades.

“I gave it about two years when we started,” Ellett remembered in a 1985 interview. “But it has picked up momentum and kept growing. We found out along the way we didn’t have to get new cartoons—we had new kids being born all the time, so that was kind of a cheap way to manage that.”

In between various cartoons, children who were given cardboard question marks would get to ask Floppy a riddle. No matter how many times Floppy was asked, “What is the biggest pencil in the world?” or “Why did the man put his car in the oven?”, he always acted surprised when the laughing youngster would say, “Pennsylvania,” or “Because he wanted a hot rod.”

Tickets to be a part of the in-studio audience for *The Floppy Show* were hard to get, with reservations required one year in advance. Fan clubs sprang up on Iowa college campuses, where wearing a Floppy T-shirt was considered the height of fashion in some circles.

“I wish the ratings surveys took into account the college and university groups, because they are the fanatics,” Ellett said.

As was the case with all late-afternoon, locally produced children’s programming, however, the weekday “*Floppy Show*” was pushed aside in 1984 to make room for syndicated programming designed for adults. Floppy still appeared on a weekly program along with other puppets, called *The Floppytown Gazette*, until Duane Ellett’s sudden death in 1987. After his death, Ellett’s family donated Floppy to the State Historical Society of Iowa, where he is always on display—trademark red sweater and all.

Without exception, the programs were low budget and were broadcast live, usually without any rehearsal. Special effects were limited. The programs relied on the imagination of the children who were watching.

Fred Petrick, who played *Mombo the Clown* for 20 years, recalled in a 1993 interview that they seldom resorted to trick photography—except on one memorable occasion involving a lawnmower.

Petrick said he and host Max Hahn saw a lawnmower in the station before their show one day, and decided it would make a good prop for a skit. The set had a carpet which was actually laid in two pieces. *Mombo* started up the lawnmower, with Dr. Max encouraging him to be careful. The camera shot the upper half of *Mombo*’s body while he pushed the mower across the set, allowing unseen stagehands to pull the carpet pieces apart. When the shot widened to show the entire set, it appeared as if he had mowed a clean strip across the carpet, much to Dr. Max’s dismay.

Most local hosts originally did live commercials during their programs, until the Federal Communications Commission changed the rules and banned the practice. Some of their experiences made many local hosts happy to stop doing commercials.

During one program, Channel 3’s Bart Curran was to do a live commercial promoting McDonald’s milkshakes. As a prank, one of the crew members had spiked the milkshake with a shot of



KRNT personality Bill Riley welcomes a troupe of Bluebirds to his "Variety Theater" program in Des Moines.

Jim Henry as
Sioux City's
"Canyon Kid."



alcohol. After one drink, the unsuspecting Curran was unable to speak. To make matters worse, a regional manager from McDonald's was in the studio that day to see how well their advertising dollars were being spent .

Channel 2's Dr. Max once noted the difficulty of ad-libbing a 60-second commercial for the same sponsor five days a week, often

for as much as six months at a time. One of his sponsors was Peter Pan bread, and Hahn said after more than 100 daily commercials for the product, "you got the idea of making sandwiches."

"When I started out in children's television, I really had no lofty ideas about educating children," Ellett said. "I just really wanted to make something entertaining for them. But then when I got older, I started thinking more about the educational aspect of it."

While their primary purpose was to entertain children, these programs also helped develop a sense of community involvement and personal responsibility in the young audience. Over an 18-month period, with the help of Des Moines children, KRNT's Bill Riley was responsible for raising \$156,000 to aid in the construction of the Des Moines Children's Zoo.

For eight years, the Dr. Max Show sponsored "My Important Book," a pocket-sized booklet where children could make lists of their "important" things. The books, which sold for 50 cents including postage and handling, were mailed from the station. They also included "Dr. Max's Rules for the Day," such as obeying your parents, saying your prayers, and brushing your teeth.

Regular guests on the Dr. Max Show included a police officer, an individual from the local humane society, and a representative from the local nature center, among others. Max Hahn himself was a regular reader at the Saturday morning story hour at the Cedar Rapids Public Library.

The young audience was impressionable, and parents were concerned about the programming. For many years, the Dr. Max



Betty Lou Varnum hosted WOI-TV's "The Magic Window," the longest-running local children's program in American TV history.

Show aired films of The Three Stooges. However, by the mid-1970s, the station pulled the Stooges due to concern from viewers about the violence depicted in the programs. Other stations had to defend violence in cartoons such as Tom & Jerry, and the Road Runner and Wile E. Coyote. (It is more than a bit ironic that the daytime talk shows that replaced children's programming in the late afternoon hours, when children are still in the viewing audience, regularly depict a great deal more "violence.")

One bit of children's show violence was not actually seen by the Sioux City television audience, according to Jim Henry. Each week on the Canyon Kid program, one day was designated as "Pet Day," when the children in the audience would bring their pets to the studio. On one show, when Henry himself was on vacation and the station's sports announcer was substituting, one child showed his turtle to another child, who had a pet raccoon. Unfortunately, nature took its course, with unfavorable results for the turtle.

"You become a celebrity when you have cows and dogs and llamas named Max," WMT's Dr. Max said in a 1981 interview commemorating the 20th anniversary of the program. A young fan once showed Hahn his two pet frogs—one named Max and one named Mombo. "So you see, you are famous when kids start naming animals after you."

Sometimes, the "naming" is more serious. Sioux City's "Canyon Kid" recalls once meeting a young woman who said that when she was a child, Henry had a girl named Rochelle on the show. The young woman said she thought that was a pretty

name, and decided then and there that if she ever had a daughter, she would name her Rochelle. The woman then introduced Henry to a young girl—her daughter, Rochelle.

"All I knew was that we were doing a show for children, with children, and that I needed to be as interested and take them as seriously as I would an adult, and so that when we talked, I always thought of dealing with children on that basis, that what they've got to say is very important, and it just worked," Henry said.

"It's a feeling of satisfaction that the kiddies out there and the people liked us, and when you please people, it gives you a good feeling," Fred Petrick, Channel 2's "Mombo," once said.

Some thought that doing a daily program in front of a live audience would get old after a while. In a 1980s interview, Duane Ellett disagreed. "With each group of young people that enters the studio down there, I see a lot of new faces and new little individuals, and it's something that I look forward to," he said.

"Is there anything nicer than being known to and loved by children? And that has been one of the most warm and wonderful parts of doing Magic Window all these years," Varnum said in a 1994 interview.

Long before books such as "All I Needed to Know, I Learned in Kindergarten" became popular, eastern Iowa children learned all they needed to know through Dr. Max's daily sign off—"Take it easy, play it safe, and be careful."

In different words and different ways, that message was delivered by all of the dozens of children's shows originated at Iowa radio and television stations.

A Word From Our Sponsors

It is hard today to think of any alternative to the current system of commercial broadcasting which dominates our country. In our free enterprise system, tangible goods are bought and sold; broadcasters have nothing tangible to sell, simply the air through which the signals travel. So despite past governmental efforts to prohibit commercial advertisements from the broadcast airwaves, the way that the great majority of stations stay in business is to sell pieces of the broadcast day to those who wish to advertise their goods and services.

A 1934 "rate card" for KWCR in Cedar Rapids indicated that during the evening hours, a person could buy sponsorship for a half-hour radio program for \$45; if the sponsor were willing to purchase that half-hour of time once a week for a year, the rate dropped to \$27 per week. Conversely, a half-minute commercial cost \$7; if that commercial were run once a week for a whole year, the per-commercial rate dropped to \$5 each. The evening hours were the most costly time in which to purchase advertising, as it was considered "prime time;" today, those evening hours are television's prime time, while the most expensive time to buy in radio are the early mornings, "drive time."

By the end of the 1930s, one of the ways the Cowles stations tried to compete with WHO's broad signal was to form the Iowa Network, occasionally sharing programming between Cowles-owned stations and offering advertisers combination



Bill Riley delivering a commercial for Wonder bread.

packages. As the station with the largest signal, WMT was the heart of the network, but as advertisements in national publications in the 1930s pointed out, "WMT can be bought in combination with WNAX and KSO or KRNT at an exceptionally low rate." Advertisers, therefore, received a discount if they advertised on multiple Cowles properties.

Broadcasters could not be shy about recruiting advertiser dollars. WHO, for its part, also advertised in *Broadcasting* magazine, soliciting national advertisers. WHO pointed out its large 50,000 watt coverage in

a 1952 ad, but also indicated that due to the station's "tremendous goodwill by helping various community organizations throughout Iowa...literally tens of thousands of families have become our personal friends," which meant "responsive listeners for WHO advertisers."

When R. J. McElroy was known as the "most curious man in the world" as part of WMT's Voice of Iowa broadcasts, he would ask trivia questions of passersby. The program sponsor was Kleen-Maid bread, and everyone got a miniature loaf of the bread for appearing on the Voice of

Iowa program. When people got a question right, McElroy's tagline was "Right as Kleen-Maid!" to give the sponsor extra promotion.

When McElroy went into the Army in 1942, he was replaced on the Voice of Iowa program by Howdy Roberts and Red Rowe. McElroy reported on how he was doing during his first months in the service with the following message sent back to the audience: "I hope you all keep buying Kleen-Maid and listening to Howdy and Red so that the program will still be on the air when the war is over and I can come back and spend happy hours with you again," McElroy said.

During the early television years, sponsorship of programs included signage on the set; even newscasts were sponsored, with company logos prominently displayed on the anchor's news desk. In Des Moines, for example, Jack Shelley would do the WHO-TV news with a Standard Oil sign on his desk, Bill Milldyke would anchor WOI-TV's news with an IMT Insurance logo in the background, and in the most famous example, the Anderson-Erickson dairy sponsored Russ Van Dyke's late news, which traditionally ended with Van Dyke taking a long drink of milk from a glass.

But those who ran the Iowa State University-owned television station, WOI-TV, were not as free to solicit advertising as their competitors. The State Board of Regents originally set a policy limiting advertising on WOI to national accounts, including advertisements during network

A Word From Our Sponsors

programs. This policy was approved on January 17, 1950, less than five weeks before the station went on the air.

Local advertisers were effectively shut out of television advertising in central Iowa for a number of years because of the policy, since WOI was the only station on in central Iowa until 1954, and many were not happy about the advertising ban.

Less than a year after the station went on the air, in May, 1951, the policy regarding “the assignment of broadcasting time” was reviewed and again approved by the Regents in its original form. Yet that was not the end of the discussion.

In November, 1951, the Central National Bank in Des Moines asked for a change in policy to allow local advertising on WOI-TV. Again, the Regents agreed that the policy governing advertising should not be changed. A representative from a Des Moines advertising agency met with the Board in January, 1952 to further lobby for a policy change, but he was again unsuccessful.

Later, however, Tone Brothers, an Iowa-based business which operated nationally, filed a formal complaint with the Regents, since the station was carrying commercials for Folgers coffee—a Tone’s competitor—but would not sell time to Tone Brothers. The policy was eventually modified so that the station would accept in-state commercials, but would not actively solicit advertising from Iowa businesses. However, once the policy was changed in any way, the overall interpretation of the policy became

more liberal, and under pressure from the television networks which aired programs on WOI-TV, even beer and cigarette advertising was eventually accepted by the station.

But once Channel 8 and Channel 13 went on the air, the increased competition along with the lackluster advertising solicitation policy adversely affected WOI-TV’s bottom line. The drop in profit was so significant that discussions regarding selling the station began as early as 1958, when college President James Hilton was directed to confer with a broker regarding the value of WOI-TV on the open market. (While nothing came of that effort, the discussion of selling the station would arise on more than one occasion in the mid-1970s, and again in the early 1990s before the station was finally sold on March 1, 1994.)

In the early days of television, commercials were done live, sometimes with interesting consequences. More than once, KRNT’s Russ Van Dyke took a long drink of Anderson-Erickson milk at the end of his newscast, only to find that it had been spiked with a shot of alcohol, or that someone had switched the regular milk with buttermilk. Regardless, Van Dyke had no choice but to smile and act as if the milk he had just drunk was the best he had ever tasted.

The late Harold Heath recalled in a 1998 interview a number of unexpected occurrences during live commercials. The rules in the late 1950s prohibited beer companies from actually showing a person drinking

the product on air; a bottle could be brought up to a person’s mouth, but they could not take a drink. On one occasion, an announcer told the audience of the virtues of Black Hawk Beer and brought the bottle to his lips; at that point, the director was to switch to another camera shot, but he was late in making the switch and the audience saw the announcer dump the beer and scowl as if the mere scent of the beer made him ill. Needless to say, the Black Hawk Beer company was not pleased.

Station marketing and promotion takes on a variety of forms, all designed to increase the audience—which allows stations to charge more for the commercials they sell, and in turn, to make more money.

One of the more ingenious advertising promotions was begun by rock station KRNA in Iowa City in the late 1970s. The station was one of the few commercial radio stations in Iowa City which did not broadcast University of Iowa basketball games, but the station did want to establish a tie to the successful program coached by Lute Olson.

The partners running KRNA, Eliot Keller and Rob Norton, came up with the idea of working with the Iowa basketball department to create a poster. Many teams had team photos and schedules printed on posters which were popular with fans; Norton’s idea was to take the concept to a higher level.

Using commercial photography and an elaborate setting, the first KRNA basketball poster was printed, titled “A Class Act.” The players, in

full uniform, were seated around a formal dinner table at a local restaurant. Waiters in formal attire were shown serving them a multi-course meal. The uniqueness of the setting was an immediate hit with fans. The posters were originally a station promotion, handed out by KRNA during remote broadcasts at area businesses. Later posters in the series included the team in a county courtroom, with different players assuming the roles of judge, attorneys, and jurors, in a takeoff on the basketball “court” theme.

However, a change in NCAA rules limited the free distribution of the posters, which are still printed annually under the sponsorship of the radio station Keller and Norton currently run, KZIA in Cedar Rapids; posters are now available for sale by the Iowa athletic department. They remain popular with collectors today.

The old FCC rules regarding the number of minutes per hour a station could air advertisements, however, are no longer in effect, and have given way to program-length commercials known as “infomercials.” Some longtime broadcasters are not sure that deregulation like this was a good idea.

“The free enterprise system in the final analysis is the best, and so we have to put up with some of these things like over-commercialization,” former WMT station manager Bill Quarton said nearly a decade ago. “I think they’re killing the goose that laid the golden egg by over-commercializing.”



Early WMT-TV children's host "Marshal J" and his dog "Rascal."