

GIZMO GUY: "AirFlossing is so much easier, cleaner and faster than conventional floss." —Jonathan Takiff, **Page 40**

APE-PAD? Zoo puts iPads into the giant, gentle hands of its orangutans. **Page 39**

FEATURES



You're welcome, America!

BY CHUCK DARROW
cdarrow@phillynews.com
 215-398-3834

"HELLO, Philadelphia. Welcome to your worst nightmare,"

With those seven words, Howard Stern began in earnest this inexorable march toward be-

coming the multimedia phenomenon we know (and love and love to hate) today. They were spoken 25 years ago tomorrow, Aug. 18, 1986, when the groundbreaking syndicated radio host debuted on WYSP-PM (94.1).

By the time Stern began simulcasting his New York-based morning drive-time radio show here, he had already been a hit in Washington and New York. And thanks to regular appearances on NBC's

25 years ago,
 Philly put
 Howard Stern
 on the path to
 national fame

"Late Night with David Letterman," Stern had some national clout. But it can be argued that WYSP launched the rocket ship. Stern subsequently rode to celestial heights as the so-called "King of All Media."

"Philadelphia was really the testing ground for the rest of the country," said veteran radio-industry analyst Tom Taylor, news editor of Radio-Info.com. "It proved [Stern] had universal ap-

peal and that you don't have to talk about local things if you're Howard Stern."

Interestingly enough, Stern's arrival on our airwaves in the summer of '86 wasn't exclusively about ratings. According to Andy Bloom, WYSP's program director back then, his station was suffering from a bigger-picture prob-

See **STERN** Page 34

STERN

Continued from Page 31

lem: irrelevance.

As the 1970s slipped into the '80s, WMWR-FM (93.3) ruled the FM rock-radio realm, as it had since its 1968 founding. "YSP had begun playing rock 'n' roll in 1973 and had proved to be a tenacious competitor. However, all that changed in 1982, when a Long Island, N.Y., rock jock named John DeBella came to WMWR to host what was dubbed "The Morning Zoo."

Armed with shtick such as Wednesday "Hump Days" and "Hawaiian Shirt Gonzo Friday," DeBella, who declined to be interviewed for this story, quickly established the "Zoo" as this region's most popular morning program behind the all-news format of KYW-AM (1060).

By the time Bloom arrived from the Midwest as WYSP program director in May 1985, his station was foundering.

"Whatever [WMWR] did was

golden; whatever we did was wrong," remembered Bloom, now operations manager for WYSP, as well as sister CBS-owned outlets WIP-AM (610) and WPHF-AM (1210).

"We could have tossed \$100 bills off the top of City Hall and the headline in the *Daily News* would have been: 'YSP kills listener in freak paper-cut accident



Bloom: Moment "frozen in time."

Shock therapy for WYSP

HOWARD STERN certainly kept his part of the bargain when he joined the WYSP air staff in 1986. The station's morning-drive ratings began to climb upon his debut; in 1990, Stern's show replaced that of his nemesis, WMWR's John DeBella, as the highest-rated non-news program in morning drive in this market.

A few years later, thanks to Stern — plus a classic-rock format that also featured the legendary DJ Ed Scahy and Eagles game coverage — WYSP became the No. 1 station among all listeners age 12 and older.

The battle with 'MMR has continued; since Stern's 2006 debut on satellite radio, 'MMR has had a clear ratings advantage, with the team of Preston (Elliot) and Steve (Morrison) consistently beating Philly native (and former "Partridge Family" star) Danny Bonaduce in the ratings. The July ratings report from the Arbitron organization had WMWR in fifth place among listeners 12 and older; WYSP finished 19th.

As for WYSP's future, *Daily News* gossip columnist Dan Gross recently reported that the sports-talk format of WIP is expected to be moved to WYSP's FM frequency (94.1), perhaps as soon as this week. ■

— Chuck Darrow



DeBella

— 'MMR on hand to save the day," said Bloom.1

A Stern warning

In November 1985, Bloom and his boss, WYSP general manager Ken Stevens, were on the train to New York to powwow with Mel Karmazin, then the CEO of Infinity Broadcasting, corporate parent of WYSP and New York's WKRK-FM, where Stern was doing the morning show.

At the time, WYSP's morning drive-time competition for DeBella was the long-forgotten Scuff Commons, whom Stevens and Bloom had imported from Toronto as part of a switch to a young-made-swinging hard-rock format.

The pair were not especially eager to see Karmazin, considering their station's poor ratings and advertising revenue. During the drive, Bloom made a reference to Stevens' move as an FM-rock radio programmer in Milwaukee, when he started simulcasting Chicago's morning-drive titan, Steve Dahl (the guy behind the infamous 1979 "Disco Demolition" mini-riot at Comiskey Park).

Simulcasting Stern on WYSP in the morning "might get the station back on the map," Bloom suggested. "We gotta do something that makes people go, 'Wow!'" Stevens' response, recalled Bloom, was to warn him not to mention the idea to Karmazin. But the young radio programmer ignored that advice later when Stern walked past Karmazin's office and was invited in to meet the men who ran Infinity's Philly outpost.

"Being Howard, the first thing he said was, 'Have you heard the show? What do you think of it?'" said Bloom. "I said something to the effect that 'I haven't heard much, because I can't hear you down in Philadelphia."

What Bloom said next truly changed the course of broadcast history. "I heard you compared to Steve Dahl," Bloom told Stern. "If you're anything like Steve Dahl, we'd love to have you on in Philly."

Stern's reaction was immediate, Bloom recalled. "He said, 'Steve Dahl?' That m----- ripped me off! He ripped me off!"

The next moment, Bloom insis-

ed, "is frozen in time like a snapshot in my head. It was almost an out-of-body experience. I said, 'Well, maybe you can do what Dahl never could do.' Stern said, 'What?' and I said, 'Maybe you could be in two markets at the same time.'"

Bloom described Stevens' burying his head in his hands during this exchange. But he also remembered looking at Stern — whose New York-based agent, Don Buchwald, didn't request for an interview with Stern for this story — and believing he actually saw "a lightning bolt go off over his head. The way he lit up, I believe it all came to gether for Howard at that moment."

Bloom is quick to deflect any suggestion that he is primarily respon-

Continued on
Near Page

Stern also shocked the 'rock jock' template.

GETTY IMAGES



Stern vs. DeBella

FROM THE MOMENT Howard Stern signed on at WYSP-FM, he made then-WMMR-FM "Morning Zoo" host John DeBella Public Enemy No. 1. For years, Stern never missed a chance to insult DeBella, both professionally (his unmerciful lampooning of the "Morning Zoo" format) and personally (he frequently described DeBella as "ugly" and referred to him derisively as "Baldy").

All of this culminated with Stern's 1990 "funeral" for DeBella outside the latter's Rittenhouse Square studio once he had toppled DeBella from his long-held perch as the market's most popular morning-show host. So what brought on Stern's wrath? What fed his obvious contempt for DeBella for so long? The answer can be found in *Miss America*, Stern's 1995 sequel to his best-selling autobiography, *Private Parts*.

"I needed a reason to hate him ... on a personal level," wrote Stern. "I found my reason in Gary [Dell'Abate], my producer. Gary had once worked with DeBella at WLIR in Long Island. At the time, DeBella was the star disc jockey and Gary was a lowly intern. Gary told me that DeBella was so arrogant that the interns, as part of their standard orientation, had been told not to talk to DeBella in the halls. They were told they weren't even allowed to look him in the eye. That was enough to get me going. Who the f--- did this arrogant p--- think he was?"

But in a 1995 interview with the *Daily News*, DeBella, who now does the morning show on WMMR-FM (102.9), claimed innocence. "That must have been written before I appeared on his show [last year] and we cleared things up," said DeBella. "On that show, I asked Gary exactly who in charge of interns. I never knew about that order ... and always wondered why they seemed to hate me."

— Chuck Darrow

Continued from Preceding Page

sible for Stern's subsequent success. But as far as Bloom knows, he was the first to suggest syndication to the DJ.

For the next nine months, negotiations involving what Stevens and Bloom dubbed "Project X" were conducted among Stevens, Karmazin and Bachwald. In late July 1986, just before leaving on a two-week vacation, Stern appeared on the *Letterman* show and mentioned that "our empire is expanding."

"When Bloom heard that, he 'poured a big drink and slugged it down. Then I lay down in my bed and just stared. I didn't move.'"

Long live the king

Stern's pending debut on WYSP sparked little heat and lots of skepticism, recalled Scott Stegelaum — then the station's promotions director now producer of the *Classic Rock Art Show*, a traveling rock-collectibles event. He said that once local tourism official insisted that the New Yorker

would bomb here "because he doesn't know the names of streets."

"That the naysayers were wrong about Stern is a matter of record. From Philadelphia, Stern went on to enjoy a nationwide network of more than two dozen stations, including KSLX-FM in Los Angeles, the market that established Stern as a truly national superstar.

Bloom is certain Stern would have reached the top of the multimedia heap with or without his station's help.

"This man's career was destined to be [spectacular]. He was destined for something greater" than being a New York radio personality, Bloom insisted. "He is such an extraordinary, once-in-a-lifetime talent. This man's career was not just going to be on a radio show in New York."

"I was just lucky my career intersected with the shooting star that is Howard Stern."



Stern (right) arrived at his mock funeral for John DeBella in Rittenhouse Square in 1990, dressed as the pope with sidekick Robin Quivers as a nun.

MICHAEL BRANT / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Offending listeners from Day 1

ACCORDING to a story in the *Inquirer* on Aug. 19, 1986, Howard Stern's first day on WYSP-FM generated 500 phone calls to the station, the overwhelming majority of which were made in protest. The story listed just a few of the reasons:

▶ "A lengthy skit called 'Guess Who's the Jew?' hosted by Kurt Waldheim Jr. [played by show staffer Fred Norris], an endless barrage of anti-Semitic ramblings topped off by a multiple-choice question asking which of three rock stars was Jewish. The winner received several gifts, redeemable only in New York."

▶ "A discussion of private parts and sexual prowess that continued throughout the broadcast and focused on racial stereotypes, bestiality, masturbation and homosexuality."

▶ "Complaints that the never ceases suicide calls from listeners ['if they were [going to jump from] the fourth floor I would tell them to go to the sixth'] and a count of children who have died after falling from windows."



Protesters in 1993.

FILE PHOTO