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WLS, Chicago's Personality Radio, Remembered in New Book

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WLS, Chicago's Personality Radio, Remembered in New Book

To arrange an interview with Stew Salowitz, the book's author, phone (309) 556-3206 or (309) 452-1309.

BLOOMINGTON, ILL. -- The oral histories of the most influential group of Chicago radio personalities of their era have been compiled in book form for the first time ever.

"Chicago's Personality Radio: The WLS Disc Jockeys of the Early 1960s," by Stew Salowitz, features interviews with veteran Chicago radio personalities Dick Biondi, Clark Weber, Bernie Allen, and Bob Hale, all WLS disc jockeys in the early 1960s, when the station enjoyed terrific success not only in Chicago but throughout the Midwest.

Also included in the book, which is illustrated with vintage WLS "Silver Dollar Surveys" of the era, are interviews with Ron Riley, Dex Card, Art Roberts, Don Phillips, Gene Taylor, Mort Crowley, Jim Dunbar, and Ed Grennan.

Former general manager John Rook is interviewed along with the late Ralph Beaudin, the station's general manager in May 1960, when WLS made the dramatic change from being the Prairie Farmer station to a rock 'n' roll format.

The 152-page paperback also features a chronology, spanning 1960 to 1967, showing a variety of WLS program schedules and highlighting news events and popular music throughout the era.

"All in all, (working at WLS was) the greatest time of my life," Riley says in the book. "I run into a lot of media people who tell they're in radio now because of me and because of what we did (at

WLS). I hear that all the time. We were really very influential. And we were the right guys at the right time."

"There's no question about it — the three years at WLS represent the high point of my career," said Biondi. "You just don't take a period like that for granted. It would be like going to the track and picking nine long shots in a row, or playing the Illinois Lottery and every week hitting the big one. Everything was going right.

"At record hops every Saturday night," Biondi continued, "I run into 20 or 30 people who grew up with me. If I sing the pizza song, the whole crowd sings along. That is a tremendous charge."

In addition to the oral histories, the book brings the reader up to date on where the personalities are now. Three are still active in Chicago radio — Weber and Hale are the morning and evening personalities, respectively, on WJJD Radio, while Biondi does the nighttime show on WJMK (FM).

Allen retired from WJJD in 1990 after 42 consecutive years of working at a commercial radio station in his hometown of Chicago.

Roberts, Taylor, Crowley, and Dunbar are also still active in radio. Roberts is the station manager at WZRH (FM) in New Orleans, and Taylor is the morning newsman at all-news KKAR in Omaha, Nebraska. Crowley is based in Milwaukee and serves as a talk-show host for the Sun Radio Network, while Dunbar is the popular morning talk host at San Francisco's KGO.

The book retails for \$14.50 and can be ordered by sending a check for \$17.50, which includes postage and handling, to Chicago Radio Book, P.O. Box 1014, Normal, Illinois 61761-1014.

Salowitz, the Director of News Services at Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington, was the afternoon drive personality from 1977 to 1988 at Bloomington's WJBC Radio, where he consistently had the highest ratings in the market and was among the nation's leaders in audience share for his time slot.

The co-author of three other books, Salowitz's articles on a variety of subjects have appeared in Sports Collectors Digest, International Woodworking, The Chicago Tribune, and USA Today.