

WMKV: 30 Years and Growing

WMKV: Who We Are

WMKV Radio (89.3FM and online at www.wmkvfm.org) has been serving seniors and families for more than thirty years as the only fully-licensed FCC radio station owned by a retirement community. WMKV began in 1995 and has been growing ever since, adding a “sister station” affiliate in WLHS (89.5FM) in 2013. The history of WMKV is one of *determination, opportunity, innovation, and strength.*

WMKV Radio, named for Maple Knoll Village (MKV), the home of our studios in Springdale, Ohio, originally was a small station owned by Reading High School in Cincinnati. The station had been transferred to ownership by Miami University, which also operated WMUB-FM. WMKV has served the Greater Cincinnati area as a public radio station and was acquired by Maple Knoll Village, at that time Southwestern Ohio Seniors’ Services, Inc. (SOSSI). Since 1995, WMKV has been a 24/7/365 representative and reminder of the quality of our parent organization.

SOSSI also operated under the name LifeSphere, and the organization has roots that far exceed WMKV’s thirty years. Maple Knoll Village originally started almost two centuries ago as *The Society for the Relief of Aged Indigent Women*, founded in 1848 by Lydia Beecher, stepmother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, who wrote the influential anti-slavery novel “*Uncle Tom’s Cabin.*”

The emergence of WMKV from its early unheralded radio history at Reading High School and Miami University can be traced to SOSSI President, Jerry Smart, who worked with WMKV’s first General Manager Alan Bayowski to acquire 89.3FM. More than 125 volunteers and \$300,000 raised allowed WMKV to have its home as a part of SOSSI. The transmitter site and a new tower were built in Reading, Ohio, and WMKV was off and running with an initial paid staff of Bayowski, Connie Langhorst, Dave Schram, and Mike Farrar.

The station, according to Bayowski, was designed to be a friend and companion to seniors in the community. The original average age of listenership was in the 70- to 80-year-old range. That station now has grown to serve adults and families largely 45+ with music,

nostalgia, and friendly, non-volatile talk programming. The station's earliest years through today can be traced to a number of national and local broadcast legends on-air and behind the scenes. WMKV has been supported in past years and hailed by the Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio as a vehicle for reaching older adults and their caregivers through a wide range of music and good entertainment interspersed with vital information for the aging community and their families. WMKV held monthly "chat sessions" with listeners as it developed its programming.

Historic Broadcasters On -The-Air

Among even more notable names from our history are: Bill Nimmo (who served as Johnny Carson's sidekick prior to Ed McMahon) along with top talent Annie Wagner (and her husband, Bob, who helped train early volunteers), Oscar Treadwell, Nick Clooney, Len Goorian, Tom Emmert, Ernie Waits, Sr., Bill Myers, Stan Matlock, Miriam Stefanik, Patti Miller, Charlie Murdock, Judy Perkins, John Burns, Mary Ellen Tanner, Don Herman, Connie Langhorst, Dr. James C. King, Mark Magistrelli, Peter Weiglin, Larry Findlay, Phyllis Martin, Link Pavey, E. Allen Elliott, Dusty Rhodes, Ken Luther, George Bryant (Bagel), Bob Trumpy, Bob Miller, Will Warren, Wolf Eschenlohr, Mike Whorf, John and Lew Gatch, Tom Sandman, Jay Gilbert, Frank Farmer Loomis, Mike Martini, Dave Bartholomew, Tom Craig, Dave Schram, Sue Zimmermann, Alice Hornbaker, Morden Grant, Jerry Springer, Fred Asmus, Bob Nave, Mike Farrar, Dr. Martin Giesbrecht, Robyn Carey-Allgeyer, Mort Zemsky, Lowell Kuntz, Jack and Joan Strader, Carol Mundy, Liz Tessone, Don Johns, George Zahn, Sonny Goldman, engineers Ed Dooley, Paul Wimmer, Jay Crawford, and Clyde Haehnle, and dozens more who donate or have donated their time, treasure, and talent to the history of WMKV.

The station has boasted volunteers from all walks of life who have added to the fabric of WMKV. Among the more unusual volunteers was Warren Hawkinson. Warren worked as an animator with Walt Disney and designed toys for Fisher-Price. Warren created the original logo for WMKV's annual golf outing, which he was instrumental in starting in the 1990s. The majority of the artwork in WMKV's early newsletters were his designs—he even sketched many of the station's on-air hosts.

1995: The Beginning

It was May 15, 1995, and this “*Little Station That Could*” fired up and broadcast LIVE appropriately from Cincinnati’s Coney Island and the 1995 Cincinnati Senior Expo. The day was dedicated to two major figures in our inception. The broadcast was dedicated to past Village of Glendale Mayor, Harry Matthews, as well as engineer and Maple Knoll resident Paul Wimmer who helped get WMKV on-the-air. There was a special letter of support by the Mayor of Reading, Ohio, Earl Schmidt, where WMKV’s transmitter is located. He applauded WMKV for providing a unique listening experience, one that continues to this day. Also Dr. Fernando M. Torres-Gil from the US Department of Health and Human Services and Cincinnati Mayor Roxanne Qualls were at the opening broadcast to congratulate Southwestern Ohio Seniors’ Services, Inc.

When WMKV first went on-the-air, the actual studios were in a Reading firehouse next to the station’s tower. The earliest days of WMKV were not easy. In addition to the Herculean task of entering thousands of songs in real time by volunteers, loading the programs into our first automation system involved staff, including Dave Schram and Mike Farrar, climbing a ladder to a second floor at the Reading Fire Station where the automation computer was located. Eventually, the studios moved to the restaurant that is now Foley’s in Reading, Ohio, before finally moving to Maple Knoll Village where it has been in two different locations, most notably in the “Main Street” area of the administration wing. Additionally, WMKV dedicated its early lunchtime music program to the volunteers and drivers of Meals on Wheels throughout Greater Cincinnati.

1995-2005: Growth, Awards, and Honors

For many years, one of the most popular programs on WMKV was *The Song Shop* with Annie Wagner and husband and sidekick, Robert “Wags” Wagner. They brought great life to WMKV Saturdays and helped in many ways with the early development of WMKV. In 1999, Annie accepted the bronze medal for Best Oldies/Nostalgia Station at the New York Festival’s Radio Awards.

The previous year in 1998, Station Manager Connie Langhorst accepted the silver medal from the New York Festival, indicating WMKV was tops in the Western Hemisphere. Among other major awards, WMKV won the Post-Corbett Award, and the station has gained dozens of accolades including NAB Crystal, UNDA Gabriel, Council on Aging, Cincinnati Magazine, Silver Microphone, State of Ohio, Mature Media, Citysearch, and Communicator

Awards. WMKV boasts a number of Greater Cincinnati Senior Hall of Fame members including Annie Wagner, Morden Grant, and Lew Gatch. The current staff and volunteers boast multiple Ohio Society of Professional Journalism, and Ohio Educational Broadcasting Awards, plus four winners of The George Foster Peabody Award, often called “Pulitzer of broadcasting.”

Our veterans and service men and women are saluted virtually every day on this station. Patriotic songs at 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. weekdays and specials on veterans’ affairs and veterans’ history are regularly featured. Included was a monumental special on V-J Day originally broadcast on September 2, 1995, with veterans’ accounts of their service and the end of WWII. That original 4.5-hour broadcast is still aired today, broken up as a five-part commemorative series. Also on June 6, 2019, on the 75th anniversary of D-Day, WMKV aired a six-hour special of a Peabody Award-winning show with original broadcasts from June 6-7, 1944. A copy of the program is now in the National Archives.

1999: WMKV Goes Worldwide

Another milestone, the birth of WMKV’s internet streaming signal at www.wmkvfm.org was made possible in 1999, when the Bahmann Foundation provided the funding to begin the service, and also create *Everybody’s Planning Hour*. This technical advancement vaulted a small public radio station into the same theater as larger commercial radio stations, opening our signal to the world.

WMKV was recognized by the *Los Angeles Times* in a 2004 article saluting this unique service to an underserved older adult community, this national spotlight spawned more coverage including reports on WBUR Radio in Boston, the New York Times, WLW-T Channel 5, Catholic Digest Magazine, plus Contemporary Long-Term Care Magazine, and many local print stories. The discovery of WMKV was made by the L.A. Times Midwest editor, P.J. Huffstutter, visiting Cincinnati for a story on Nick Clooney and punching through local radio stations.

For more than two decades, WMKV has hosted Sunday Big Band Dances on select Sundays at the Maple Knoll Village Auditorium. These dances not only help us spread great music and raise money for the station but also draw new potential residents to Maple Knoll

Village. We've featured live bands over the years, including the *Maple Knoll Big Band* under the direction of Ron Purdon. As another fundraising tool, Maple Knoll Village has helped WMKV hold an annual golf classic every year since 1997. For many of those years, Alan Bayowski's famous Cadillac convertible could be found at WMKV events with the classic license plate WMKV FM.

2006: Changes and the Modern WMKV

In 2006, WMKV reached a major turning point in its history as classic radio shows were added to the wildly popular music selections for families and older adults. Music was slightly modernized to include new artists doing classic songs from *The Great American Songbook*. Talk shows were refreshed and "Senior" was removed from talk shows such as *Senior Computer Talk*. New shows including *Sandman Standards* and *Trivia Tuesday* were also introduced. We salute Dr. Jim King, who helped that transformation to the modern WMKV take place in conjunction with Maple Knoll President Jim Formal. New staff joining Mike Farrar, Dave Schram and Sue Zimmermann, included author and radio historian Mike Martini, and Development Director Bob Hanneken, along with Tom Sandman as sales rep and host of *Sandman Standards*. Peabody Award-winner George Zahn was brought in as station director.

WMKV is likely the first public station ever to simulcast a local commercial TV newscast (initially with WXIX Channel 19, and for most of our history, Local 12, WKRC-TV), covering the TV commercials on our radio broadcast with extra traffic reports, notable birthdays, and today in history notes. This change in 2006 was a marked change from the early WMKV philosophy of not doing news or traffic prior to the change.

2006-2013: Growth and Community Impact

Our community involvement is important to WMKV. It's common for our staff to meet people in public and they crow about our big band dances, the annual Blue Ash Concert series, ScamProof Seniors and Fraud Prevention Forums, and our BBB programs, among many others. We have also hosted bands including the Glenn Miller Orchestra, The Harry James Orchestra, and more at Cincinnati's Music Hall. Our regular partnerships include Cincinnati Museum Center, City of Blue Ash, Cincinnati BBB, Pro Seniors, Cincinnati Jazz Hall of Fame, and the Bahmann Foundation. For years, the Bahmann Foundation even

offered a free radio every week to a local listener who would need one. For seniors and caregivers, we continue to offer a weekly discussion of Medicare issues and more on Medicare Moment with the Ohio Senior Medicare Patrol. George Zahn has also been the MC of the ProSeniors “Seniors Who Rock” Awards presentations since 2021, and for almost twenty years has served as a host/moderator for live forums on scam prevention recorded for later broadcast.

WMKV has been a major proponent of classic, old-time radio, especially locally-produced content. From 1995 through 1999, WMKV was part of a project that brought back the classic radio show *Moon River*. The station also provided live music broadcasts of local and national artists. Mike Martini has worked with a number of local theatre groups to recreate classic radio programs on stage complete with Mike’s sound effects. WMKV is a champion of finding, restoring, and airing historic and current local musicians through our acclaimed *Cincinnati Music Project*. In the early to late 2000s, WMKV hosted multi-day salutes to Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby with listeners from Cincinnati to England responding with appreciation. Also, WMKV boasts nationally-known *Kaleidoscope* by Peabody Award winner Mike Whorf seven days a week. Mike was a long-time voice and Peabody Award-winner at WJR Radio in Detroit.

While many would assume that older adults would be the biggest proponents of big band and crooner music, we often hear from 20 and 30 somethings that enjoy the swing style of music and dance to it at events, keeping this historic music alive for future generations. Older listeners are asking more and more for music of the 60s and 70s that no other stations are playing. We’ve tried to respond (including Russ Heltman’s *Ticket To Ride: An Hour with the Beatles* and *That 70s Hour*) without losing our connection to big bands and crooners. Specializing in Music and Memories, the slogan for WMKV’s history has been “*The Way Radio Was, and Is, Meant to Be!*”

WMKV was the host of an international radio competition—TWICE! WMKV was the host station for the international Williams College Trivia Challenge in 2011 and 2013 with players listening from all over the world as live overnight trivia ruled the airwaves, drawing attention from around the world to WMKV.

2013: Birth of the Maple Knoll Radio Network

In 2013, WMKV made another leap forward, working with the Lakota Local School District to broadcast on the district's 89.9FM WLHS signal, bringing new radio service to previously unserved parts of Butler and Warren Counties! The partnership has benefited both WMKV and the school district. On the first day of broadcasting WMKV's signal on 89.9FM, area residents showed up at the Lakota offices with cakes and cookies as gifts for making 89.9FM fun!

The COVID pandemic in the early 2020s was a critical time for many, and the value of WMKV was magnified for many listeners. The comments even today are that WMKV fills a valuable service for people homebound and is a constant beacon in difficult times—a “soft landing spot” without volatile talk and divisive content. Also, during COVID, residents at Maple Knoll were basically isolated. WMKV responded by George Zahn hopping in his van with a laptop and playing music over a loudspeaker outside the different residences so that residents could open their windows and listen—the popular *WMKV Music Mobile* was born!

It wasn't in a political style, but the infamous TV host Jerry Springer's made his last broadcast anywhere on WMKV. Eschewing political or other commentary, Jerry Springer and Jene Galvin hosted the *Jerry and Jene Folk Hour* for several months on Sunday mornings before Jerry passed away in 2023.

2020s: More National Impact

In 2024, WMKV entered the national stage by offering some of our shows to public stations across the country through the Public Radio Exchange. The exposure on PRX expands national awareness, notoriety, and support for WMKV, its parent organization, and its services. Stations around the U.S. picked up a number of our signature shows.

WMKV is here to serve our community---to listen, and to provide a comfortable space and important tools to help tell stories, and to create social impact, providing ideas for active listeners and companionship for those who cannot get out. In 2024, WMKV added to our Maple Knoll announcements, and started running spots saluting all the BHI Community locations as a way to let local and on-line listeners know more about the services BHI offers. We are told by listeners and supporting members locally and across the U.S. that

there is no other station like this anywhere other than WMKV. We want both Maple Knoll Communities and BHI to jointly find listener affinity to what we offer.

One of the longest-running support organizations for WMKV is the Bahmann Foundation, which helps people battle isolation brought on by disability or age. WMKV also appreciates the support of Larry and Carol Fobiano, who have commissioned a wide-ranging series of music specials, including music from the 20s to today, rail and travel history, and voices of Cincinnatians. Also in our history, the John Hauck Foundation and the Corbett Foundation helped to lay the foundation for WMKV. In 2007, WMKV received a major studio grant from the Cromer Mashburn family. When WMKV didn't make the cut on a national grant for a new transmitter, the Ohio AARP jumped in to help, calling the request a "slam dunk" due to our service to seniors and families.

For approximately two years in the early 2020s, WMKV was granted a Corporation for Public Broadcasting award for about \$100,000 each year. As a small, independent, non-NPR public station, the fear was that WMKV would not qualify for the grant. When CPB learned of our unique, community-responsive, locally produced programming servicing a largely unserved audience, we were told WMKV was exactly the kind of station that CPB wanted to support.

Contributing members have also been a key part of the lifeblood of WMKV from Day One. Our members sometimes have unusual stories when they call in to pledge. One member called from a beach in Thailand, and another from a train in California. There's a world map in our studio that shows listeners and members from all over the world. Local, national, or international, our members are the key reason we're now 30 years strong. A listener near Kansas City is just one of many who have adopted WMKV as their "local" station.

2026: To the Future!

Today in 2026, WMKV operates every day with a small, dedicated staff of four full-time employees, Station Director George Zahn plus Dave Schram, Mike Martini, Russ Heltman, along with part-time employees Michelle Barkan and Bob Pritchett. Some notable volunteers involved on-the-air in recent years include Tom Sandman, Lew and John Gatch, Mark Magistrelli, Bob Hinklin, Vena Jones-Cox, Jay Gilbert, Dave Ausdenmore, Ken Luther,

Dr. Bob Biederman, Cathy Rafales, Carol Mundy, Jim Milner, Jeffrey Evans, Chuck Black, Dusty Rhodes, Jim Ingram, Frank Farmer Loomis, Nate Henderson, Jim Anderson, Bob Nave, Doug Lillibridge, Lee Hay, George Whitton, Larry Findlay, Joe Busam, David Ray, Alan and Judy Seeger, Dan Sweeney, Ron Esposito, and many more. From Day One of WMKV's history in 1995, volunteers have been at the core of our success on-air, behind the scenes, and during fund drives.

As media has changed over the years, WMKV has also evolved. While it's cost-prohibitive to podcast music shows, virtually all of WMKV's talk programs are available as podcasts at www.wmkvfm.org. We can easily be found on smart speakers by calling the speaker by name and saying "Play WMKV." We have apps for smartphones, and car listening apps, and more are experiencing WMKV's streaming on tablets as well. A quick snapshot of our online listening shows listeners not just in Cincinnati Columbus, and Dayton, but all around the U.S., plus listeners in Finland, Germany, Canada, Hungary, Mexico, Greece, Brazil, and India.

As a representative carrying the flag under BHI's John Dattilo and Maple Knoll Communities' Tim McGowan in 2026, we proudly say that WMKV preserves the golden age of radio and makes new radio history every day. The WMKV staff looks forward to enmeshing our broadcast entertainment and information into the many communities within BHI and continuing to grow locally and around the U.S. and the world!

WMKV: 30 Years and Growing was compiled and written by *Connie Langhorst and George Zahn*.