

THE BEST PROGRAM DIRECTORS IN COUNTRY RADIO

They are the hitmakers in Nashville. Despite the onslaught of digital music sources, most surveys say radio continues to be the source from which listeners get their new music. In country music, few have more power to create a hit song than Country radio's program directors. Artists know it, and labels know it. They want their songs played by these powerful PDs, and they show up in droves every year to the Country Radio Seminar to mingle with the most powerful Country PDs in America.

Every year at the Country Radio Seminar in Nashville, *Radio Ink* honors the Best Country Program Directors in Radio with a special plaque during an event sponsored by Sony Nashville. The awards are presented on a boat ride hosted by Sony, with entertainment from Sony Nashville artists.

This year's list of top Country PDs started, as always, with nominations made by radio-industry managers, country music experts, and record label executives. Nominees were asked to respond to questions about their stations and themselves, and they were asked to rank their colleagues as if they were putting together this list themselves. All that that information was used by the *Radio Ink* Country Radio editorial committee to determine the 2015 Best Program Directors in Country Radio.



JEFF KAPUGI
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CBS Radio
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As we polled our top Country programmers for 2015, Jeff Kapugi was listed as the number one program director by more than half, with most others putting him in the top five. He was clearly the dominant choice as the number one PD in Country radio for 2015 – a remarkable accomplishment.

CBS Radio EVP/Programming Chris Oliviero says, "Jeff is truly a model for the modern Country programmer. He has embraced all the energy, excitement, and buzz of today's country and has crafted a contemporary sound that stands out on the dial. Jeff has also earned the respect of both Nashville and his fellow programmers, which makes him our ideal leader for CBS Radio's major-market Country footprint coast to coast."

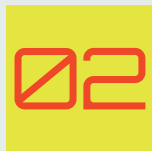
CBS Radio Chicago SVP/Market Manager Rod Zimmerman echoes those sentiments, saying, "Jeff has all the qualities you look for in a program director. He's smart, strategic, experienced, driven, connected, competitive, and he's a problem-solver. Jeff has the confidence of the entire staff, and his leadership skills make everyone around him 'raise their game.' *Radio Ink's* recognition of Jeff is well earned and well deserved."

In 2014, WUSN was the largest-cume-ing Country station in the U.S. US995 made some significant changes to the on-air lineup last year, moving p.m. drive jock Drew Walker to middays and hiring Shila Nathan to drive listeners home. 2014 was also the first full year the station was 100 percent live and local from 5:30 a.m.-midnight. And, according to Kapugi, one of the station's more rewarding accomplishments was raising over \$1.1 million for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in December.

Kapugi explains his success in one short-and-sweet answer: "Being able to balance art and science with the brand and financial goals of the station."



Pictured: Jeff Kapugi and his wife with (l) former Major League Baseball pitcher Kerry Wood and (r) country artist Chris Young.



JOHNNY CHIANG
 KKBQ/Houston
 Cox Media Group
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 @jchiang68
 Years Programming Country:14

KKBQ was named CMA Major Market Station of the Year in 2014, when it also took the Marconi for Major Market Station of the Year. And Johnny Chiang says 2014 was also the most successful ratings year in KKBQ's 23 years in the Country format. This award-winning PD advises aspiring programmers to embrace everything! "Go beyond just being good on the air and picking music," he says. "Are you knowledgeable with digital, sales, engineering, etc.? Our business is changing a mile a minute. Are you keeping up?"

Johnny Chiang with country artist Jana Kramer



MIKE BROPHEY
 WKLB/Boston
 Greater Media
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 Years Programming Country: 30

This Country Radio Hall of Famer is one of the most respected programmers in Nashville, and 2014 saw the Floating Hospital at Tufts Medical Center in Boston name its Country Healing Garden after WKLB (Country 102.5). Brophey says time management is one important component to his longevity and success: "Each year presents new initiatives and challenges that must be somehow fit into an already busy schedule. Through good time management and delegation, we can complete that which is necessary and still have time for creative moments. Never be satisfied with mediocrity."

Mike Brophey with Big & Rich: Big Kenny (l) and John Rich (r)

WHAT'S ON YOUR CHECKLIST?

- STRATEGIC EVALUATION-STATION ACTION PLAN
- RESEARCH: MUSIC TESTING, PERCEPTUAL STUDIES, AND FOCUS GROUPS

- DIGITAL STRATEGY/SOCIAL MEDIA EXECUTION AND SALES ADVICE
- SELLABLE PROMOTIONAL IDEAS
- TALENT COACHING

Get the job done right with new ideas and new resources from A&O&B. Social Media insight from Jacob's Media digital expert Lori Lewis is now part of our partnership with you. Contact us with your checklist today!

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SHELLY EASTON
 WXTU-FM/Philadelphia
 CBS Radio
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 Years Programming Country: 20



XTU celebrated its 30th year as Philadelphia's Country station in 2014; the XTU anniversary show continues to be one of the largest and longest-running free radio shows in America, typically giving away over 25,000 tickets to fans. Easton says the payoff at Country radio is limitless if you get the process, are passionate, and love the job. "There's creativity, marketing, and community service," she says. "There's the music, and the artists who make music, and the fans of the music. There's the lifestyle opportunities to connect the dots in such a way that the radio station's talent and brand matter to the audience. If you dream of

programming, do it. Working with others to help achieve their personal goals while building a radio brand is truly a gratifying experience."

Easton says it takes drive to constantly step up the game. "It takes awareness and understanding at a time when technology and change are at a rapid-fire pace. It takes focus to not fall victim to information overload, as the information highway has morphed into the Autobahn. In short, the challenge is to stay current, identify what's next, and strive for new avenues and opportunities to become stronger and even more relevant to the audience, every day."

Sheryl Crow (l) and Shelly Easton



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TIM ROBERTS
 WYCD-FM/Detroit
 CBS Radio
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 Years Programming Country: 36

WYCD in Detroit had a fantastic 2014, receiving Marconi and ACM nominations and raising over \$500,000 for St. Jude's. Roberts says that if you want to win as a PD, creativity and coaching mean a lot. "Building a brand and delivering on that vision every single day, and never losing sight of the target. How we get there has changed, but in the end, it still has to be a fun and exciting business, and winning stations always seem to have those things in common."

Tim Roberts with Luke Bryan



STEVE STEWART
 WEBG-FM/Chicago
 iHeartMedia
stevestewart@iheartmedia.com
 @BigSteveRadio
 Years Programming Country: 13

Steve Stewart was brought into Chicago in early 2015, when iHeartMedia launched new Country station WEBG (Big 95.5). He successfully programmed 93.7 The Bull in St. Louis for years, and he says of the Chicago gig, "We are new and awaiting big results." Stewart says the key to winning is knowing what your station is all about before trying to compete with other stations in the market. "It sounds simple," he says, "but if you don't really know all of your strengths, you can't correct your weaknesses. An evaluation of the station 24/7 should be part of your daily checklist, and that will put you in the best position to compete against others."

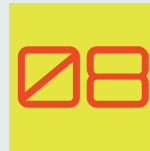
Jana Kramer and Mike Preston



GREGG SWEDBERG
 KKEY/Minneapolis
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 @thatsalottags
 Years Programming Country: 22

In 2014, under the leadership of Gregg Swedberg, KKEY was able to hire Chris Carr & Company to replace its longtime morning show, and managed to get a nice bump in the ratings. And, like quite a few other PDs on our 2015 list, Swedberg says that right now, there's too much product coming out of Nashville, and that's a challenge. "The audience just can't digest everything that Nashville would like to have us play – and attention spans are shorter, so we don't have the luxury of developing over months. So, to make it work, you have to be able to manage a playlist, to create compelling content between the records, and then find a way to monetize that."

Gregg Swedberg (r) with Little Big Town (l-r): Phillip Sweet, Kimberly Schlapman, Karen Fairchild, and Jimi Westbrook



MIKE PRESTON
 KKWF-FM/Seattle
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 Years Programming Country: 5

On being a successful PD, Preston quotes his friend Scott Shannon: "Blocking and tackling." Preston says. "So many programmers are wrapped up in everything that's shiny – social media, digital apps, events, etc. – that they forget about the brick-and-mortar radio station. Don't misunderstand, all of those things are extremely important, but not to the detriment of your bread-and-butter product, the one thing that still creates most of your revenue: what comes out of the speakers."

Preston says his biggest challenge in programming country music is battling the perception and image of the music with advertisers. He notes, "While there's a huge country heritage in this market, and country music's popularity is off the charts, ad-industry players are often not fans personally and so don't 'get' the format. So it's easier to buy five CHR stations, which is to Country's detriment."

Jana Kramer and Mike Preston



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MEG STEVENS
 WMZQ-FM/Washington, DC
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 @WMZQ
 Years Programming Country: 17

One of the highlights of 2014 for Meg Stevens was the community support WMZQ received for its radiothon benefiting St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. "It's a mission for the station to help the kids," she says. "Danny Thomas said, 'No child should die in the dawn of life,' and the entire staff takes that to heart. While we raised over \$404,000 in 2014 during the radiothon, we also raised a significant portion during the rest of year with events like Concert for the Kids, an online auction, and midday talent Aly Jacobs hosting spin classes and happy hours. In addition, Michael J helps raise money through auctions, giving listeners the opportunity to win once-in-a-lifetime experiences." WMZQ has raised over \$14.5 million for St. Jude's over the past 16 years.

Stevens says PDs need to know their brand and what the audience's expectations are: "If you stay true to your brand and give your audience what they want, you'll do fine. Listen more than you talk!"

Brad Paisley and Meg Stevens



WES POE
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 @wespoe
 Years Programming Country: 10



Poe believes that to win, you must be adaptable. He says, "Being a leader means maintaining a positive attitude as much as possible, and identifying people that have strengths that you don't to make sure your team is well rounded and focused. And many times, being an 'army of one,' by wearing every hat and being able to do and train others to do anything that is needed in the programming and promotions departments."

Poe says that one of the biggest challenges in Country radio is the increasing number of new artists from all labels. "It's put a new layer of pressure on Country PDs and has affected my enthusiasm for new music," he says. "There is so much that the days of listening to find a song from a new artist that you feel really fits the sound of your radio station, and is something you can take a chance on, are gone. Now, due to the increase in TV talent shows and the increased number of sister labels, every new artist's single is being pitched as if it were life-or-death. It's desensitizing to me.

"The positive is that most of these new artists are very talented. It appears to me, however, that in most cases there is very little strategy to launch them other than to just get them out there. I'm painting with a broad brush here, so this isn't the case with everyone, but the accelerator on new artists has been put to the floor, way beyond what any station can reasonably handle.

"What am I doing to tackle this challenge? I've had to put all new music into two lists for consideration: music from artists who've had hits on my radio station, and a list of completely new and unfamiliar artists. The second list doesn't get as much attention from me as it used to, unfortunately. There simply is more volume than what the market can bear, in my opinion."

Wes Poe with Frankie Ballard

iHeartRADIO
CONGRATULATES

TRAVIS DAILY
MEG STEVENS
STEVE STEWART
GREGG SWEDBERG
KERRY WOLFE

Radio Ink's Best Country
 Program Directors for 2015

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11

DJ STOUT
WSOC-FM/Charlotte
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@stoutman01
Years Programming Country: 12

Stout says the biggest challenge for a Country PD in 2015 is staying on top of all the great music coming out of Nashville. "Not a day goes by that we don't receive a great song by a great artist," he says. "There are so many great artists and great new artists that it's tough to find spots for them all. I think it's very important to break new artists, so we spend a lot of time being creative to find spots for new artists and making sure that we are always playing the best songs. It's a pretty good problem to have."



12

BOB RICHARDS
WLHK/Indianapolis
Emmis
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@hankfm
Years Programming Country: 25



Richards says 2014 was one of the most successful years in WLHK's history: "We created, produced, and hosted two major station concert events, the Monumental Music Jam and Hankfest. Combined, the two events attracted over 20,000 people and were huge financial successes, leading to the highest billing in station history. In addition, to give you an idea of our team's performance in the three-book year-ending average (October/November/December), Hank FM was number one in the market in persons 18-34 and persons 18-49 and tied for number one in the market in persons 25-54 with our sister station B105.7 [AC WYXB]. We have an amazing team."

To be successful, Richards recommends that you tutor under great mentors, surround yourself with talented people, be dedicated to continual learning, and, "As my son says, 'Be smart and be funny.'"



Tim McGraw and Bob Richards



13

JEFF GARRISON
KCYF-FM/San Antonio
Cox Media Group
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Years Programming Country: 24

2014 was a Marconi Award-winning year for KCYY (Y100), something Garrison is very proud of. "Y100 has been the most listened-to Country station in San Antonio 6+ for 2014 – we finished the year strong, maintaining Country dominance top three persons 25-54, 18-34, and 18-49 for both November and December."

Garrison says it's key to "know where the puck is going to be," and always move forward, never back.



14

LISA MCKAY
WQDR-FM/Raleigh
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Years Programming Country: 12

2014 was a big year for WQDR: The station won another CMA award for Large Market Station of the Year (it's the second time WQDR has received that honor; the station won the same award in 2011), and McKay won an ACM for Large Market Personality of the Year. The station also beat its billing budget, raking in more than \$11.7 million.

Her secret to success? "With a wealth of ways to monitor the station's success and to connect with our listeners, I can try something new on the air and know in three weeks if it made a measurable difference. My team can post a topic and find out if it has legs instantly, and directly attribute a funny comment to one of our listeners via social media. I would say, know your listeners and love on them hard, on air and off air."



(L-r) Mike Wheless (Q Crew in the Morning), Lisa McKay, Jason Aldean, Janie Carothers (Q Crew in the Morning), Cody Clark (MD and nights)

15

MIKE KENNEDY

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Years Programming Country: 21**



In 2014, Kennedy was inducted into the Kansas Association of Broadcasters Hall of Fame and selected as the Kansas City Media Legend for 2015. Meanwhile, KBEQ celebrated its 21st year in Kansas City, surpassed the \$100,000 mark in cumulative giving to Children's Mercy Hospital through the Q104 Celebrity Golf Tournament, and saw its annual summer concert, Y'allapalooza, celebrate its 20th year. Kennedy says the key to success is finding ways to keep the station and personalities "relevant, engaging, exciting, locked in, and educated on any and all opportunities and technical advancements to achieve the bottom line – increased ratings that can be converted to increased business for the radio station and the company." Biggest challenge? "It's finding the time and airspace to expose all the really great music coming out of Music City! The shorter attention spans and added distractions and the necessity to play the hits more often tends to make it tougher to get exposure for some of the new music that I consider to be good songs, good artists, and potential hit songs. It takes some creativity and attention to detail to showcase some of the new music you believe in and that deserves a chance to be on our station! I'm sure there are more sexy issues, but this is the one issue that frustrates me the most day to day."



16

MARK ANDERSON

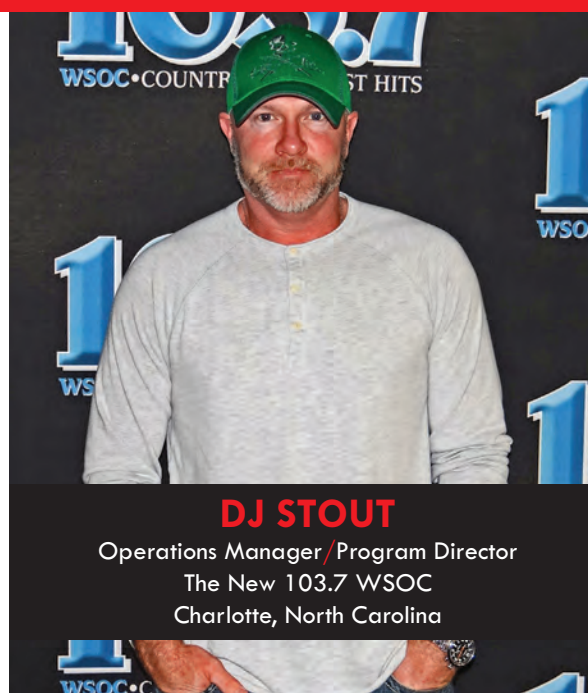
**WDSY/Pittsburgh
CBS Radio
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Years Programming Country: 5**

In a market with seven metro-licensed frequencies all playing essentially the same body of music, Anderson says his success or failure comes down to what surrounds the songs: "Fortunately, Y108 has the best possible team to deliver great localism, community service, and entertainment. So much has changed in our business, but what is most important has remained the same: having a great team, and facilitating an environment in which they can do their best and be excellent. I work for the best market manager in America, Michael Young, who provides that type of environment for me. My goal each day is to do the same for everyone on Team Y108."

Mark Anderson and Lee Brice



CONGRATS DJ STOUT!



DJ STOUT

Operations Manager / Program Director
The New 103.7 WSOC
Charlotte, North Carolina

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Mike Moore with Maddie & Tae: Taylor Dye (l) and Madison Marlow (r)

17

MIKE MOORE
 KWJJ/Portland, OR
 Entercom
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 Years Programming Country: 20

In 2014 KWJJ raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for local charities, including \$299,147 for Doernbecher Children's Hospital. Moore says his biggest challenge as a PD is time management: "I am a slave to my Outlook calendar, and I am fortunate to have a tremendous staff who are extremely hard-working and mostly self-motivated."

We proudly congratulate
CBS RADIO's
Country Programmers
 and all the *Radio Ink* honorees





18

BRUCE LOGAN
 KILT-FM/Houston
 CBS Radio
 bruce.logan@cbsradio.com
 Years Programming Country: 22

It's been a year of rebuilding KILT-FM, according to Logan. "In January, we began with a new musical approach on all airshifts. And 2014 ended with our annual 10 Man Jam, with a stage full of platinum-selling superstars who, combined, had 59 top 10 singles and 27 number ones." Logan says the challenge with a station in rebuilding mode is finding passionate, energized air talent. "Where is the next great morning show?" he says. "As the business model for many stations and companies changed from live and local to syndicated shows, the talent pool has dried up. We have to find new stars to shine in this new environment, which means they have to be more than disc jockeys. We need broadcasters who know how to quickly entertain, love the music, and embrace technology. And if they could be a YouTube star, that would be awesome."

Bruce Logan (front row, 2nd from right) and Zac Brown (3rd from right) at a CBS Radio Programmers meeting



19

EDDIE HASKELL
 KYGO/Denver
 Lincoln Financial Media (soon to be Entercom)
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 @haskell99
 Years Programming Country: 17

Lincoln Financial Media Denver Market Manager Bob Call says Haskell has great skills as a PD, starting with the fact that he walked in the door and engineered a near-complete rebuild of KYGO in all dayparts. The station has been on a consistent growth curve for nearly two years, Call reports: "In January 2013, KYGO was 16th, and in the November 2014 PPM we were top five and number one 25-54 with women. Eddie has worked very hard to build relationships with sales and reestablish trust internally and externally. He's added great creative energy to the sound of KYGO and surrounded himself with an impressive team of on-air professionals."

Haskell says the key to becoming a successful PD is having a love for radio, for the music, and for the audience: "Strive every day to make great radio." He believes the biggest challenge is striking a balance between the younger appeal of the music and not alienating the upper end of the audience. "Country is enjoying huge popularity anchored in the new, younger-skewing musical style," says Haskell. "Occasionally it is hard to find music that is stylistically balancing yet enjoys the same high appeal. How are we tackling it? Playing the best-researching hits while looking for balance – female artists, non-'bro country.' But the bottom line is playing the hits."

Eddie Haskell (2nd from l) with (l-r) the Band Perry's Reid, Kimberly, and Neil Perry


Curtis Media Group

CURTIS MEDIA GROUP CONGRATULATES
LISA MCKAY & WQDR



Lisa McKay

Best Country PD's as recognized by Radio Ink



CMA Large Market Station of the Year



TRAVIS DAILY
 WFUS-FM/Tampa
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 @us1035travis
 Years Programming Country: 22

Daily calls himself a “mad scientist” who’s always drawing up new clocks, and a “doctor of PPM tactics,” always looking for one more listener and one more occasion. He says that to win, you have to be able to lead your team. “We are all being asked to do more,” Daily notes. “Making sure you take care of your team will make sure they take care of you.” He says the Country format is in a great place, with a lot of new fans coming to Country every day. “It’s important to remember the roots and history of this genre, because that’s what makes it special. I’m all about programming a wide lane. However, in times like this, where the music is so great and so diverse, it’s really easy to get so wide that you are in the ditch and don’t know it until it’s too late. The challenge is balance.

“There are PDs, some are my best friends, that don’t want anything to do with an act that is over 50 or any songs that were hits before 2004. And then there are those that don’t want to play the Sam Hunts or Cadillac Three of the world. I feel like one of my strengths is taking ‘what’s right from both sides’ to create a unique product for the listener. There are similarities between markets, for sure, but Tampa has some very unique tastes and we have to make sure we get it right for our audience. I don’t remember a time where we were as diverse as we are right now in country music. Diverse is exciting if you have balance.”

.....
 Travis Daily with Jason Aldean and Daily’s son Zen and wife, Christine



J.R. SCHUMANN
 KSCS & KPLX/Dallas
 Cumulus
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 @JRSchumann1
 Years Programming Country: 7

Schumann says his biggest accomplishment in 2014 was getting the opportunity to come to Dallas and become a part of these two legendary Country stations. “The stations have also really seen tremendous growth, and both finished the year top four, for the first time in a long time,” he says. “We’ve been able to grow KSCS without damaging KPLX, and have really developed two very strong Country stations in this market – and the credit for that goes to the staffs of these two stations. They get the vision and do a tremendous job of executing that every day.”

As far as his biggest challenge, he says it’s balancing the different sounds in the format today. “Country radio has become one of the biggest mass-appeal formats in the country, and we have to find a way to program to the 18-24 without totally alienating the 45-54. The good thing about that is we’re targeting the female demos, and the 45-year-old female has way more in common with a 24-year-old female than a 45-year-old-male has with a 24-year-old male.”

.....
 J.R. Schumann with Jerrod Niemann



22

KEVIN CALLAHAN
 KSON/San Diego
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 @KSON973
 Years Programming Country: 5

General Manager Dan Austin says Kevin Callahan is one of the brightest and most talented PDs he's ever worked with. "He has high standards for talent and execution, knows how to write up a winning strategy and adjust the course as needed, and he gets the balance of programming and sales very well," says Austin. "KSON is a great worst-to-first story. KSON was already a legacy brand in San Diego, but under Kevin's leadership, he refreshed the brand, ran a Country competitor out of the format, and is more active on the streets than any station in any format. He's a brilliant marketer, has a keen eye for details, and knows how to craft a winning team that works hard to achieve his vision."

Callahan says it all comes down to innovation – using technology to find new ways to engage the audience – and leadership that pulls together the talent on the team to get results from the station.

Kevin Callahan (2nd from l) with (l-r) Neil, Kimberly, and Reid Perry of the Band Perry



23

JULIE STEVENS
 KRTY/San Jose
 Empire Broadcasting
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 Years Programming Country: 33

GM Nate Deaton says Julie Stevens is a shining example of today's "brand manager who programs radio stations." He says, "She's not only the PD, but also music director and co-host of the top-rated morning show. KRTY has been remarkably consistent over the past 20 years under Julie's leadership. Her passion for country music and our remarkable listeners is really her strongest suit. Plus, her legacy of heritage to this market and our station is really unique."

According to Stevens, the key to becoming a successful PD in 2015 is being live and local: "There is no way you will ever convince me that the people in Salt Lake City are like the people in San Jose. The people in San Jose are nothing like the people in Dallas, and on and on. If you don't have a unique selling point, you are simply not going to survive. And guess what, playing today's country music is not a unique selling point. There are simply too many other places where folks can get those songs. Why in the world would they choose you?"

Julie Stevens with her morning co-host, Gary Scott Thomas

COX MEDIA GROUP
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JEFF GARRISON
 Operations Manager
 San Antonio




JOHNNY CHIANG
 Operations Manager
 Houston





COX MEDIA GROUP



24

KERRY WOLFE
 WMIL/Milwaukee & WMAD/Madison
 iHeartMedia
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 @fm1061 and @963starcountry
 Years Programming Country: 30

WMIL was a finalist for CMA Large Market Station of the Year in 2014 thanks to Kerry Wolfe and his team. To make that happen, Wolfe says you must be on top of trends and in touch with your target audience – which changes all the time.

Kerry Wolfe and Jason Aldean



25

TOSH JACKSON
 KNTY/Sacramento
 Entravision
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 Years Programming Country: 5

Jackson says his biggest accomplishments in 2014 were raising money for the local Children’s Miracle Network hospital, the Wounded Warrior Project, and the Sacramento Food Bank. Entravision SVP Angie Balderas says Jackson is probably the hardest-working PD she’s ever worked with. “He listens to every single new artist who comes through his office, and develops real relationships with those artists,” she notes. “Last year was my first year attending CRS, and everyone knows Tosh. I can’t tell you how many artist managers came up to me to tell me how much they love working with him. From a programming standpoint, he’s worked hard to modernize the format in Sacramento with a younger, fresher sound and by taking the station to the streets with the Wolf XTREME team.”

Tosh Jackson with Billy Currington

VOTED ONE OF
THE 25 BEST COUNTRY MUSIC PD
 IN THE UNITED STATES BY RADIO INK



entration
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IS PROUD OF
Tosh Jackson
 101.9 THE WOLF, KNTY



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