

Setting her dial for Radio Mississauga

BY SHERI CRAIG

The question is not whether Mississauga should have its own radio station. But who should be granted the license to operate it?

This is a lucrative market and a number of contenders are anxious to get involved. At the front of the field right now is Jean Caine, owner of radio station CHWO in Oakville, a formidable lady with a wide friendly smile.

She appears to be the prototype of the energetic clubwoman, organizing rummage sales, introducing guest speakers, pouring tea in a fancy flowered hat. Her office adds to the impression, all decorated in soft yellow and green shades with elegant white French provincial furniture and a picture of three grandchildren in a prominent position on her desk.

Jean Caine is a lady who prides herself on her lasagna but don't be fooled. She is equally at home in a radio control room as she is in her kitchen.

ELOCUTION

Jean first got involved in radio when she was 11 and the winner of the elocution category in the annual Hamilton arts festival. The contest won her a job with the local council of churches reading the Lord's Prayer on their weekly radio show.

It started with the Lord's Prayer and then went on to soap operas.

All through high school Jean acted in radio dramas. "If it hadn't been for the war I might have gone to New York to study acting," Jean recalls. But the war was on and her family wanted her to stay home in Hamilton.

She graduated from high school and got a job as copywriter at Hamilton's radio station CKOC. The program director there was a young Englishman who had grown up around the Clarkson and Oakville areas.

Jean and Howard Caine were married. He joined the Navy and she followed him around from Halifax to Annapolis to the Gaspé.

A daughter, Pamela, was born and later a son, Michael.

The war ended. Howard went to work for an advertising agency in Toronto. Jean stayed home taking care of the children. Occasionally she did some part-time work for the CBC and some free-lance writing.

CHALLENGE

But radio was a challenge for both of them and the idea of their own radio station had more and more appeal. They chose Oakville for a location because it was Howard's old home and because it seemed ready for a station. The name Whiteoaks Radio (CHWO) was selected from the Mazo de la Roche novels because the author had written so much about the area.

Nov. 17, 1956 at 12:50 p.m. for 1250 on the dial, Whiteoaks Radio went on the air. The first program was a live show and anybody who was anybody was there.

The place was packed with school choirs and bands and members of Parliament and mayors. Seven-year old Michael Caine distinguished himself by emptying all the champagne glasses he could find.

"Oh it was a grand opening," Jean smiles remembering. "We were off to a good start."

She came out of semi-retirement to become assistant general manager of the station, assisting in all the departments. It was a small place with a close-knit staff specializing in middle-of-the-road programming and local affairs.

COMMUNITY

Howard always emphasized the local angle and involved himself in community activities. Because Pamela (now Mrs. James Stokes and the mother of three children) was crippled by polio when she was six, Howard joined the March of Dimes and became president of the Canadian organization. Jean is on the board of directors of the Canadian Rehabilitation Council for the Disabled.

In 1967 Howard died of cancer. As a mark of their respect, the Canadian Association of Broadcasters established the annual Howard Caine Memorial Award to be presented to the broadcaster who most closely emulates the late Howard Caine in his attitude to public service.

"He was quite a guy, my husband," Jean says softly.

She took over the station after his death. "There was never really any thought of selling. My son was interested in coming into the business and I knew what I was doing."

The emphasis on community programming continued.

EXPANSION

Meanwhile Mississauga was growing. CHWO expanded its coverage into the area.

"But it wasn't enough," Jean says. "I'm not apologizing in any way for the job CHWO has done. We're the only station that ever really paid attention to Mississauga."

"But we weren't doing a thorough enough job."

"And then about a year and a half ago it came to me in the middle of the night. We had to start our own Mississauga station. That was the only sensible idea."

The problem was to find an open spot on an already crowded radio dial. Jean let Mississauga engineer George Mather take care of the technical details.

A brief was submitted to the federal department of communications applying for a station operating from sunrise to sunset at 10,000 watts from the 1190 spot. The brief was approved technically which meant it was feasible for the station to operate.

The main hurdle, however, is a hearing before the Canadian Radio and Television Commission in Ottawa Sept. 17 for a license to operate.

FIGHT

Jean is prepared to go and fight for her station.

"I'm really excited about the idea," she says. "I think the station would be such a good thing for Mississauga. I think it could really help in bringing all the separate communities together."



Jean Caine, principal owner of radio station CHWO in Oakville and a lady who has been in the radio business for a long time, is applying for a license to operate a new station here in Mississauga. Times photo by Ron Pozzer.

"Mississauga really needs its own station."

What about the criticism that there may be too much of a monopoly with Craine-operated stations in both Oakville and Mississauga?

She shrugs aside the suggestion. "Look this is only an extension of the service we are already providing. We have Mississauga people on our staff, in our newsroom. This just gives us the opportunity to concentrate more heavily on what is happening here. We could give better service if Mississauga had a separate voice."

"A number of prominent people have offered their support for our application. This station would be good for Mississauga."

LOCATION

It will be several months, probably November, possibly longer, before Jean

learns whether her application has been approved. After that a station location must be selected and building begun. Several sites are being considered but no decisions will be made until news of the application comes through.

Jean thinks she could be on the air by next September, maybe sooner, if construction goes well.

The station, will lean heavily on local news. "We have done an extensive survey on the people who live in Mississauga and our programming will be designed for an adult, intelligent audience," Jean says. "That will include talk shows and an emphasis on consumer affairs."

"Plans for this station are really nothing new," Jean says matter-of-factly. "This is just an extension of what we've always been doing. This is what we always were working towards."