

Leitrim's Local Radio Service

Shannonside Radio holds the franchise for local radio transmission in South Leitrim Longford and Roscommon, but it is very popular in many counties outside that area. Last November Shannonside FM enjoyed its second birthday.

With a staff of twenty plus, the listener is taken through the day from early morning to close down with a great variety of styles and programmes.

Shannonsides regular morning news item "On This Date", continues to build on its own fan club. Researched, written and presented by Leitrim's own Joe Daly - this daily trip down memory lane has been one of the most popular aspects of local radio programming since Shannonside was first launched. Joe Finnegan is the station manager. From Kilkelly Co Mayo, Joe presents a very popular daily programme, plus sports reports and sponsored programmes.

Ciaran Mullooly is Head of News at Shannonside Radio. A native of Lanesboro Co Longford, Ciaran was formally the Deputy Editor of the Cavan leader, and a journalist with the longford Leader. He is presently youth officer of Co Longford GAA Board.

Shannonside Radio plays an active daily role in Co Leitrim. Through the reporting of journalist Anne Norris, the affairs of local authority and community are covered adequately, and the county has found a new forum to use. Anne is a native of Co Westmeath, and worked with various radio stations both North and South, before joining the Shannonside team.

The local elections of June were just one element of Shannonside's coverage of the county in the year gone by. Throughout 1991 the sta-

tion has continued to play a prominent role in the broadcasting of events - both on a commercial and sporting front. Live coverage of Gaelic games in Leitrim is now the jewel in the stations crown.

That memorable All Ireland B Campaign of 1990 brought the county's fortunes to new heights, and Shannonside was only too happy to be there to record it. The voices of Ollie Honeyman, Tommy Floran and P.J. Carroll became daily features on local radio.

Grace Brennan, from Mullingar, takes on all types of issues on her programme - Social Political and Topical, with special slots on gardening, DIY, and Medical problems.



Ms. Anne Norris

Grace has a great interest in drama and theatre.

The book programme is another specialist slot, dealing with all types of books particularly recent publications in Ireland. and the Book Programme provides a very useful forum where authors get asked the intentions and events behind the book, and local children get a chance to review stories designed for their age group. Researched, read and presented by Myra Reynolds. Myra has a degree in English Literature from UCD. She is a Mohill girl. It is a very popular weekly programme.



Dessie McLoughlin and Cathy Casey

Cathy Casey presents two very popular country music shows. Cathy is also the advertising sales person for Co Longford and Westmeath. Originally from Texas Cathy lives in Clondra with her husband Colm Casey and daughter Jamie.

Paul Newton is the advertising sales person for Leitrim and Roscommon. It is debatable whether Paul is from Leitrim or Roscommon. His father PJ, was a native of Amsaduff Co Leitrim, and the family now live just a stones throw into Roscommon. Paul has a degree in marketing and advertising from Rathmines Collège Dublin.



Myra Reynolds talking to Eilis Dillon, the famous children's writer, at the Shannonside Studios.

How does it feel to be loved by thousands of people? Dessie McLoughlin, is one of Shannonsides top music presenters with his Donegal accent, his quick wit, his affable humour and his sincere respect for each listener, Dessie is local radio is all about, when one listens to Dessie, he could be with you in the sitting-room talking just to you. He always puts the listener first.

It is not possible to include everyone, but it must be said that Shannonside is special in Leitrim and as the county's local station, it will remain so.

North West Radio

by NIALL DELANEY

THE phenomenon of local radio? As difficult to pin down as Charlie Haughey's ability to survive.

There's something awfully disconcerting about listenership levels doubling when the daily death notices are being read out. Disconcerting, amusing, and in reality, totally understandable. The huge rate of listenership during the obituaries is unquestioned, borne out by the recent JNLR/MRBI radio listenership survey.

Then there's a presenter by the name of Claffey who persuades people to engage in press-ups on air; lost budgies, Welger bailers for sale, and Councillor A.N. Other's opinions on the state of the roads.

Laughable perhaps in the corridors of RTE; a combination of necessity and profitability in local radio.

North West Radio, the baby of the local radio stations, has been on the air since November 1990. In the last JNLR survey, figures revealed that station to have the highest level of listenership with its own franchise area (63% in North Leitrim, Sligo, and South Donegal) than any other station in the entire country. No wonder so many budgies are located.

Although in its infancy, I doubt whether any future plans to abandon the concept of local radio on the Government's behalf would be accepted. Increasingly, it's becoming an essential service — essential being the key word, in

that they'll seldom thank you for what you do but will be on like a shot should you falter. "How could you have a 'sentimental' bullock?" they ask. "The presenter's not of farming stock," we inadequately reply.

My colleague in News, Tom Shiel, on our sister station Mid West Radio in May, was on television last week. On "Changing Places". Changing places indeed — imagine RTE doing a half-hour documentary programme on the success of local independent radio. Anyhow, getting back to Tom: he was commenting on the phenomenal popularity of the "death notice slot". It seems that recently, a Mayo native died in England, after being a long time away from home. Seemingly, the family rang in, requesting that after his obituary was read out, the presenter play "The Green Green Grass of Home". Which he duly did. Whatever would Tom Jones make of it — the plane carrying the coffin was apparently just touching down at Knock Airport when the "old home town looks the same" started up.

Tom was also asked as to what constituted local news. He made the point that when he was going to school, radio reports regarding traffic congestion at Doyle's Corner in Phibsboro meant little to a crowded school bus of Western pupils. A comment on the flooded nature of Ballaghaderreen is obviously more apt.

And that's what makes local



news. The cliché of "keeping it local" is truth in words. There's no point in competing with RTE; after all, Radio One remains the strongest station in the British Isles, if not in Europe. But what they can't do, and where they can't score is keeping up with the Tidy Town effort in Manorhamilton or Leitrim County Council tributes to the late Pascal McKeon.

Then there are the generic issue — Charlie Haughey's leadership, PD involvement in Government. No point in getting on to PJ Mara, what does John Ellis or Paschal Mooney think?

And believe me, any politician will tell you what a difference there is between sending a photocopy of a statement to a local newspaper and being challenged on that issue on the air. One councillor I recall (not from Leitrim) used to refer constantly to his "electrical constituency" and the problems with local "refuge collection". But it's all part of it, at least they're getting their point across.

Not that the interviewer is without fault? How many times have we cringed when an answer to a question begins, "Well, as I've just pointed out already . . ." or "Councillor so-and-so, you're unhappy with the present water supply, why?" ANSWER: "We, no, I never said that . . ."

I've been asked to tell a little about the main presenters on North West Radio, the personalities behind the facade. I'll take four.

Tommy Marren, from Tourles-trane in County Sligo. He of the surprise phone call. Cursed by brides rang unexpectedly as they leave for the chapel, hailed by those celebrating becoming octogenarians. Tommy, it appears to me, has a special fan club and mutual affinity for Killargue. Catch Tommy between 9 and 11 a.m.; last summer, Lady From Glenfarne was huge with him and his listeners.

Paul Claffey. What can you say about Paul Claffey? Recently surprised as a "This Is Your Life" guest in his native Castlerca, how did they fit it into one book? On air,



● Pictured above: Paul Claffey (Chief Executive) and Mary Marren (Accounts Dept.)

he's the housewives' darling, and can regularly be heard conversing with Brandy the dog, dabbling in cookery with Marjorie, and attempting to get people to say "yes" or "no" on air. (It'll make more sense to those who listen.)

John Duggan, of *Duggan At Home*. Between 7 and 9 each night, recreating the days before radio in television, he of the *Rambling House* on a Thursday night, when musicians, poets, tradesmen, and talkers, congregate and create. Loves the Sawdoctors, and Howard Keel, I seem to remember.

Adrian Eames, a Leitrim lad by his roots. I know his uncle, Roger, won the *Leitrim Person of the Year Award* some years back. Adrian's in news and current affairs, and has a soft spot, one feels, for Sligo Rovers and PJ Carroll's footballers.

it before about Leitrim people. By a large margin, they are the most grateful and helpful people in terms of doing your journalistic work.

Genuinely grateful, I recall, in particular during the pre-local election days. More words of thanks came from Leitrim hopefuls than any other area. When PJ's men were on top of the heap; as RTE and the nationals started to take notice, there was always the time given to the local station for the comment. It's probably not fair to mention names, but always particularly helpful have been Sean in the Library, Tommy Moran, for literally anything on everything, and, of course, our resident Leitrim newshound, Gerry Farry.

Last week, in *The Sunday Press*, there was a colour supplement on how Leitrim is emerging as a county despite the age-old problem of emi-

Ming Ming arriving at London Zoo, but it's different.

Never lose sight of the old woman sitting on her own by the fire, Paul Claffey has been known to say.

So, undoubtedly the existence of electrical constituencies and lost budgies is here to stay.

As for the future, what we wouldn't do with a Leitrim Connacht Championship win, or a Ministry for the area, or John McGahern to finally win the Booker Prize.

In conclusion, I must relate a story of pandemonium which occurred during the summer and in a way, reflects the chaos and spontaneity of local radio. It was June of this year, the local elections were being held for the first time in six years. Local radio's biggest test yet, tested in a way that no General Election could have done.

Weeks of preparation was put into operation, phone lines hooked up, reporters hired, programme schedules planned, venues, and so on.

We were concentrating on the three main counting centres in the North West region: Collooney in County Sligo, St. Mary's Hall in Carrick-on-Shannon, and the John Bosco Centre in Donegal Town. No problem, all centres tested and rearing to go (apart from a minor Eircell problem in Carrick . . .)

Donegal Town proved the difficult one. The station's production manager, Andy Matthews, and myself, spent one long evening at the Bosco Centre trying our utmost to set up a phone line. To cut quite a long story short, we had to run the phone cable from a building about 300 yards from the Centre itself. The resulting cable ran across brambles, hedges, seven-foot walls, across a basketball court, looped through the actual basket, in through the window of the toilet in the Bosco Hall, at which point it ran out. Which meant that the reporter's phone was based at the entrance to the men's toilets.

Not the most ideal place for interviewing Deputy Mary Coughlan, or anyone else, for that matter.

Regardless, the line was in, and Donegal and the North West would benefit on election day as a result.

Election Day '91, the big test. All systems go at 9 a.m. Then comes the call. The dreaded reverse charges call from Donegal Town.

(DONEGAL ACCENT . . .)
 "Hello, how are ya'. Just a slight problem here. You know Francie, Francie ya met the other night? (Don't recall, but anyhow . . .) Well, ya see, Francie was out clippin' the hedge in the summer sunshine and it seems he's clipped the phone cable. Is that a problem?"

Only in local radio!



● Pictured above, Niall Delaney (News Editor), Tommy Marren (Station Manager), and front, Adrian Eames (News & Sport)

North West Radio, by its nature, is split three ways. Which means that our franchise area includes North Leitrim but not South Leitrim. Despite this, the station can still be picked up in Mohill and Carrick-on-Shannon, but the bulk of Our Leitrim emphasis will be on Manorhamilton and Dromahair, and Rossinver and the like.

I've always thought North and South Leitrim were like two different counties anyhow. There would appear to be a different attitude in both.

I've worked with two radio stations and one newspaper that all covered the Leitrim area. I've said

gration and unemployment. I think North West Radio, along with radio stations in general, has a duty to add to the county's development, to promote the county and its people, and to reflect the area in its entirety.

It's a symbiotic relationship in that respect.

I'm writing this while preparing for the evening news. On that news will be Paschal Mooney's reasons for supporting emigrant rights, the details of the plans to extend the "Clean Up Leitrim Week", and how the county will benefit from the Acumen programme. It's a long way from Croatia and Jesse Turner's release, even from the Giant Panda