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Ron McFadyen Puts Down the Mic

April 30, 2009
BY PAM BUCKWAY



For more than 50 years, Ron McFadyen has been asking questions and providing radio listeners with the answers.

PHOTO: JENNY SKELTON



Working for CBC Radio and for CKRW, Ron McFadyen always had his tape recorder with him.

PHOTO: TIM KINVIG



Ron McFadyen has interviewed many Yukoners and he knows just how to get more than a yes or no answer. Here he is talking with Olive Storey.

PHOTO: TIM KINVIG



Ron McFadyen (left) worked with another Yukon storyteller, Les McLaughlin, while they were both at CBC Radio.

PHOTO: TIM KINVIG



If there was a community event, Ron McFadyen would likely be there.

PHOTO: TIM KINVIG



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Amateur radio is Ron McFadyen's longtime hobby and he has contributed many, many hours to its development in the North.

After more than 50 years on the air, Ron McFadyen is retiring. April 30 is his last day at CKRW. McFadyen was interested in electronics and radio from childhood. His start as a broadcaster was at 15, at CKEK in Cranbrook.

"I was a kid in high school and I hung around the station until they hired me." He did a show after school as well as the weekend sign-on shifts. Full-time work at stations in Alberta and Saskatchewan followed.

In 1969, McFadyen came North for the launch of CKRW.

He moved to CFWH (CBC Yukon), in 1973, and remained until 1996. In 1999, he was back on the air heading up the CKRW newsroom.

Better than anyone, McFadyen understands "community radio", insisting that "the only way to be relevant in the radio business is to have local content."

When first assigned to the sports beat at CBC, he decided to put children's voices on the air. He taught himself how to talk to kids and frequently came home with knees wet from doing interviews at child-level in soccer fields and ski trails.

Not only do six-year-olds have opinions, but they also have parents and siblings who tune in to listen.

McFadyen loves the immediacy of radio, of getting a story on the air within minutes. One example is the day he was walking back from another interview in downtown Whitehorse and came upon a car upside down in the intersection at Second and Lambert.

He whipped out the tape recorder that he always carries and asked an excited bystander, "Did you see what happened?"

Seconds later, the "clip" was recorded and McFadyen was kneeling on the sidewalk, cellphone held up to the speaker, live on CKRW.

In 40 years in the Yukon, McFadyen has built a lot of relationships in the community.

No matter what's happening in the news, in about five minutes he can usually find someone who knows someone with the information. And he handles the tough stories as capably as the easy ones.

"There are times when you're talking to people at their most vulnerable. Instead of asking, 'How do you feel?' when you're standing beside someone whose house is burning down, I ask, 'Can you tell me what happened?'"

He then gets the whole story – usually including how they feel about it.

He's learned how to ask questions that require more than a "yes" or "no". He always listens to what his interviewee is saying instead of thinking about his next question.

And he smiles a lot. "You can hear a smile on the radio."

Don't expect McFadyen to ever stop asking questions. It's a lifetime habit and he'll still be going for the whole story when he runs into people at the coffee shop.

He isn't giving up all radio, either. Amateur radio is Ron McFadyen's longtime hobby and he's looking forward to more time with that. First, though, his wife Cathy has "a little list" of chores ... and his dog, Bailey, is looking forward to more walks.



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