

## WEBR: Committee of experts to create a library of artists, titles and composers

nel 2 by the time I moved back to Buffalo. We reacquainted ourselves and I've been dear friends ever since that day to this day. It's just such a wonderful thing to be back together with him, here, together, on WEBR. I'm over the moon with that. I just love it!"

Lillis, longtime weather forecaster at WGRZ-TV, has the afternoon drive slot from 3-6 p.m. at the new WEBR.

### On the Road Again

Angelo went from market to market during his long broadcast career. "I was changing jobs at the least every three years. Trying to move up, and I had my own personal goals. On air news, DJ, production director, did talk show for a while. I want to taste it all. Have an opportunity to see what it's like at every level of doing this business."

From news to on-air talent, eventually his path took him to a favorite stop, St. Ignace, Michigan, near the resort area of Mackinac Island, where he had the first of numerous posts as station general manager. He changed the format, rebuilt the station, hired new staff, all skills that he would bring to the new WEBR. Along the way, he and his family made lifelong friends who they visit to this day.

### All Roads Lead to Buffalo

In 1978, Angelo and his family returned to Buffalo after 17 years, when his father became ill and eventually passed away from cancer.

Angelo found a job in town at WWOL in the Lafayette Hotel in downtown Buffalo, where he met Steve Mitchell, a production director there. "And from that day to this day, he has worked for me at several stations, and for 40 years we have been planning and working on the development of a format of the station you're listening to now, that we call Standards of Excellence."

From WWOL radio, Angelo went to a succession of broadcast executive positions in Western New York, including WUTV Channel 29, and Sherwin Greenberg Productions as marketing director, where he met the great actor, director, producer and writer Orson Welles. Angelo recalls that Welles was in Buffalo to do a national Dunlop commercial, which he completed in one perfect take, walked right past a lavish reception planned in his honor, put on his cape, strode out the front door into a waiting cab and drove away.

### Sabres and a Sports Network

Angelo got a job as general sales manager for what became WNYB-TV, Channel 49, Buffalo's Super Station. He and a fellow executive were in the final stages of getting the station on the air, having built it from the ground up to become the local Fox affiliate. Angelo and his co-worker picked up the CEO at the airport, took him to a meeting downtown with his attorney, and picked him up several hours later to show him the new station, whereupon, as Angelo tells it, the CEO announced, "Guys, I've got great news for you. I just sold the station to the Knox Family." That ushered in a long association with the Buffalo Sabres hockey team and building up the Niagara Frontier Sports Network.

### Gannett: Hitting a Home Run

There was a stop at WNET-TV, where Angelo was hired to build an advertising sales department under new PBS guidelines. Then, he came on board in 1996 at WGRZ-TV, where Gannett Corp. was just taking over. Angelo describes the experience there as the dream job that took him to retirement. "I was in dreamland. What a great, great company! I still have total respect for the way they did things," he said. "We bought the vision and worked very hard, and eventually, the numbers came. We were pushing No. 1 in the market; the

money was flowing; we had a great staff and it was doing wonderful. And I rode that all the way up to the day I retired. I got so lucky at the end of my career. I spent 12 years there with Gannett. It was enough to get my kids through college without going broke. We did OK for ourselves with it."

### Nothing But the Best for WEBR

Angelo was happy to come out of retirement to launch WEBR at its new location at 1440 on the AM radio dial. The station also got a new physical address at 1580 Kenmore Ave., Buffalo, where Yuhnke also has offices for his cab company. WJLL had been housed in a small space in the Southgate Plaza in West Seneca with what could best be called aging equipment.

"First, we bought brand new equipment for the new studio," Yuhnke said. Angelo told the contractor to build two studios, the second one a duplicate of the first, with a window between them. The construction had to ensure the sonic quality of the rooms and make them big enough for live music or interviews. There's also an independent studio in the Niagara Arts and Cultural Center on Pine Avenue in Niagara Falls, where newsmen Tom Darro and former Falls Mayor Vince Anello do their shows on WEBR.

### What's Not on the Dial? Vinyl Collections – the Basis of the Format

For the all-important on-air format,



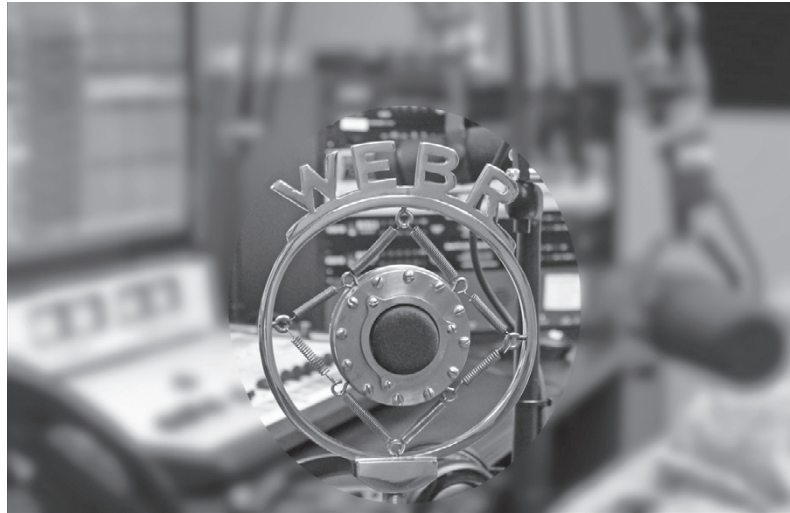
The clock at the new WEBR-AM radio station, owned by Kenmore Broadcasting Corp., 1580 Kenmore Ave., Kenmore.

mat, Angelo called on his old friend, Steve Mitchell. "Steve and I, we are old, old radio guys. And when you go back to the early '60s and forward, when radio was still great fun to work in, you went on the air and you could do things you would never be able to do today," Angelo said. "And there were formats, a lot of what we're doing (now) was on the air back in those days, he said. Record companies would routinely mail records to stations, Angelo said. "So, over that period of time ... I became a vinyl collector, and Steve did, too. So he's probably got, I don't know, 4,000 to 6,000 pristine vinyl, stereo recordings, and I do, too." Those two libraries form the basis of the Standards of Excellence format that WEBR employs. The signal is also a rare combination of AM stereo radio, which Angelo said has an enhanced sonic quality that can be appreciated especially online, but also on mono AM radio.

Angelo said doing demographic studies and looking up and down the Buffalo radio dial of 28 stations brought the questions: "What's not there?" "What doesn't exist?" "And I looked at Steve Mitchell, he looked at me, and we said, 'Yeah!' It's not there at all, in any way, shape or form." Their desired format is The Great American

Songbook. "And we said, 'Let's do it!' So, the two of us went to work."

Angelo and Mitchell convened a



The vintage microphone from WEBR radio, "The Sound of the City," now resides at new studios in Kenmore.

committee of experts to create a library of artists, titles and composers. The committee, a group of program directors, musicians and composers, worked on compiling the library over the winter of 2019 through middle of June 2020.

"We said, 'Let's stop now, that's enough to launch with,'" Angelo said. "Steve has a studio at home, and he's a tremendous production expert. And it was his job, then, to digitize all of the music."

What you hear, musically, includes

with John Farley; and a treat for fans of jazz, "Jazz on a Sunday Afternoon," with Al Wallack, who hosted "Jazz in

the Nighttime," for many years on the old WEBR.

Wallack figures prominently in the station's lore about "The Lone Ranger." Wallack produced an anniversary broadcast and played the Lone Ranger in a 1983 live on-air re-creation of the show. He said Fran Striker Jr., son of the man who wrote the radio series, specifically wanted WEBR to do the project. "I liked you guys because you were the first station to do the first script," Wallack said Striker Jr. told him. "Bill Devine (then station manager) called me in and said, 'I think you're the guy who needs to see how to do this.'" So Wallack set up WEBR's live broadcast, which took place at Striker's house. Coincidentally, the site was in Strykersville – no relation to the Striker family. Wallack recalled some of the actors who recreated that first script live, on air. "I remember Dave Waples was in it. Mark Hamrick, Laurie Githens. People came from around the country for this. And there was a little kind of gift shop area and they were buying weird collectibles. And it was the 50th anniversary [of the original broadcast]. That's why we did it," Wallack said.

Like Wallack, Jack Horohoe also was an on-air personality in the WEBR of then and now.

"I started my radio career kind of in the mid-60s, '64, and worked for WEBR from about '68 to '71," Horohoe said. "They changed format, went to an oldies format and they brought in new guys, so I was gone," he said.

"Then I worked as the program director for WJLL, Niagara Falls, for a short period of time, then decided, you know, by that time we had two

kids, and I decided, well, I've got to watch the bucks a little bit, because radio did not pay a lot back then," Horohoe said.

"So I went into the real estate business, owned my own real estate company for many years. Retired in 2005. So, spent the next 15 years enjoying my retirement, traveling and like that. Then the pandemic hit and I figured, well, I'm not going to be traveling in the near future," he said.

"And then, strangely enough, I got a phone call from Don (Angelo), and he said, 'Would you be interested in coming back and hosting a show three hours a day.'" Horohoe said he answered, "Sure, why not? I'll give that a shot." Horohoe has a deep radio voice well-suited to the business. "It's something I enjoy doing. They say if you wake up in the morning and you enjoy going to your job, you've got the right job."

### For the People

Angelo says the station plans to introduce specialty programming, including live musical performances and a talk show without a talk show host. Add that in with the variety in shows already on air, and you have what Angelo and Yuhnke are banking on as a winning combination and a magnet to viewers young and old. The partners are also exploring an FM component, and Yuhnke is spending a lot of time at the antenna site on Buffalo Avenue in Niagara Falls, upgrading the transmitter with digital technology.

Yuhnke said the radio station is committed to giving back to the community. "You know, we're giving back by gentleman who was 99 years old," Yuhnke said. Former WEBR engineer Don Lange was hired by WEBR as a vacation relief transmitter engineer in 1941. He eventually rose to the position of chief engineer. "The family called us and said he wanted to spend his birthday at the station and were wondering if we'd let him see it. We did better than that. We put him on the air and we celebrated his birthday," Yuhnke said. The special event was aired live on Jack Horohoe's afternoon show on July 20.

"I think what's really made the difference in WEBR radio is that we are touching the people," Yuhnke said. "And what's happening is that they're finding out that we really do care about it. This is not Bill Yuhnke's radio station. It's their station. And that was the whole mission, right from the start."

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