

KOMY to go off air indefinitely

By LANE WALLACE
STAFF WRITER

Watsonville's KOMY radio will shut down indefinitely at the end of this month after 54 years on the year.

Station owner Phil Rather said last night the station is closing — at least temporarily — to make room for an affordable housing project, but he would like to find a new home in the Pajaro Valley for the station.

"Our main concern is to get the station back on the air," said Rather, who with his wife, Betty, has owned KOMY since 1963.

The Rathers sold the 4.5 acres around the station on Atkinson Lane to the Santa Cruz County Housing Authority, which plans a 50-unit project. As the details were worked out, it became apparent there wasn't room for the housing and the station's tower, Phil Rather said.

If the station is to broadcast again, Rather said, three acres of relatively flat land is needed, something he said isn't readily available in the Pajaro Valley.

Rather, 62, said he would consider selling KOMY's license or running the station himself at a new location in the Pajaro Valley.

"This isn't a financial problem," said Rather. A station can be successful here, he said, "if it has a niche."

KOMY's "niche" has been an emphasis on local events and delivering something for Watsonville's various ethnic groups. Evening Spanish-language programming takes about 35 percent of the station's air time, Rather said. Ann and Andy Soldo, who have a regular show aimed at people of Yugoslavian descent, have been with the Rathers since they bought the station.



File photo

Phil Rather

For the last 10 years or so, the station's daytime programming has been devoted to music of the "big band era" and of the '50s. Rather said he was not offended when the station was called "the time warp of your life" — a satirical reference to the station's motto: "the music of your life."

Rather said he doesn't know of any other stations "except maybe in Montana" that broadcast all the football games of the local high school. In Rather's early days at the station, all of Watsonville High's basketball games were broadcast as well.

There have been no formal announcements of the station's impending closure, although Rather said some will be made on the air in the last week of broadcast.

The station's 14 employees were notified several months ago, Rather said. Bill Moody, who has held down the station's morning slot for a number of years, was planning to retire soon anyway, Rather said.