



Photo by Kurt Ellison

Sparky Sparks behind the mike at KMFO studios.

## Weekday groceryman, Sunday broadcaster

By CANDACE ATKINS  
Sparky Sparks always has a good word for people. Weekdays, it's friendly banter from behind the checkstands at Opal Cliffs Market in Capitola. On Sundays, Sparky Sparks' good word is scripture — offered over the airwaves of KMFO Radio Station, 1540 AM.

"I play contemporary Christian music," he said. "Music is a vehicle for scripture. I read what the guy on the beach can understand."

In 18 months, Sparks' program has grown from a half-hour pre-recorded show to a five-hour live broadcast supported by local merchants. From 7 a.m. to noon, Sparks combines music, Bible passages, guest speakers and listeners' calls in a way he feels is "positive and not controversial."

"I read scriptures designed for everyday living," he said. "I'm pretty careful not to read controversial things, yet I don't hide anything. I see the Bible as a manual to run life."

Although he holds a minister's license, Sparks says he "doesn't preach" on his radio show.

"I don't like people to think I'm a minister, I'm just Sparky," he said. "I'm only doing this because I have an opportunity. I don't mean to lift myself up in any way."

Sparks will continue his full time job as assistant manager at Opal Cliff Market, saying he has "the best of both worlds" at the grocery and the radio station.

He began his "Sunday career" in circumstances some (including Sparks) would consider a divine arrangement. He and his wife Peggy were shopping at Capitola Mall, and were approached by a KMFO announcer to answer a

"man on the street question."

"We started talking, and my wife mentioned that I was a musician and I had always wanted to do radio work. The station asked for a demonstration tape, so I put one together. The owner liked it. One thing led to another, and here we are, a year and a half later," he said.

Sparks receives no remuneration for his broadcast, saying it is his privilege to "spread the good word." It is up to him to arrange sponsors for the show, something he admits is far more difficult for him than ringing up groceries. But the sponsors keep buying air time, and the "Good News" show continues week after week.

"I'm not here to make a lot of money," he said. "We're on the air because the Good Lord has kept us there. At first the sponsors were reluctant to take part in the show — they thought they were going to take advantage of God. But now they're right behind us one-hundred percent."

On an average Sunday, Sparks arrives at the station around 6:15 a.m. He goes over the wire desk news service (he says he reads news between scripture passages) and selects music (from his own record library) for the broadcast. By 7 a.m., his program is arranged, and he is on the air with what he calls "more traditional music and Bible selections."

At 9 a.m., he leaves the air for 45 minutes while local church programs are aired. At 9:45 a.m. he returns to the microphone until 10:30, when a short church program runs until 10:40. From 10:40 until noon, Sparks' "contemporary" show is on, which he feels will appeal to "just about everyone."

"I'm not trying to give

people religion," he said. "I just let them know God loves them. To some, that means a lot."

Sparks' receives dozens of calls while on the air; a number have been from people who have decided to give religion a try. Sparks feels this is the real reason for his program.

"Those who aren't looking for God will probably switch the program right off," he said. "But even the biggest people who look like they have no problems, need something. What if they hear a song (that has meaning to them)? What if they hear that certain scripture (on the Good News show)?"

Sparks, an accomplished vocalist and musician, has traveled internationally giving Christian music concerts. For more than 15 years, he has performed at army posts, prisons, rest homes and churches.

"When I give concerts, I never sing any of the crying in your beer type of songs. I offer my ministry through my songs. It's pretty informal, I like it that way," he said.

To move from concert sound equipment to a single handedly running a radio station for five hours was traumatic at first for Sparks.

"It was scary," he said. "I forgot which buttons to push, and I did a lot of things wrong. I can't tell you why we stayed on the air once we went live — but at least the listeners knew the show was live. I had to make apologies all the time for the crazy things I did."

Today, Sparks' show runs smoothly. He usually pushes all of the right buttons, turns the proper knobs and for five hours, people in the Monterey Bay area have the opportunity to hear "Good News."