

Signing off

KOMY hopes
to be back
on air soon

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WATSONVILLE — The Big Band sounds of Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey and the Andrew Sisters began to fade away Sunday when one of Watsonville's two radio stations, KOMY, shut down.

But station owner Phil Rather, who has owned the 1340 AM station for 28 years along with his wife, Betty, hopes the shutdown is only temporary. He is trying to find a new site for the station and its antenna. A 52-unit affordable-housing project will be built on the station's 4.5-acre Atkinson Lane location.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Betty Rather and her husband Phil have owned Watsonville radio station for 28 years.

"We are pursuing a new location and have also received a half-dozen offers to sell," Rather said Friday while hurrying around the station, packing away records and tapes. "We definitely want to see the station come back on the air, whether it's with us or new owners. But we don't have anything definite yet."

Rather was quick to point out that shutting down the station had nothing to do with financial problems. He said they have been very successful in their own niche.

KOMY's "niche" has been an emphasis on local news, as well as broadcasting Big Band music during the day and catering to Watsonville's diverse ethnic groups at night.

KOMY is the only local station to regularly cover Watsonville City Council meetings, and has broadcast Watsonville High School football games for more than 20 years. Spanish-language programming has dominated the station's evening broadcasts since 1965, but Yugoslavian and

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— Phil Rather, KOMY owner

Portuguese-language programming is also aired. The former includes former Watsonville mayor Ann Soldo, who has had a weekly show since 1963.

KOMY switched to the Big Band format in 1980, becoming the first station in California and 18th in the nation to do so, according to Rather.

Losing KOMY will be difficult for many loyal listeners.

Hazel Wright likened it to a death in the family, saying she

moved to Watsonville in 1974, set KOMY on her radio "and haven't moved it since."

Herman Schmidt, who has listened for 14 years, said, "I enjoy the music. It's damn hard to find anything but rock 'n' roll these days."

Rather conceded, "This has been a difficult week for us. We're saddened about this, but we also look back with pride that we've served the people of Watsonville and the Pajaro Valley

well."

The stations' 14 employees were notified of the situation several months ago. Bill Moody, the station's morning anchor for 28 years, will be retiring; Jim Workman, sales manager since 1963, will be going to KPUP in Salinas.

Rather and his wife, Betty, plan to remain in the area. Both have strong community ties, having been named man and woman of the year by the Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce. Rather is also a board member of Watsonville Community Hospital.

If the station does come back, Rather said three acres of relatively flat land in or near Watsonville is needed. The Federal Communications Commission requires KOMY to be maintained as a 1,000-watt non-directional station. If the station's antenna is moved far, it will be outside the area of operation.