

Anxiety in the sty

KPIG buyer plans few changes at station, but staff still wary

By **BOB LINNEMAN**
Sentinel staff writer

WATSONVILLE — It's been more than a month since radio station KPIG was sold, and staffers are still a bit "paranoid" about the future.

"No one has said anything to us, one way or the other," program director Laura Ellen Hopper said of possible changes to the station's musical lineup or personality. "No one has said they're going to leave it the same, or change it."

The popular FM station (107.5 on the dial) has a strong and loyal listener base and "would be a real loss to the community" should it change, Hopper said.

Hopper said listeners, supporters and advertisers have all contacted the station and asked that KPIG be left alone. "The support has been great," she said.

KPIG, along with two other stations in the Monterey Bay area, was bought by New Wave Communications, based in New Jersey in late May. Attempts to reach the corporate office of New Wave by phone this week were unsuccessful. One phone number had been disconnected.

Will Douglass, the corporate vice president of programming and new management for New Wave, said the company is in the middle of moving and "we have people working out of their homes." Douglass is currently based at KXDC in Monterey — another of New Wave's new properties.

Douglass, however, said not to fear: KPIG will remain with its current musical lineup — which includes a wide range of artists, from Johnny Cash to the Wallflowers to John Prine to the Rolling Stones.

"KPIG is one of the premier radio sta-

tions in the country," Douglass said. "It's unique, and I'm proud to be a part of it. There's no reason to make changes to successful radio stations."

But KPIG hasn't always been successful, which is one reason why Hopper remains apprehensive about the new ownership. The station only started making money about two years ago, she said. Plus, KPIG has a history of turmoil and upheaval dating back to the KFAT days in the 1970s.

The fact that the sale to New Wave isn't final yet also leads Hopper to worry. She said it takes three months for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to finalize a sale, and that won't occur in KPIG's case until August.

"I'm trying not to be paranoid," Hopper said. "But we've been lost so many times. Now we have it to where we're making money. We should be a valuable commodity to anybody. ... But when no one tells you anything, then you really worry."

Douglass said the only changes discussed so far are administrative, and "detail stuff."

"As for programming and personality, we don't plan to change any of that," he said. "We're having a lot of fun, and we're going to continue to have a lot of fun. The Pig will be the Pig. I'm not even going to make them clean up the sty."

There have been two changes in the on-air lineup since the sale. Nighttime disc jockey "Buffalo Bob" Cassidy was not rehired by New Wave. Hopper said she had suspended Cassidy "because he had some personal problems that affected him on the air." When the new owners came in and fired and then rehired the staff, Cassidy was not rehired.

"Everybody knows Bob's problem,"

Hopper said. "I don't know if Bob can handle that kind of stress."

Hopper, with a wary eye on the future, said she has not hired anyone to replace Buffalo Bob, because "I don't want to be cruel."

Also gone from the KPIG lineup is Sandy Shore — who was promoted to work with the other stations in the group.

New Wave bought KPIG and the other stations, KCDU and KXDC, from Elettera Communications, which had owned the group for two years. Elettera bought the stations from Leo Kesselman and Hopper, the last local owners of the station.

"It is so ironic, and I don't make this up, but Leo Kesselman and I lost money on the station for eight years," Hopper said. "I kept saying it was going to work. But he said he had to sell. And I swear almost to the day of the sale, it started making money."

Now it's one of the most popular stations on the Central Coast. Hopper just hopes it is allowed to keep doing the things it's been doing.

"I don't think there is a whole lot we can do," she said. "The ball is in their court. I do know KPIG is a real valuable part of this community. I don't think it will be lost one way or another. The community has always rallied behind the station. The listeners want it to stay on the air, and they'll make sure it does, one way or another."

So until Hopper hears otherwise, it's business as usual. Friday that meant the station's staff and its loyal listeners donned their best pig snouts and marched in the World's Shortest Parade in Aptos. And, of course, they marched to one of the station's signature songs: "Happy Boy" by the Beat Farmers.

PUBLIC LIBRARY
SANTA CRUZ

REFERENCE