



Photos by the author

Engineer Don Mussel takes the controls at the new KZSC-FM studios.

## They used to laugh at KZSC, but it's serious business now

By MATT SPEISER

The signal from the UC-Santa Cruz radio station was so weak, it had become the butt of jokes.

"The cheapest walkie talkie with the fancy turntables" was a cynical description of the 10-watt, student-run FM station.

This week, though, the ribbing comes to an end. KZSC-FM is now broadcasting its non-commercial smorgasbord of programming from new facilities at 100 times its old power, making it one of the strongest stations on the Monterey Bay.

The \$100,000 project was begun in the campus's growth years, following pioneering efforts by students to establish a campus radio station. According to one campus legend, the first such attempt involved a cadre of electronic whizzes who hooked up a turntable, an amplifier, a microphone and an AM transmitter, located in a garbage can atop one of the Stevenson College dormitories. The Federal Communications Commission was not amused, and several students were reprimanded for their efforts.

Someone then got wise to the system, applied for a 10-watt educational FM broadcast license, and the station took off. Through the years, the equipment, programming and personnel have grown.

"It got to the point where we had the right blend of things," said former station manager Robin Lewin, "but we only had 10 watts of power. The audience was very limited. And we wanted to reach out further."

And so the project of increasing the station's effectiveness began. In 1975, the station determined its signal could reach more people, if the transmission tower were moved to a better location. Someone suggested in passing that perhaps at the same time the station could increase its power some. One thing led to another and...

In the subsequent four years, the prospects of KZSC's relocation and power increase were the sport of a bureaucratic ping pong match between the university, the students, the FCC and several different budgeting bodies. But finally, it came about.

Lewin, who served as station manager for three years up until his graduation from UCSC last June, has "lived and breathed" the project since taking it on. Since leaving the university, Lewin has stayed with the project, offering his assistance to present station manager Maggie Sparkman. The work at times, has been very frustrating.

At one point, after a year-and-a-half of paper shuffling by the FCC to approve the station's application for the power boost, the KZSC engineer discovered that the location of the antenna would make some science experiments in the school's labs go haywire. So the station had to start from scratch, and reapply to the FCC to change the antenna's placement.

But a group of students persevered. Today a new tower stands on a knoll behind Merrill College and looks out over the city of Santa Cruz. KZSC's engineer Don Mussel predicts the new signal at 1260 watts, broadcasting at 88.1 MHz, will reach the entire Monterey Bay area and will extend as far south as Gonzales.

New studios have been built into a cavernous building, formerly known as Student Music Center East, also located to the rear of Merrill College. Since the stilted building was nothing but a shell, the station, along with Mussel and architects, developed blueprints for a series of studios, editing booths and news and business offices. Last summer, with the combined labors of volunteers and construction workers, the plans began to come to life.

The station's electronic equipment, which was mostly hand-me-downs from other radio stations and nearing obsolescence, has now all been replaced with state of the art technology.

You might ask, "But does UCSC even have a school broadcasting?" The answer is no — and in many ways the students prefer it that way. The funding for the project and for the station's general operations comes entirely from

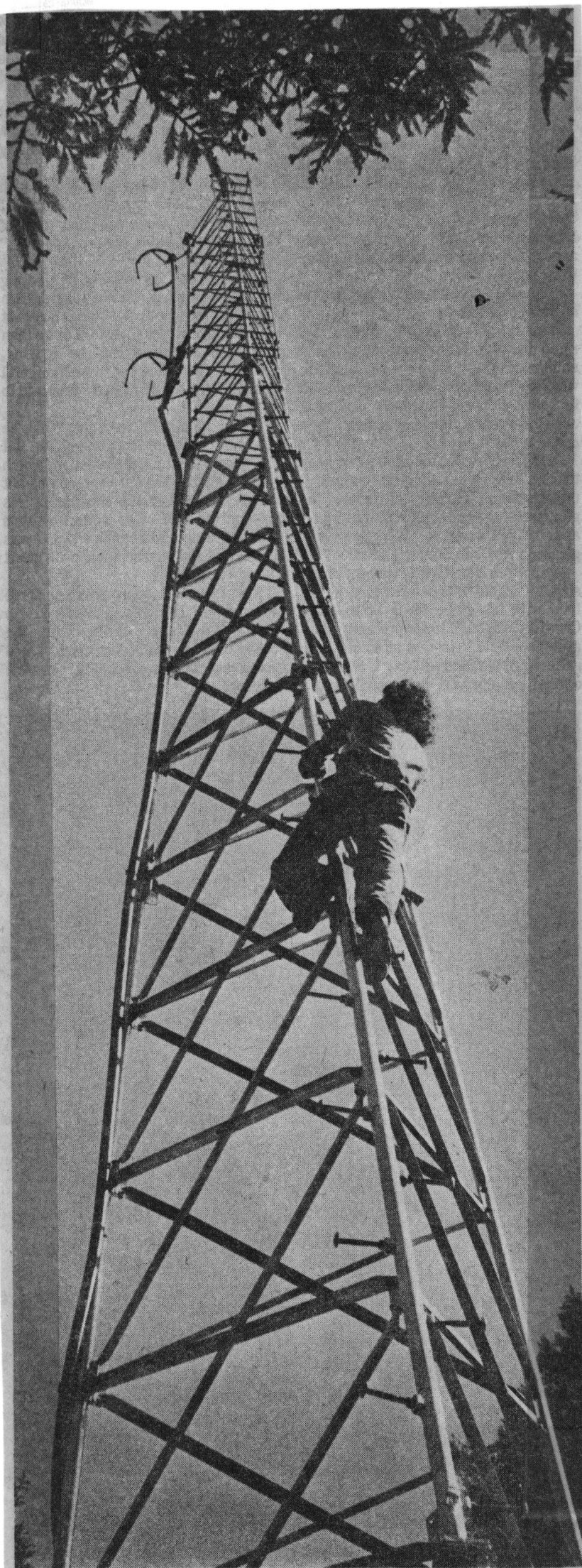
student activity funds (no tax dollars are used). Defined as an activity, rather than an academic offering, the station has sought to use entertainment, public-affairs and news as a means of increasing the bond between the listening community and the students.

Since the station is entirely student funded, it has succeeded in maintaining a great deal of autonomy over its own affairs. This self-governing philosophy is no better evinced than in the mosaic of programming broadcast each day. An unpredictable blend of music, public affairs, and news fills the day's logs. The vast majority of time slots are used for broadcasting music, which varies from Latin soul to popular rock to esoteric jazz. Some shows display the slick flair of ambitious future top 40 disc jockeys, while others fill the minutes with whale cries.

Programming decisions are made by a committee at the station which reviews proposals from students, staff and community members about prospective shows.

The next two Saturdays the station will be celebrating its rebirth. June 7 an "All Day Live" celebration will be held, featuring the talents of local artists and the words of local politicians, including James Lee Stanley, The Satellites, The Screaming Memes, Gary Patton and Robert Cole. June 14, an all-day open house will be held, allowing visitors the opportunity to examine the new facilities.

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**Former station manager Robin Lewin climbs the fruits of his labors.**