

'CKAR' still kicking 50 years later in Huntsville

Olive Diefenbaker did not consider herself a public speaker, but she enjoyed going with her husband John on his many prime ministerial jaunts around the country.

However, when asked to officiate at the opening of CKAR in 1958, she reluctantly stretched her principles, thus leaving the prime minister to go to Quebec to receive an honorary degree, while she journeyed to Huntsville to renew acquaintances with colleagues from her teaching days at H.H.S., then make a speech at the inaugural ceremony of CKAR.

It was a big deal for Huntsville. The whole affair was held at the town's largest venue, the arena.

According to the *Huntsville Forester*: "One of the most stirring moments in the official opening ... was an unreleased chorus of O Canada, that some 400 men and women joined in as the station went on the air for the first time."

Also at this inaugural were a couple of new Edsels, one being driven by the radio station's first manager, Bob Deal.

This was the Ford Motor Company's \$250 million flop car, but on that day, it was all part of the hype that went with the occasion. Deal left within a year, Edsel production ceased in late 1959 – only CKAR has endured. (as

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MOOSE 105.5FM CFBK)!

Two of the main influential individuals who brought the radio station to Huntsville were Norris McKenzie (whose son Hugh has served as Muskoka District chairman and Huntsville's mayor).

And Allan Rogers, a cousin of the inventor of the batteryless radio, E.S. "Ted" Rogers. The appliance first sold in 1925, one year prior to the opening of CFRB Toronto, known at that time as Roger's Batteryless – a truly pioneer effort in the world of radio communication.

One of Huntsville's current councillors, George Young, actually got hired on at CKAR when he was a lad of 16, and on his way to becoming a high school dropout. But life took a different turn for George. He loved the broadcasting life, and from his humble beginnings at CKAR, he went on to enjoy a long and successful career with the CBC, which literally took him "all over the world." He not only covered national sports, he reported on seven Olympic games, four World Cup soccer competi-



Garth Thomas has been a Huntsville radio broadcaster since July 1, 1958, despite offers to ply his trade in other locales. He is pictured here at the MOOSE-FM station on Huntsville's main street. (photo by Gary Dennis)

tions and had a major role in the breaking of the Ben Johnson story.

Then there's Garth Thomas. Hired on July 1, 1958, by his Ryerson classmate Don Wilcox, the first CKAR program director, Garth is still part of the ongoing operations of the station to this day! Although he claims he is "still a big town boy," referring to his upbringing in Toronto, at 73, Garth says he is "happy and contented to be in Huntsville. This town has treated us well."

Even though he spent over a decade working at "The Forester" and did a short stint as director of the Muskoka Tourist Association, he never completely gave up radio. In fact, he continued to work there despite his other jobs, hosting for many years a program that many may recall -

"Music for the Dark Hours," which "ran from ten in the evening until two in the morning."

"It took hard work and we had no money to work with," Garth recalls, "but here we are, still broadcasting 50 years later."