

Diné radio station KTNN celebrates 38 years of radio broadcasting

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
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Each morning across the Navajo Nation, a familiar sound can be heard on radios reverberating across the airwaves. With this sound AM 660 KTNN The Voice of the Navajo Nation begins yet another day, and this year marks 38 years in radio broadcasting for this little 50,000 watt station.

KTNN began its history of broadcasting on Feb. 28, 1986, in a modular building in Window Rock, Arizona. Today the station is located at 178 W. Hwy. 264 in St. Michaels, Arizona., still on the air and still expanding its audience.

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Listeners can enjoy KTNN on FM 101.5, KKNS AM 1310 - Corrales/Albuquerque, as well as online at www.ktnnonline.com.

A GLOBAL AUDIENCE

With the Navajo Nation makes up its Diné audience, the online outlet for KTNN draws listeners not only from across the U.S. but literally “all over the world” as those comment on how they’re listening in from Hawaii, Germany, and France.

Last year, the little 50,000 watt “all Navajo speaking” station claimed yet another year of being the #1 radio station for the demographic area. Even beating out several 100,000 watt commercial stations including IHeart affiliates. General Manager Cisco Benally said this is just the beginning.

“Turning 38-years-old for our station is just the beginning, we look forward to many more years and being the number one Navajo station for the past 18 years is a great feeling,” he said.

Benally gave kudos to his staff of 16 who provide not only the different genres of Native American music, but also inform the listeners of local community news on a daily basis.

“I want to thank my staff for all that they do and especially the listeners for being there all these years and I’m sure they’ll be there in the coming future,” Benally said.

Long-time listeners Rosita Clark and Lula Joe, both from Greasewood Springs, Arizona, came out to the celebration and gave their own congratulations as they enjoyed some cake and punch.

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“I like when they pass on the local news, announcements, and chapter news,” Clark said.

Joe felt the same way, chuckling as she recalled how she listened “back in the day.”

“It’s very informative when they [deejays] tell you about the happenings around the area. I’ve been listening since KTNN went live, when at the time you would put batteries in your radio,” she said.

KTNN Program Di-rector Lee Michaels, who has been with the station for the past 25 years, also remembers when the station first came on.

“I was just a kid back then waiting up all night for the station to hit the airwaves for the very first time,” he said.

Michaels says he’s glad the station is still going while keeping the Diné language alive. He adds that it would be great if young people would catch the “radio bug” and work for the station to keep it going – not letting the language fade away.

“I enjoy my work and working with interesting people, thus the music we play makes us all the more enjoyable,” he said.

The main genre of this station is country music, which mixes Classic Country with New Country. Blending in with this format is traditional Diné music depending on the time of the year. This could include Winter songs, Summer songs, and others. Not only is Diné music played, but other songs from different Indigenous tribes such as Southern Pueblo’s, Hopi, Apache, etc.

Midday Diné jock “JB,” who does the 12 pm- 6 pm Monday through Friday shift, said he really enjoys playing the music. Being with the station for 20 years, he says it’s indeed a milestone for this Navajo radio station.

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“I enjoy it here, it’s very laid back, and just being here for the people makes this job that more enjoyable,” JB said. “I like relaying the news and playing songs that can change a life – hopefully in a positive way.”

For more information on KTNN, call (928) 871-3553 or stop by 178 W. Hwy. 264 in St. Michaels, Arizona.

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