

## The Lasting Legacy of KDCR

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# THE LASTING LEGACY OF KDCR



DORDT ARCHIVES

The original KDCR building fit one studio, a transmitter, and some equipment. One staff member commented that the building was "hardly large enough for three people to turn around in."

On May 14, KDCR News Director John Slegers ('78) sat down at his desk and spoke into the microphone one last time.

"When I began work at KDCR as a student, I thought this place would be around forever," he said. "So, it's difficult to realize that, in less than a half hour, KDCR will go silent. While I can think of hundreds of reasons why KDCR should stay on the air, we won't. So you know what I have left out of all of this? Thankfulness."

Slegers then read 1 Thessalonians 5:18: "In everything give thanks, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." He talked

about what he is thankful for: the long affiliation of KDCR and Dordt University; how his faith was shaped and deepened through his work at KDCR; how his life's work began at KDCR.

"KDCR is the place where I met the person who would later become my wife. It is the place where my children tagged along on severe storm nights and, later, dropped by to visit between classes," he says. "I'm thankful that KDCR was a community outreach, and I'm especially thankful that you let me into



your home and your vehicles and your headsets."

Slegers paused for a moment before saying, "I'll always be grateful for the trust you placed in KDCR to be part of your day and part of your lives. *Soli Deo Gloria*—to God alone be the glory."

KDCR 88.5 FM has been on air for 53 years "proclaiming a God-centered culture" to generations of listeners. KDCR broadcasted 24 hours a day, sharing Christian contemporary music, weather and news information, devotional and informational programs, and play-by-play action of Dordt athletics. Now KDCR has become KDLX 88.5 FM, which airs the K-Love network and streams Christian music.

"We are grateful for the good work of KDCR radio and the legacy of Christian radio," says President Erik Hoekstra. "This was a difficult decision, and we are committed to honoring the legacy of KDCR radio as well as the good work of those involved."

What is the legacy of KDCR radio? To Jim Bolkema ('76), who served as music director at KDCR, the legacy can be traced back to the vision Dordt's first president, Reverend B.J. Haan, had for a Christian radio station. Haan founded the station after asking donors to give \$1,000 to build the station.

"B.J. Haan envisioned KDCR as a way to provide a bridge between the college and the community—for us to work together," Bolkema says. "We worked to live out Reverend Haan's vision, and you can see that in the support we had from the broader community."

Once the radio station was up and running, Haan even hosted his own daily radio program.

"Before going to his office, he'd come in to KDCR, grab a newspaper, and talk off the cuff on air for 13 minutes," recalls

DORDT ARCHIVES



**Leonard Van Noord ('79) was hired as KDCR's first manager in the fall of 1967. In the early years, Van Noord was the only full-time announcer and often worked 90 hours a week.**

Bolkema. "He did this every day. I always said that many people in the community would wait to formulate their opinions on issues until they heard what Reverend Haan said—that's how strong of an influence he had in this community."

Because KDCR was an independent radio station, KDCR could dream up their

Reverend Carl Zylstra had his own show called "Conversations" during his presidency. "Looft den Heer" was a Dutch Psalms and hymns program that ran on Sundays. "Tick Tock Town," a creative educational program designed specifically for children, featured a little boy named Beany who sought out

Christian answers to his many questions. "Finding your Way," led by former KDCR General Manager Denny De Waard ('92) and Dale Ellens of Bethesda Christian Counseling, was a weekly counseling program.

Another KDCR staple for many years was "Plumbline," in which Dordt faculty would offer a four-minute commentary on how their discipline

integrates with Christian life. And who could forget "Illumination," the evening show where callers could request contemporary Christian music from bands like Caedman's Call, Third Day, DC Talk, Rebecca St. James, and Burlap to Cashmere?

In the last few years, Slegers ran "Focus

SARAH MOSS ('10)



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own programs. Creating and planning all aspects of KDCR was challenging at times, but it also gave opportunities for one-of-a-kind programming.

Deborah Haan, Reverend B.J. Haan's wife, created a program called "The Family Room," during which she shared household tips, recipes, and stories.



on Fine Arts," where he interviewed Dordt professors and students who work in the arts. "Money Concepts Radio Series" featured Tom De Jong ('02), an independent financial advisor who shared insights on wealth management and financial planning. And Station Announcer Christian Zylstra ('17) started a popular program called "Where are They Now?"

"I interviewed former athletes or coaches who have affiliation with Dordt and asked, 'Where are they now?'" says Zylstra. "There are a lot of amazing stories we've been able to share. For example, Mark Rowenhorst ('09) is a wilderness tour guide up in Alaska. A secret service agent came on the show; I also interviewed Todd Green ('11), whose family helped found Hobby Lobby. I heard more from people about those segments than anything else I do. It's great to see how God has worked in Dordt graduates' lives and led them down different paths."

In addition to creating their own programming, KDCR staff decided what music they wanted to play on air. When Bolkema began working at KDCR in the



SARAH MOSS ('10)

66

"KDCR functioned entirely on our own. Our goal was to provide a kingdom perspective on all of life, so if you're playing the radio in your car or at the workplace, we're showing how Christ's kingship exists in all aspects of life."

— Jim Bolkema, KDCR

mid-1970s as a work study, the radio station primarily focused on classical and choral music. Over time, they moved toward contemporary Christian music while also making sure their programming was distinctive.

"These days, you get your music in a certain category, and many radio stations are run by large conglomerates who own multiple stations," says Bolkema. "KDCR functioned entirely on our own."

Our goal was to provide a kingdom perspective on all of life, so if you're playing the radio in your car or at the workplace, we're showing how Christ's kingship exists in all aspects of life—how you manage your finances, how you listen to the news, how you raise your kids, what music you listen to."

KDCR programs and music also tried to give their listeners the content they desired.

"You have to know your community and what they want, because if listeners don't like your content, they don't have to listen," says Bolkema.

"It was our job to serve our local community, but as a Dordt-owned radio station, we tied the community to Dordt as well. I believe that, if KDCR never existed, the overall reach of Dordt would have taken longer to get to the point

## FIRST 20 YEARS

Back in 1988, KDCR celebrated 20 years on air by putting together an anniversary booklet that is rich with the radio station's history. To view the booklet, see [bit.ly/3gm30Fm](http://bit.ly/3gm30Fm).



In 1988, KDCR's core staff was comprised of Station Manager Denny De Waard, News Director Tim Vos, Administrative Assistants Caroline Douma and Ruth Hofland, and Music Director Jim Bolkema.



DORDT ARCHIVES





DORDT ARCHIVES

**"I enjoy watching local communities like Sioux Center and Orange City work," says John Slegers. "It's neat to see the towns grow and work to be innovative."**

where it is now," adds Zylstra.

Sports Information Director Mike Byker ('92) says he doesn't get caught up in the notion of legacies, but he does hope that listeners remember that KDCR staff took their jobs seriously and tried to show their Christian faith in how they worked.

"KDCR presented news stories, music, and other information from a Reformed perspective," says Byker. "Jim Bolkema closely examined music that was played and was very intentional about what was chosen. John Slegers presented news in a way that was in-depth and made you think. We all sought to challenge our listeners to think and formulate views. KDCR did things a little differently than what other media outlets were doing at the time."

KDCR changed with the times. The technology used today would be barely recognizable to early staff and students who once worked there. Bob Grotenhuis ('81) was 11 years old when KDCR first signed on the air, and he recalls as a child hanging out at KDCR with first-time broadcasters Jerry Vreeman ('72) and Ron Klemm ('74). "The DJs let me record newscasts from the old teletype. That led me to a 40-year career in TV news,"

SARAH MOSS (10)



66

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**— Christian Zylstra, KDCR**

Grotenhuis says in a Facebook post commemorating the last day of KDCR's broadcast.

Grotenhuis adds that the chance to work with former KDCR Station Director Marty Dekkenga, Administrative Assistant Ruth (Wester, '96) Hofland, De Waard, and many other radio station stalwarts was rewarding.

"Thanks, Dordt, for giving me the happiest years of my life," says

Grotenhuis. "What a truly great and good God we serve."

Leon Groenendyk ('88) also mentioned on Facebook that "back in the mid-1980s, my work study job was to listen to records that might have been scratched or skipped while they had been played on air. I had to decide if those records were scrap or could be salvaged!"

At one point in KDCR's history, all music was listed on 3 x 5 notecards, all hand typed. "Before the days of computers, that was your method of rotating music—you'd grab a card to switch songs," says Bolkema.

Jordan Gaiser ('05) worked at KDCR from 2001 to 2005 and remembers "working closely with Jim Bolkema to help move from CDs to MP3s."

From LP records to reels to digital tapes to computer-based audio, Bolkema has been leading his team through new technologies and finding ways to experiment with available sources. He says there was never a dull moment when working at KDCR radio.

To Byker, the mission statement of KDCR—"to encourage and equip our listeners in their daily walk with God"—is key to what KDCR was trying to accomplish.

"If you keep the mission statement at the foreground of what you do and how

you make decisions, that's important," says Byker. "We were not asking our listeners to hunker down in their basements and wait for Christ's second coming. We all need to work and be salt and light right now in this world. And the media, for right or wrong, has tended to not be salt and light in this world, but we at KDCR have taken that role seriously."

Byker's work at KDCR focused primarily on Defender athletics, which is one of



the reasons many listeners tuned in to KDCR. Byker was the voice of Defender athletics on KDCR, and he spent many nights and weekends on the road, bringing the games to fans. From football through basketball season, Byker's voice was one that KDCR listeners could rely on for both home and away games. Looking back at his time with KDCR, Byker is most grateful to the avid fans for tuning in.

"Athletic listeners are very loyal. They'd be with us during seasons where we went .500, and they'd be with us in seasons where we'd play in the national tournament," he says.

Corey Westra ('97), who now works as the commissioner for the Great Plains Athletic Conference (GPAC), was KDCR's first sports announcer and Dordt's first sports information director. He started working at KDCR after his senior year of high school and spent many hours on air during his four years as a student. As sports announcer and sports information director, he traveled around Siouland and the United States to broadcast games.

"I enjoyed working at the station every day. There were great people who worked there; Denny De Waard was one of the greatest guys I've ever known, and I think the world of him," says Westra. "Working at KDCR led me into the position I'm in today, because the GPAC recognized me from the work I did at KDCR and Dordt when considering me as a candidate."

Westra was only one of many student workers who served at KDCR over the years. Since the beginning, students have been an integral part of keeping KDCR up and running all day long. They took on some of the same tasks and roles that full-time employees did, including writing, editing, broadcasting, and producing. In recent years, the 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. programming could be automated, but not too many years ago, students had to staff the station every hour of the day.

JAMIN VER VELDE ('99)



"Athletic listeners are very loyal. They'd be with us during seasons where we went 500, and they'd be with us in seasons where we'd play in the national tournament."

— Mike Byker, KDCR

"Early mornings, late nights—it was a great place to be," says Westra about his time as a student worker.

Grotenhuis has memories of early mornings and late nights spent at KDCR as well. "The most difficult time at

I'd drink gallons of that awful brew for the chance to do it again."

Gerald Rutgers ('75) truly enjoyed working at KDCR when he was a student. "I met my future wife there, who also

KDCR as a student worker was being scheduled to work Saturday night from 6 – 12 p.m. and then having to sign on at 6 a.m. on Sunday morning only to find that the budget was so tight that I had to make coffee from the grounds left over in the coffee pot on Friday afternoon," he jokes. "Why did they have to lock up the fresh coffee every weekend? But



DORDT ARCHIVES

"One of my greatest memories of working at KDCR was the passion of the staff, faculty, and community members who were involved in creating the programs," says Ruth Hofland.



worked there while at college and during the summers," he says. "In the mid-1970s, all programming had to be done when the station was off the air at 12 a.m. until 6 p.m. Those were the days."

Cindy Holtrop ('78) worked at KDCR from 1974–78 "announcing, spinning records, and reading a book for 15 minutes a day on air," she says in a Facebook post. "Later I worked as music manager and announcer in the early 1980s. It was the most valuable experience in my life. Thanks to Ron and Ila (Vande Kerk, '72) Klemm for giving me a start."

Many others got their start at KDCR. Mark Vogelzang ('79), who worked as music coordinator at KDCR in the late 1970s, now serves as president and CEO at Maine Public Radio and Television. Dr. Tim Vos ('84) was a news director at KDCR for many years before moving to academia; he has taught communication and journalism at Michigan State University, University of Missouri-Columbia School of Journalism, and Seton Hall University. Brent Assink ('77), who was once KDCR's music director, went on to serve for 18 years as executive director of the San Francisco Symphony and is now chief of philanthropy of the Fuller Foundation. Rich Haan ('04), a former KDCR engineer, has spent many years working as a senior broadcast technology executive in the Siouxland area. Piet Westerbeek ('98) and Mark Buss ('89), both former student employees at KDCR, now work at KSOU in Sioux Center.

Looking back at KDCR's 53 years of broadcasting, current KDCR General Manager Rich Lodewyk recognizes just how many people have worked at KDCR and how many stories and memories they have about the radio station.

"There have been excellent student workers over the years who have made the most of the opportunity to push themselves and grow in their talents while working at a full-scale, far-reaching radio station like KDCR," says Lodewyk.

Most of the current KDCR staff also got their start in radio as student workers. Bolkema began at KDCR in 1974 while studying music education at Dordt. Slegers



The KDCR station was once surrounded by cornfields. Today, the cornfields have been replaced by the Recreation Center and the De Witt Gymnasium.

auditioned at KDCR as a freshman in 1974 and was hired the following year as a basketball announcer; student worker positions were highly sought after at KDCR, so competition was steep. Byker worked at KDCR as a student in 1991–92, beginning in the newsroom writing stories while being supervised by Vos. Zylstra also worked at KDCR as a student.

"KDCR offered a tremendous opportunity

to students," says Westra. "It was a classroom, a laboratory, and a real-life radio station, and a lot of KDCR people have or still are working in media today. That's quite a legacy. It shows that not only was it a phenomenal radio station, but it turned out some really good people. And I for one am proud to be an alumnus."

Westra says the KDCR signal wasn't very strong in his hometown of Sioux City on KDCR's last day on air, but he made it a priority to tune in.

"I listened all the way to the end of the sign-off on that last day," says Westra. "It was hard to see it go. It is the end of an era."

In his parting words on KDCR, Bolkema thanked the listening audience for allowing KDCR into their lives.

"It was all intended for you, to help you grow in your faith, to help educate you in the ways of living out Christian life," he said. "That goal dictated the music that was played and the music that was *not* played. It reflected a Christian perspective on news in an age filled with lies, agendas, and extremes found in the media today."

KDCR sought to put life into focus, without focusing on a narrow part of life, added Bolkema—and that focus was Christ.

"So, thank you, everyone. And a heartfelt goodbye. God was, is, and will always be in control."

SARAH MOSS ('10)

## WHAT'S NEXT?

The decision to cease operation of KDCR 88.5 FM reflects ongoing rising costs and limited listener financial support for the station in recent years. Dordt is still committed to engaging its community, both regionally and beyond, by encouraging and equipping listeners to live as God's people. Dordt will now concentrate on growing livestream access to athletic events, chapel, fine arts, and other programming. Coverage of all home basketball, football, and women's volleyball contests will happen through the Dordt Media Network's livestream broadcasts, and away games will air via an audio link.

"The Dordt Media Network will continue to provide exceptional educational opportunities for students," says Rich Lodewyk, Dordt Media Network director. It will also offer multi-camera broadcasts of Defender athletics and continue to air weekly chapel services and music concerts.

To learn more about the Dordt Media Network, visit [dordt.edu/dmn](http://dordt.edu/dmn).