



97.1 Christian rock targets the young

Gordon Govier
Correspondent for The Capital Times — 10/11/2007 11:01 am

Madison's newest low-power radio station is pumping out a 24-hour-per-day stream of rock music onto Madison's airwaves, and its goal, according to organizers, is to get more young people to think about Jesus.

"The idea is to carve out some kind of niche to encourage kids who are believers and also to get the attention of someone scanning across the dial who's open to hearing about Jesus in a different way -- through music that appeals to them," said WIXL's engineer and chief volunteer, Tom Weeden.

WIXL went on the air on Aug. 12, just barely beating a Federal Communications Commission deadline and helping Weeden meet a goal he first sought 20 years ago.

The station is heard at 97.1 FM and is licensed to Lake City Church, 4909 E. Buckeye Road. It's a low-power station of 75 watts, which means it can be heard across Madison, but not too far beyond.

It comes in loud and clear on the University of Wisconsin campus, where the largest potential audience exists for its contemporary Christian music format. Bands that can be heard include Reliant K, Switchfoot, Kutless, Skillet and Barlow Girl. The target audience is teens and young adults, ages 13-30.

WIXL has no live announcers, at least not yet. "We don't have live capability now because the studio-to-transmitter link is not reliable," Weeden said.

All station breaks, weather reports and station announcements are prerecorded by Weeden and fellow volunteer David Batz. Then they are uploaded to the same computer that plays the music. The computer and transmitter are located at the tower site on Madison's east side, about a mile from the church.

Once Weeden has established a stable connection between the church and the tower, WIXL's programming will expand to include live broadcasts of Lake City Church's Sunday services. Live coverage of football and basketball games at Abundant Life Christian School (ALCS), another Lake City Church ministry, is also planned.

"It gives us a presence in the community that we didn't have before," said Lake City Church interim senior pastor John Ruck. "I'm not in the target audience, but I listen periodically."

Ruck said the Lake City congregation has reacted positively to the station, contributing pledges of \$20,000.

"Support from Lake City Church is awesome," Weeden said. He expected complaints from older church members about the music style but has been getting compliments instead.

Down the road, Weeden and Ruck expect there will be opportunities for young volunteers from ALCS and from Lake City's youth ministry programs to get involved in programming. But for now, the station primarily broadcasts music.

The station is also streaming on the Internet at [97X.fm](#). Weeden actually began experimenting with an internet version of WIXL in 2001.

Twenty years ago, Weeden first applied to the FCC for an open frequency at 105.5. He lost out to another applicant, and the station went on the air as WMMM-FM.

In 2001, the FCC opened up low-power FM (LPFM) opportunities for nonprofit educational institutions with a community presence and no other broadcast interests. Weeden got a green light from then-Lake City Church pastor Warren Heckman and began the detailed application process once again.

In August 2004, the FCC issued two competitive construction permits for 97.1 FM. One went to Lake City Church and one to the Wisconsin Polka Appreciation Society of Dane. The permits were contingent on finding a tower site and raising money for the necessary equipment. The polka society's plans fizzled. WIXL made it on the air just two weeks before the FCC permit expired on Aug. 25.

Since filing the second FCC application and beginning his Internet

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experiment in 2001 Weeden estimates that he's invested about \$80 per month in the station. He's collected 2,500 songs, and tweaked the format numerous times.

The eight to 10 hours per week Weeden spends on WIXL is in addition to his full-time job as operations director for NBC15 television, and his part-time engineering duties for WNWC radio, which broadcasts Christian programming at 102.5 FM and 1190 AM.

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