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## Search Strategy

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S 2	(media consolidation) AND ftany(yes)	Gannett Newsstand	2324°
S 1	(covert consolidation) AND ftany(yes)	Gannett Newsstand	17°

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**A classic rocks**

**Author:** Lee, David

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**Abstract:**

After 30 years, WCMF tries to make headway in radio's changing waves BY STAFF WRITER DAVID LEE Thirty years after WCMF-FM (96.5) sent out its first signal, the radio station that used to play the

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**Full text:**

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After 30 years, WCMF tries to make headway in radio's changing waves

BY STAFF WRITER

DAVID LEE

Thirty years after WCMF-FM (96.5) sent out its first signal, the radio station that used to play the likes of Styx and REO Speedwagon . . . well, still does.

The album rock giant is one of a handful of stations in the country that have lasted that long without switching formats. The one-time small player became legendary by the mid-'80s, when it dominated the local market with the help of a DJ named Brother Wease.

But after falling ratings, legal battles and changes in ownership, WCMF's song hasn't really remained the same. Its legend, however, remains intact.

Alan Levin, better known as Brother Wease, still remembers his days at WCMF's first home.

"It was a little, junky, run-down studio in the ghetto," Wease says.

The station has since shed its brick shack for a spot in the HSBC tower downtown, and the change may be more than symbolic.

When ratings grew, so did the companies that owned the station. Through mergers and buyouts, WCMF became part of Infinity Broadcasting Corp., the nation's second-largest radio conglomerate.

"I worked at WCMF when it felt like a family," Wease says. "I work for a corporation now, and it feels like a corporation."

To Wease, this is more a wrap-up of the industry than a complaint. After all, three of the country's five largest radio conglomerates - as ranked by their 1999 revenues - own 15 stations here.

When the federal government eased ownership restrictions in 1996, some companies started a buying spree, snapping up radio stations.

The pickings were especially good in Rochester. American Radio Systems Corp., which owned WCMF at the time, bought so many stations here that the Justice Department ordered it to sell four of them.

In the midst of this consolidation, WCMF has tried to keep its focus local.

"The bottom line is that we're a local company that's run by local people, locally," says Kevin LeGrett, vice president and general manager of Infinity Broadcasting Rochester.

But the station's size and corporate ownership might be a strike against it, at least if it keeps the station from making the offbeat moves it once dished out regularly.

"I listened in my bedroom when I was 15, and I remember hearing Frank Zappa's 200 Motels in its entirety," says Tom Kohn, owner of the Bop Shop. "That was, like, cooler than God."

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The 1971 album runs 91 minutes.

Today, WCMF pushes its products harder. For one thing, it has upped its advertising budget by 15 percent to 20 percent in each of the past few years, LeGrett says. For another, the station hopes to finally move ahead with syndicating Wease's show.

As it stands, WCMF wants to replace Wease sidekick Stacy Carmichael, who was fired from the show in September because of poor chemistry. The station had talked about syndication for a few years before Carmichael's arrival, but her exit stalled those plans.

Carmichael herself replaced a previous sidekick, Cindy Pierce, who quit the station in August 1999. Pierce had made claims of sexual harassment against the station, and later settled out of court. Her complaint followed a \$2.3 million lawsuit by Jodi Strada, a former WCMF account representative. She also reached a settlement.

The show might relay to other markets as soon as next year. Wease would air in cities such as Syracuse and Elmira before it moves on to other states.

"We're going to make sure the radio stations' management and programming staff understand as best they can how the show works," says John McCrae, WCMF operations manager. "When he says 'mother hucker,' I don't want a phone call."

Wease already draws guests ranging from Jerry Seinfeld to Oscar De La Hoya, and Wease and McCrae say syndication will attract even bigger guests. However, they insist that it would not hurt the show's local identity - an identity that Wease calls "a soap opera of wacky dudes."

"The judgment call about content has to be - and I think it already is - is that they don't just do material for the sake of being local," McCrae says.

So a promotion like Wing Bowl, in which local participants compete in a wing-eating contest at football's Pro Bowl in Honolulu, would continue because it appeals universally - at least in the minds of some folks.

### WCMF 30th Birthday Bash

What: A concert featuring REO Speedwagon, Styx and Survivor.

When: 5:30 p.m. Sunday.

Where: Blue Cross Arena at the War Memorial.

Tickets: \$25, \$130 and \$40, available at the arena box office or Ticketmaster (232-1900 or [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com)).

Call: 758-5300.

### Evolution of a station

July 1970: WCMF sends out its first signal.

December 1979: Community Music Services Inc. sells WCMF to Sconnix Group Broadcasting Inc.

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May 1983: Stoner Broadcasting Systems Inc. buys WCMF. The company (named after its owner, and not the cannabis-inclined lifestyle) owned 11 other radio stations at the time. Ten years later, Stoner merged with another group to become American Radio Systems Inc.

September 1983: WMJQ-FM (92.5) switches formats and plays Top 40, leaving WCMF as the only album rock station in town.

August 1984: Brother Wease becomes a full-time DJ on WCMF. By January, he was running his popular morning show.

September 1987: WCMF runs a call-in program among local listeners and residents of Moscow. Most of the talk was limited to social and family issues.

August 1988: Billboard magazine nominates WCMF as one of the nation's best album rock stations. "We don't even subscribe to the magazine," Wease says. WCMF doesn't win.

February 1990: Wease and WCMF hold a mass wedding for about 120 couples, beginning a decade-long tradition. The Rev. Sun Myung Moon did not officiate at the ceremony, incidentally.

February 1993: Howard Stern airs in Rochester for the first time. Although Wease defeats the self-proclaimed "king of all media" in ratings, both lose out to a morning show on WHAM-AM (1180).

September 1997: Westinghouse Electric Corp. buys American Radio Systems for \$1.6 billion and makes it part of its radio arm, Infinity Broadcasting. Entertainment; Radio; Celebration; Anniversary WCMF-FM Northeast

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## **Bibliography**

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