

Kyle Bauer – 1, KCLY

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

“Me, too radio.” That refers to radio that sounds like every other radio station and provides no unique or local content. Today we'll meet a radio station owner whose goal is not “Me, too radio,” but instead to provide local coverage for his greater community. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Kyle Bauer is general manager and owner of Clay Center's KCLY FM radio station, which he doesn't want to be “Me, too radio.”

Kyle did not set out to be in the radio business. He graduated from K-State in Agricultural Economics and returned to the farm near Clay Center. He diversified into other businesses over time.

“I am in broadcasting because God pulled me in by the hair,” Kyle said. In 1994, he was approached about buying ownership in the local radio station, KCLY. This station had been founded in 1978 by several people, including some affiliated with the radio-TV program at K-State.

Kyle saw the importance of local radio coverage so he bought in and eventually became general manager. At the time, KCLY operated on 6,000 watts of power. “Our broadcast territory barely covered the county,” Kyle said. He set the station on a path to growth.

“We call it Radio for Grown-ups,” Kyle said. The station features a mix of musical styles along with local news, sports and weather. “You might hear a country song one minute, followed by classic rock after that,” Kyle said. KCLY has more than 6,000 songs in its inventory.

KCLY was housed upstairs in a bank building downtown when Kyle began. As the station grew, it moved into a new building on the west side of Clay Center.

“We upgraded the technology and improved the sound quality,” Kyle said. When he began, the station signed off each night at 10 p.m. The new owners upgraded the station into the computer era so that it could operate around the clock.

The station which began as a 6,000 watt station on a rented tower is now a 35,800 watt station on a 500 foot tower. KCLY reaches about a 60 mile radius around Clay Center.

The emphasis is local programming. “Local news, local sports, and local talent make KCLY special,” Kyle said. “KCLY staff live here and really care about the people of north central Kansas.”

Sports coverage is another way to serve local communities. KCLY is the voice of the Clay Center Tigers, but the station also covers the entire Twin Valley League tournament of both boys and girls basketball games. That builds listener loyalty among fans of schools in rural communities such as Hanover, population 665; Linn, population 410; and Axtell, population 406 people. Now, that's rural.

One time in the early years, sports director Rocky Downing went to cover a ball game out of town. It turned out there was no cell phone coverage or landline. “He did the game while standing at a pay phone in the hallway and looking in the gym,” Kyle said. “It was easy to invest in a staff that was so dedicated,” he said.

Seven staff members agree to be on call during severe weather season. “Someone is always within ten minutes of the station 24-7 to come in for severe weather coverage,” Kyle said.

The station continues to upgrade technologically. “We started streaming 10 years ago and, eight years ago, we got onto cell phones so you can listen on an app,” Kyle said. “Everything’s about creating good content, however it goes out to the listener.”

“Clay Center is a great community and KCLY is a great source of local news and information,” said Steve Smethers, associate director of the A.Q. Miller School of Journalism and Mass Communications at K-State.

For more information, see www.kclyradio.com.

Instead of “Me, too radio,” KCLY is providing local coverage for the communities it serves. We commend Kyle Bauer and the staff of KCLY for making a difference with its coverage. Would you like to hear truly local news, sports and weather on the radio? Me, too.

And there’s more. Kyle also owns another station which has become a national leader in agriculture programming. We’ll learn about that next week.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.