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Radio career spans 60 years

Arnold D'Angelo started his career in 1948 on WKRT in Cortland



Photo provided by Arnold D'Angelo

Arnold D'Angelo, shown in this recent photo at the studios of Hartford, Conn., radio station WTIC, will mark his 60th year in radio on July 14. D'Angelo grew up in Cortland and worked at WKRT in Cortland and WHEN in Syracuse before moving to Connecticut in 1965.

By AIMEE MILKS

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It was nearly 60 years ago when a young local man turned his love for radio into a career.

Arnold D'Angelo, 77, of Rock Hill, Conn., fell in love with radio before he turned 10 years old, living on Scammell Street in Cortland.

"We didn't have television then so we did a lot of listening to the radio," D'Angelo said.

When D'Angelo was 8 or 9 years old in the late 1930s, he began listening to WAGE, a Syracuse radio station now called WHEN, which he was mesmerized by.

But it was in 1946 when the Cortland radio station WKRT signed on the airwaves and gave D'Angelo the opportunity to foster his passion in radio.

D'Angelo has been working at a radio station, WTIC, in Hartford, Conn., for more than 40 years now.

"His character on air is perfect because it's pretty much the same off air," said Scott Gray, a morning sport's anchor at WTIC who was hired by D'Angelo 27 years ago. "He is caring and intelligent ... treats everyone with respect. He has a very pleasant, soft-spoken personality."

D'Angelo is known for mentioning Syracuse and Cortland, especially the sports teams at Syracuse University.

"He is very proud of his heritage," said Gray, 60.

D'Angelo said he always mentions Cortland as the real Big Apple.

"I have had some people call and recognize my voice and say, 'Didn't you used to be on WHEN?' I have even had some people call and asked if I used to be on WKRT."

Only several days after his 18th birthday, D'Angelo auditioned to be on WKRT, and although he did not stay there long, it is where the Cortland High School graduate got his start in a career that has lasted nearly 60 years.

"At that point they didn't need any announcers, but they were sure they would because the SUNY Cortland students would go home for the summer," D'Angelo said. "So Bill Hall, the program director at the time, told me I had a decent voice and could read well, but I was really raw."

But instead of turning D'Angelo away, Hall gave him a key to the station, told him to come in whenever he wanted after 5 p.m. and learn the basics of operating the station and being on air.

On July 14, 1948, a night announcer had D'Angelo practice a public service announcement and read it on the air.

"It was my first time on," D'Angelo said. "And here I am 60 years later and I haven't improved a bit."

D'Angelo's mother convinced him to go to the radio station every night to learn the fundamentals of radio broadcasting.

"I learned how to run everything in that station," D'Angelo said. "Then several months later the station was having a holiday party and no one wanted to work."

As a result, D'Angelo ran the entire station himself that night and was hired full-time shortly after for 50 cents an hour.

"I thought the epitome of my career would be if I could get to \$1 an hour, I would be set for life," D'Angelo said.

After a year at WKRT, D'Angelo decided to go to college and follow his heart in radio. He went to Syracuse University, where he studied broadcasting. But while he was there, D'Angelo got a call from an old co-worker at WKRT who said the Syracuse station WAGE, the radio station he fell in love with during his childhood, desperately needed an announcer.

"I got up from class and went to audition," D'Angelo said, adding that he was hired for \$60 per week. So D'Angelo juggled school and his job at WAGE. But the radio station was sold and became WHEN, where D'Angelo dabbled in television and radio. And while he was at school, D'Angelo decided to follow another dream — flying.

He joined ROTC and entered the United States Air Force for pilot training in 1955. "I had 75 hours in, and about 45 of those were solo," D'Angelo said. "But they discovered I had an inner ear problem."

D'Angelo was forced to stop flying and was sent to aircraft maintenance school for nine months, then became an aircraft maintenance officer in Strategic Air Command.

D'Angelo returned to WHEN in 1958, but in 1965 followed his career to Connecticut when WHEN said he priced himself out of the market and they could not afford to give him raises anymore. So D'Angelo applied to WTIC radio in Hartford, Conn., and made the audition. In order to be on WTIC, though, D'Angelo had to change his radio name to Arnold Dean so no ethnicity was portrayed.

D'Angelo hosted a number of sports, news and classical musical shows.

"I loved being a staff announcer," D'Angelo said. "Then the station sold again and they eliminated a number of my shows, so I proposed a sports talk show in 1974 and they said OK."

D'Angelo hosted the sports talk show full-time until about two years ago. Now the 77-year-old who dreamed of being on radio, covers on WTIC for announcers who need a break, are sick or go on vacation. But it does not stop him from talking about Cortland and Syracuse every chance he gets.

Although D'Angelo has slowed down in the radio business over the last couple of years to spend more time with family, Gray said he is still very popular.

"He is a local icon in this market," Gray said. "What you get on the radio is what you get in real life. You don't have to talk to his co-workers, you could talk to his listeners and callers and they would tell you the same thing."

In 2006, D'Angelo was inducted onto the Cortland High School Wall of Fame for his "outstanding contributions in communications."

He was nominated by Marcy D'Angelo, his first cousin.

"He has just always been a star in our family," Marcy D'Angelo said. "He is the person I have always looked up to and admired. I used to listen to him on WKRT when I was a little girl. My mom always told me he would have to play a song for me before I went to bed."

Arnold D'Angelo has done a lot in his radio career, being one of the first announcers on the Cortland radio station, anchoring the PGA Tour Hartford Golf Tournament for 43 years, hosting a daily record program of the Big Band music and a monthly series called "One Night Stand With the Big Bands." He has interviewed music legends, including Artie Shaw, Cab Calloway, Gene Krupa, sports legends, including Jackie Robinson, Joe DiMaggio and Mickey Mantle.

D'Angelo has won countless awards from The Associated Press, the National Sportscasters/Sportswriters Association, various charities and has been inducted into numerous hall of fames, including the one at Cortland High School.

His cousin Connie Consroe, who lives in Cortland, said although D'Angelo has won many awards, they are all under his radio (or professional) name, Arnold Dean.

"I think it was a tremendous honor for him," Consroe said about D'Angelo being inducted into the Cortland High School Wall of Fame. "It's the first award he won under Arnold D'Angelo instead of Arnold Dean. I know that meant a lot to him."

D'Angelo will celebrate his 60th anniversary in radio on July 14, the same day he was asked to read an announcement on WKRT in 1948.

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