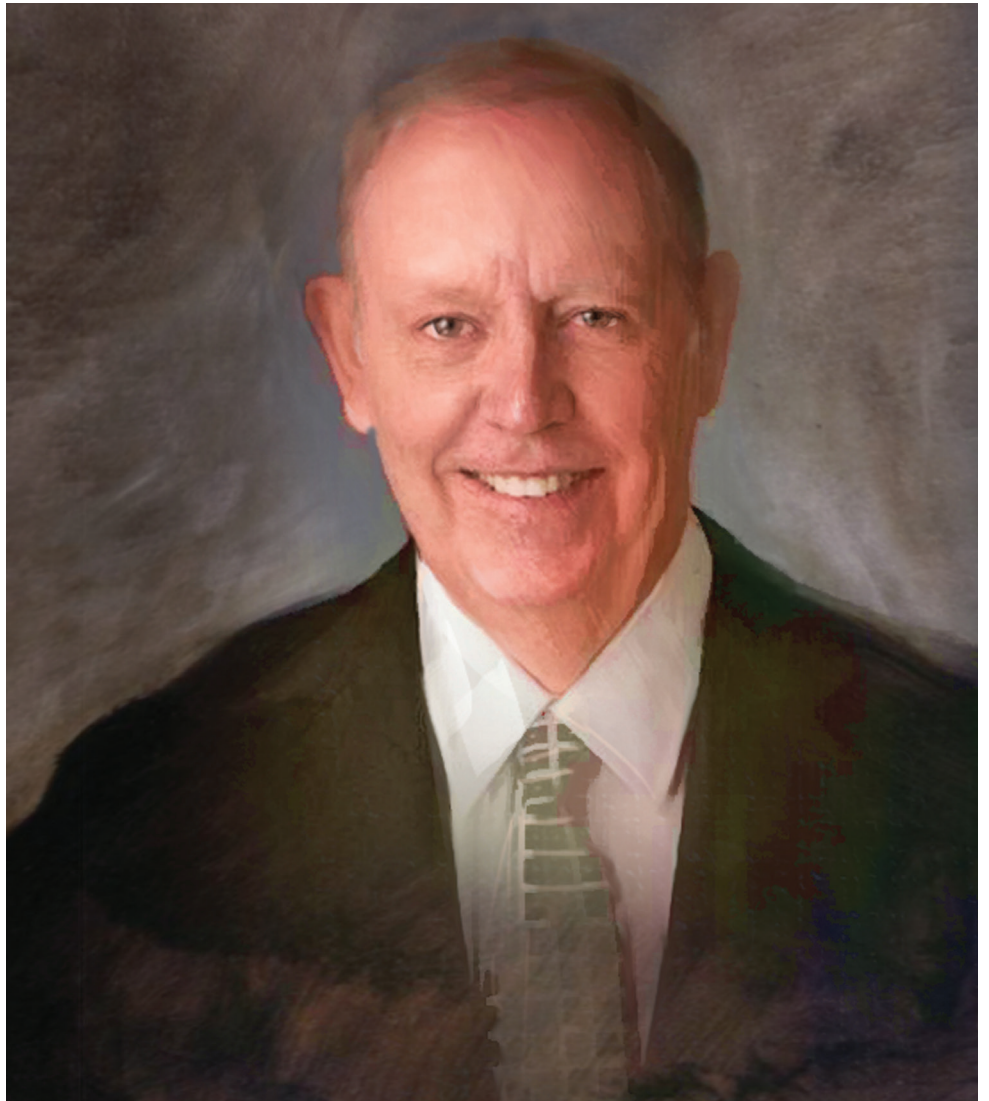


Jim Slone

What They Want To Hear

From pre-recorded play-by-play announcer to jock to manager to owner, Jim Slone had done nearly every job in radio before he was 35. With a gift for programming, he turned a failing station into a nine-station empire before retiring in 2001. And after all he's seen and heard over the years, it only took one phone call to render him speechless.



I was working as a dishwasher at Eastern New Mexico University's chow hall, which is not an easy place to work with all the food fights. Food got all over me, it smelled and I thought, "There's got to be a better way to make \$.40/hour." A friend at the local radio station said I should talk to the woman who ran it. Can you imagine, a woman manager in 1955? I bet she was the only one in the whole nation – Leola Randolph. She didn't have anything available, but she was very creative and aggressive. "You know all the schools in the county," she said. "Why don't you take a tape recorder and announce one of the games?" The tape aired the next afternoon and she got the feed store as sponsor.

Typical radio, it wasn't even a week until her morning person didn't show up. She called and asked me to sign the station on at 5:30am and stay until I went to school at 8am. That's how I got into broadcasting.

The Army, Navy and Air Force put out 15-minute programs with country singers. We aired one every morning at 5:30. From then until 6am we played the Sons of the Pioneers. You can get about five songs on in 15 minutes and we had 15 of their records. By the fourth day you'd start repeating. For I don't know how many months, I played those same 15 songs. And I just loved the Sons of the Pioneers.

I sang a bit, did solos and was all about the music. Eastern had a really good music program, but radio was my vehicle. When I saw the control room for the first time – all those 45s, 78s and LPs, even just the smell – I got chill bumps. I said, "Whoa. This is for me."

I cut a record with a couple of guys for a small label. We got enough airplay that as soon as I graduated in '58 we went on tour for six months. We were called The Shy Guys and I was the lead singer. We recorded at Clovis, NM, where Buddy Holly recorded. I had to go into the Army for six months and when I got out I took my first full-time disc jockey job in Farmington, NM. That was 1960 and I've been in radio ever since. I eventually cut a bunch of demos and had four records on a couple of different labels, but I never had a hit.

Radio gave me the opportunity to make a living so I got into it with great vigor, enthusiasm and excitement that stayed with me my whole career. I started as a disc jockey, worked my way into sales, then management and ownership. Before it was all over I was fortunate enough to own nine radio stations.

When I came to Tucson in 1963 it was for a brand new, 24-hour radio station called KHOS. The other Country station, KMOP, had to sign off at sundown, so I knew they were history. They didn't last but about six months. I was on the air six weeks when the owner, who also managed the local NBC-TV affiliate, told me they didn't like that he owned the radio station, too. He didn't want to sell, but he didn't want to lose the job at the TV station. "Do you think you could manage the station?" I said I could – I'd done everything except being an engineer. So I was GM at 26 and came off the air about two-and-a-half years later.

Glen Campbell was on tour with the Beach Boys when he called. I said, "Well, that's pretty fancy, Glen. I just got named manager of a radio station," and he said, "Well, that's pretty fancy too."

Glen is one of my best friends. We became friends in 1961 in Albuquerque. When he was on his last tour,

he came through Tucson and I knew I had to go see him. When he saw me, he said, "Jimmy Slone from Albuquerque, NM!" I said, "Well, Glen, yes, that's where I first met you, but I've been in Tucson for 50 years." And he said, "Oh yeah, you're in the radio business. I was just remembering when I first met you. You were playing my first record and I came in to thank you." It just brought tears to my eyes. I reminded him of when he and Jerry Reed did a big show at the first station I owned. He said, "Oh, Jerry was the funniest guy, next to Roger Miller."

We built KHOS into the best station in Tucson during my eight-and-a-half years. The owner of KCUB called because it was doing very poorly and they couldn't sell it. He asked if I'd run the station and get it out of the pickle it was in. I don't know where this came from – it just popped out of my mouth – but I said, "I wouldn't make a move unless I had some

ownership. But I don't have any money." I thought that would be a big problem, but he said, "There are ways around that." I had to come up with \$5000 to get 49% ownership, but I had three years to turn the station around and then I'd get another 2% for \$300. I took six members of KHOS with me, and within a year-and-a-half we were the No. 1 station in town and I had paid the debt. I owned 51% with agreements to buy everyone else out.

In 1983 I was able to get an FM, which I knew I would need to survive. If anyone took an FM Country, I'd be toast, so I got the license on KIIM/Tucson and built that. At that point, I had a franchise and was riding high. As time went by I continued to buy stations in El Paso and Lubbock, and six in Tucson. So when I sold my group in 2001 I had nine stations. Not a bad story for a farm boy with no money.

I was the guy who would never play music with profanity in it, and I took a lot of heat for that at R&R conventions and from labels and even artists. There was one artist who tried to get me blackballed from being a reporting station when I wouldn't play his record. His manager called, the local paper got in on it, and the woman who writes the entertainment section wrote a big article that got pretty nasty about me and my family.

I never lost sleep over those instances. It was called the Granny Rule. We didn't have any blue humor on our radio station and none of my disc jockeys used foul language. I never wanted to hear anything on my radio station that, if I were sitting at the breakfast table with my grandmother, would make her uncomfortable. We practiced it at KCUB and KIIM. Herb Crowe at KIIM told me they still practice that because they respect what I built, and that's one of the best tributes I've gotten.

My biggest gift was the ability to know what people wanted to hear. I tried to make something out of nothing and was able to do that because I was gifted in that respect. KCUB was Country Station of the Year and Grand International Station of the Year in 1977. Ten years prior to that, all of the stations that won came out of New York, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. And there was KCUB in little old Tucson. I about had a heart attack when they announced it. It was a really big deal at the time.

There are so many things to be proud of. I'm proud that all my family, my children chose to work for me. And they liked working for me, because I was easy on them. But they were capable.

Tucson had one of the best Top 40 stations in America, KTKT. It was noted for massive ratings. After five years at KHOS, I'll never forget when the Pulse Radio Survey came in the mail and we had beaten KTKT across the board. I don't think there was ever a bigger thrill for me in radio.

I never really had goals. I just took it day to day because I loved every bit of it so much. I sold my stations for \$65 million. Did I have a plan for that? Of course not. I was at the right place at the right time, and I knew how to do my job. I had the confidence of knowing I could make all of this work.

Lon Helton was the one who called to tell me I'd been selected for induction. I was so caught off guard I said, "I thought you had to be dead to be in any kind of hall of fame." For the first time in my life I was speechless.

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Three Of A Kind: With Jerry Reed (l) and Glen Campbell (r).