

Listener-supported

KCHO celebrates 50 years of public radio in Chico

By the time Phil Wilke arrived for his first day as general manager at North State Public Radio last August, the Carr Fire had destroyed one of the station's transmitters, sending its Redding-area listeners into radio

by
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Preview:
NSPR 50th Birthday Party, Saturday, April 20, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., outside in the parking lot. Live music by The Bidwells, Sunday Iris and Michael Russel Duo, plus food trucks, kids activities and station tours.

North State Public Radio
35 Main St.
858-6100
mynspr.org

were able to confirm it."

As the National Public Radio affiliate for 13 counties—from Sutter to the Oregon border, and from Trinity to the Nevada state line—NSPR is part of a daily ritual for some 40,000 listeners, and a trusted source for news every morning (on *Morning Edition*) and evening (*All Things Considered*). Station call signs—KCHO 91.7 FM in Chico and KFPR 88.9 FM Redding—as well as the familiar names and voices of the program hosts have become ingrained in lis-

teners' consciousness. This week marks 50 years that NSPR has been on the air, and its place in the community today is as a cultural and informational cornerstone. The station imports some of the finest radio programming into our little corner of the world—from the NPR slate to *This American Life*, *Radiolab* and *The Moth Radio Hour*. Plus, the station's staff and stable of freelance producers and volunteer hosts fill out the schedule with shows that have become institutions in their own right: Mike Fishkin's daily explorations of the world of classical music on *Afternoon Classics*; Dave Schlom's science/environment/astronomy program, *Blue Dot*; and Nancy Weigman's long-running author spotlight, *Nancy's Bookshelf*, to name a few.

A few months later, however, when the Camp Fire broke out, the station got a chance to fulfill its promise as a community resource. "I was very proud of what we could offer," Wilke said about his team's around-the-clock efforts to keep the public informed. "We were parsing out information as quickly as we



In the booth at NSPR with (from left) reporter Marc Albert, News Director Sarah Bohannon and General Manager Phil Wilke. PHOTO BY JASON HALLEY, CHICO STATE COMMUNICATIONS

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On April 22, 1969, however, the station was simply KCHO, a radio training ground for Chico State communications students that debuted with a mere 10-watt signal emanating in a 14-mile radius from Ayres Hall. In 1975, the station moved to the basement of Meriam Library, and it wasn't until 1982 that it started broadcasting NPR content. After federal regulators sided with KCHO over Jefferson Public Radio for the rights to broadcast in Shasta and the surrounding counties, a transmitter was installed on the Shasta Bally peak, and Redding's KFPR went live in November 1993, joining sister station KCHO under

the NSPR banner.

A decade later, in 2004, the station moved into its current downtown location and new digitally upgraded digs with professional production studios and the promise of more locally produced shows. That's still a mission, Wilke said, though he acknowledges the staff (six full-time; five part-time) is stretched thin.

"I want to reinforce local programming, especially the local news," he said. "The region deserves longer, more, and in-depth news.

In the wake of the Camp Fire, NSPR was able to add *After Paradise* to its rotation. Created with visiting journalist Tess Vigeland, a veteran public-radio reporter/producer (*All Things Considered*, *Marketplace*), the show was initially a daily program focused on recovery efforts. After Vigeland left two and a half weeks in, *After Paradise* morphed into a weekly series produced by News Director Sarah Bohannon with reporter Marc Albert.

This week, the station is hosting a 50th birthday party in the KCHO parking lot. Wilke says the event is an opportunity for NSPR to show its appreciation for the supporters who keep the station going (to the tune of roughly \$500,000 in pledges a year), and for the community to "meet the people who you listen to." □



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