

TALKERS magazine

Inaugural Radio Row

services 40 broadcasters

By Ellen Ratner

TALK RADIO NEWS SERVICE
 Bureau Chief

WASHINGTON — TALKERS magazine and its sister company, Talk Radio News Service, held their third Inaugural Radio Row at the Liaison Hotel in the shadow of the Capitol. The event took place January 19-21 with more than 40 radio programs, stations, syndicators and networks participating. Planning took months with Kandy Stroud and a band of 30 volunteers booking at the beginning of November. Kandy's volunteers (many of them Capitol Hill press secretaries) had the challenging job of escorting guests to radio broadcasting positions in three rooms spread out over two floors. The Talk Radio News Service staff received a bit of extra help from co-sponsor Comrex's Chris Crump and the bright students of the University of New Mexico's journalism intern program.



The booking of guests for this event was much more difficult than average radio rows (as if there is such a thing) because anyone who was potentially serving in the Obama Administration was not allowed to be interviewed. It has long been against the policy of incoming presidents to have staffers-to-be blabbing to the media.

Although hosts on the Democratic side of the fence dominated this radio row, there were plenty of middle-of-the-road and conservative hosts as well, including Jack Rice who hosted for WCCO, Minneapolis and KOGO, San Diego; Blanquita Cullum for WOAI, San Antonio; Dom Giordano for WPHT, Philadelphia and George Russell for WSMN, Nashua, New Hampshire. The radio row had an international flavor as well with two competing stations coming

from the Bahamas — GEMS and ZNS — and News Talk Ireland broadcasting for hours at a time. WHTB, Fall River, Massachusetts broadcasts in Portuguese but managed to snag its Congressman, Barney Frank. He stated that the radio row was the most constructive initiative in its 20 years of broadcasting.

This radio row had several firsts. Three popular internet radio shows had significant impact increasing the busy buzz of the row: Gary Baumgarten of Paltalk; Michael Levin of Progressive Blend Radio; and The Guy James Show. Another first for this radio row was that some broadcasters and stations heard about the row and its location and just showed up hoping they could be accommodated. By magic they were able to broadcast but it took some massive moving around of equipment and lines and guests by the Talk Radio News Service staff and by Kandy Stroud's booking operation.

The guests kept coming and coming, especially amid the excitement of Oprah Winfrey broadcasting her January 21 show live from the Liaison. More than 100 guests were booked into 1,000 interview slots during the four days. However, some guests could not make it through the roadblocks and traffic. Several members of Congress got stuck in their offices as the massive influx of constituents coming to the Inauguration wanted to have a chat with their representatives. However, those Congressional members and Senators who came were gracious with their time and sat down in front of many microphones. New Senators Mark Warner (D-VA), Jeane Shaheen (D-NH), and Jeff Merkley (D-OR) were joined by many members of the Black Caucus as well as the House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn. Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) was staying at the hotel so he offered him-



self up to do interviews several times a day. Other guests included radio row co-sponsor Tom Buffenbarger, president of the International Machinists and Aerospace Workers Union. Tom stayed for hours and was able to get to know many of the hosts off air as well as on. Other great guests included European Union Ambassador to the U.S. John Bruton, James Zogby, NAACP President Ben Jealous and the always talkative and fun Russell Simmons. Given the Oprah Winfrey buzz, Liaison Hotel co-sponsor made its chef available for interviews giving a fun and non-political touch to the interviews. Hosts also interviewed each other, and Thom Hartmann was spotted spending quite a bit of time on Stephanie Miller's show.

Hosts attending had positive things to say about this radio row. Dom Giordano described it as an island of calm in a sea of crowds and lack of resources. Angela Anderson, PD of WGIR, Manchester, said that she was able to offer a different view than the television networks, and listeners were very responsive. She loved Kennedy family spokesperson Melody Miller, who was able to offer insight about what the Obama children were going to experience. David Elliott from WGUF, Marco, Florida attended his first radio row and felt he had access to guests that his audience would never have been able to tap in such a short period of time.

A number of hosts used their creativity to the max. WWRL, New York's Errol Louis took advantage of the long lines everywhere in the city. He sent his producer to Starbucks and interviewed people from all over America who had traveled to the event. Their audience loved it. Talk Radio News Service's Bob Ney (former U.S. Rep.) who was welcomed by his former colleagues with bear hugs, helped Howard Monroe from WVLY, Wheeling and West Virginia Radio Network along. This was Ney's first trip to Washington since being released from prison on corruption charges.

Syndication One/Radio One had one of the largest footprints. With weeks of plan-

ning by Kirk Tanter, many shows broadcast live from the event including Warren Ballentine's show and Tom Joyner's show anchored by co-host Sybil Wilkes. Other shows included Yolanda Adams, Rickey Smiley and Russ Parr.

There were some issues with the obtaining of credentials. The Senate Radio-TV gallery had 4,000 more requests than they could honor. They tried in earnest and gave every show at least one credential to watch the swearing-in ceremony. Several shows were able to broadcast from the scaffolding set up along the side of the Capitol, including Rip Daniels from WJZD-FM, Gulfport, Mississippi; Air America Media's Thom Hartmann; WWRL, New York; Peter Case from WKVT and WRSY in Brattleboro, Vermont; and News Talk Ireland who were in the Talk Radio News Service space. Four broadcast lines and 10 square feet made it very cozy and a bit warmer on a cold day.

The problem was the Presidential Inaugural Committee gave radio short shrift. They allotted only six tickets to the Sunday afternoon concert and only one ticket to cover the Inaugural Ball for more than 40 radio hosts and stations. Depending on who was giving the explanation, the reasons varied from "we have to give local print the space" and "radio is not our priority" to "television coverage is where we have decided to give our credentials." No amount of appeals changed their allocation and many hosts were disappointed. Liberal host Chris Hennen of WZFG, Fargo, "The Flag," worries that this is a sign that the Obama Administration will neglect progressive talk radio...a bitter thought in the aftermath of President George W. Bush meeting at the White House with his most supportive hosts during the final six days he was in office as a great thank you.



Ellen Ratner is bureau chief of Talk Radio News Service. She can be e-mailed at ellen@talkradio.com.



Air America Media (soon to be with Dial Global) talk star Thom Hartmann (l), publicist Kandy Stroud (c) and U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) (r) smile for the *TALKERS* magazine camera at the publication's Inaugural Radio Row in Washington, DC presented in conjunction with Talk Radio News Service.