On the Air with the Good News Guys

Story and Photos by Debbie L. Holmer

Gray skies are going to clear up
   Put on a happy face…
Pick out a pleasant outlook
   Stick out that noble chin…
Spread sunshine all over the place
   Just put on a happy face.
   —"Put On a Happy Face,"
sung by Dick Van Dyke (1960, Bye Bye Birdie)
composed by Lee Adams and Charles Strause

It’s 7:00 a.m. on a weekday morning in Fort Bragg and, as I’ve been doing for the past eight years, I turn on the radio to KSAY 98.5 fm’s the Good News Guys show with Fred Vodicka and Jay Odee.

How it all started…
Back in 1994, a couple of guys, Elmer Barney (he prefers going by his last name) and Fred Vodicka, created a morning radio program called the Good News Guys.

It was Barney’s love of radio that brought about the Good News Guys. Born and raised in Vermont, he was an avid radio fan as a child and would pretend to be the DJ. Barney told me several years ago, that after graduating from high school, he had a choice of radio school or the air force. He chose the air force.

Barney moved to Little River in 1989. He still loved radio, and after moving [to the Mendocino Coast] he became a weekend news announcer at KDAC. He then switched over to KSAY as a news announcer and DJ. Then in 1994, during the O.J. Simpson trial hype, Barney thought he should start a radio show with a “good news” theme.

It all started on July 4, 1994 to be exact, when Barney and Fred were watching the Mendocino Fourth of July parade. The two knew each other from their days as fellow members of the local Fort Bragg Kiwanis Club. Barney saw Fred and said that he wanted to do a good news program and that he needed a co-host. So they took the idea to Paul Clark at KDAC and bought the time from him. Monday, Wednesday, and Fridays for forty minutes right after Paul Harvey.

At the end of 1994 the Good News Guys went to KSAY who was Barney’s old employer. They had to pay for the airtime in advance but were on the air five days a week. Signing up fifteen sponsors in thirty days, they talked live about the businesses and the people who own them. And folks could phone in. By December 1996, they were getting so much material they extended the program to two hours, having more great sponsors.

Barney and Fred co-hosted the program for a number of years. After Barney moved from the area about three-and-a-half years ago, Fort Bragg resident Jay Odee became Fred’s “good news” radio pal.

Although I was unsuccessful in trying to reach Barney, I understand from friends that after successfully battling cancer he’s been traveling the world. One said he was in China, another said he was on the way to Costa Rica! Well, wherever he is, we know Barney is still listening to the radio and sharing “good news” along the way.

The Good News Guys radio program focuses exclusively on good news in the Fort Bragg/Mendocino communities and the surrounding area. They inject as much humor as possible into their spontaneous and
unrehearsed dialogue.

Local resident Lori Cole shared the following story with me: “I used to sit in for one or the other when they were out. And they were both a lot of fun to work with. When they first started on KDAC, the show was less than an hour long, but I loved listening to them, and would laugh all the time. So I wrote a postcard to them saying, ‘I love your show. There’s only two things wrong with it. Number one, it’s too short and number two, it’s not on enough days in the week!’ So guess what? A short time after that, they moved to KSAY for two hours, five days a week. I was thrilled!”

**Live from the little blue building on Main Street in the heart of Fort Bragg…**

On this March 2005 morning, after hearing the theme song, “Put On a Happy Face,” Fred starts out the morning with, “Well, Jay, it looks like a real gully washer today.” And their day begins!

Fred and Jay play all kinds of music—from the thirties and forties to the eighties and nineties—jazz, swing, blues, folk, country, show tunes, even a little bit of rock and roll! They play music that people know and love, their listeners range from age ten to ninety!

On this particular day, they feature Herb Alpert, Del Vikings’ “Come Go With Me,” Ella Fitzgerald’s “A Tisket, A Tasket,” the Jackie Gleason orchestra, Perry Como, Carly Simon, Doris Day and Ray Charles’ “Georgia.” There was Petula Clark singing “My Song,” written by Charles Chaplin for the movie “Limelight.” Oh yes, and Fats Waller and the Beach Boys, too—just to name a few!

Their sponsors feel like old friends—and they are. Today they were talking about a favorite local pizzeria, a Noyo Harbor sports boat captain, and the owner of an antiques and collectible shop. It’s all so interesting that I forget I’m listening to a “paid sponsor.”

Local residents call in on a regular basis with requests and announcements of upcoming community events and just to chat. Some of the regulars over the years have been Jim Holmes, Bob Ballew, Viola King, John Whatley, John Skinner, Lori Cole. Oh, and don’t forget our beloved Irishman Harry Fortune, who wrote the weekly “Golf Notes, etc.” column in the *Fort Bragg Advocate-News* and *Mendocino Beacon* for so many years.

Fred and Jay are always happy to take requests and in the last half hour they announce local birthdays and anniversaries, along with much fanfare! They talk about sports—right now it’s basketball’s March Madness. And, of course, there’s the reading of the daily menu at the Redwood Coast Senior Center.

Whether it’s a free community Easter dinner, a dialysis fund-raiser, the Mendocino Study Club Country Christmas, or a musical extravaganza, Fred and Jay are always sharing good causes and happy events with their audience.

**The good ol’ days…**

Fred and Jay talk a lot about the history of our Mendocino Coast—the old Piedmont Hotel, Cousins Inn on Main Street, the Windsor Hotel that was owned by Ole Hervilla (there were fifty rooms that rented for two dollars per night. Verna Wales was the organist, and she played all requests. A fire destroyed this hotel). They talk about the Hotel Italia and its wonderful family-style dinners, the Fort Bragg Hotel (did you know that at four stories high, it was the tallest building ever in Fort Bragg?), Loggers games, B & C Grocery, State Theater, and Eagles Hall and its renovations over the last few years.

One of my favorite “history” topics is when the Good News Guys are talking about Lena Paolinelli’s Green Parrot, an old-time Fort Bragg soda fountain where many of their listeners hung out during their high school days.

Judge Ray Ware started the Green Parrot, which was located on Laurel Street in Fort Bragg, in 1927, and in 1947 Pete and Lena Paolinelli purchased it from him. They owned it for thirty-eight years. Mary Shaeffer, who worked at the Green Parrot when she was in high school brought in an original menu from
the popular gathering place. Lena said on an earlier radio program, “Oh, how we loved that place, especially seeing the kids come in after school. It was a special time in our lives that we will never be able to recreate.”

Some years ago Dee Lemos wrote in the Mendocino Beacon about the Green Parrot: “What a treat it was for us to come in from Comptche as children to visit our relatives the Hardells (who owned the store next door) and to have an ice cream cone! Comptche had no electricity in those days, so ice cream cones were non-existent. So those cones at Green Parrot were the best. In those early years, a lemon cherry, or chocolate coke could be had for five cents, a milkshake made with real cream was ten cents, and a banana split was thirty cents. What a hangout this was for the young and also for the adults who went there to eat from 9:00 p.m. to midnight during dances. It was also a favorite place to go after baseball games when long lines would form.”

The Green Parrot was an important location site in 1985 for the film, Racing with the Moon. When Fred and Barney were together and started talking about old-time baseball players who live on the Mendocino Coast, Dee Lemos wrote an article about the program and the baseball team her husband played for in the forties.

**Our guest on the show today is…**
The Good News Guys have had many guests on their show through the years—Doris Day, Judy Collins, Shelley Berman, Red Socks Hall of Famer Bobby Doerr, Hall of Famer Duke Snider, local resident Gayle Caldwell (formerly of the New Christy Minstrels), locals Olaf Palm and pianist Jason Serfling, George Guzzi (the creator of the original Star Trek poster), Jack Armstrong, the “All-American Boy” from old-time radio fame and numerous other local entertainers throughout the years.

**Fred Vodicka**
Born in Carmel, California, “with all the movie stars,” Fred was raised in San Mateo, California. Kris Kristofferson was a fellow high school student.

After high school, Fred worked for a large chemical corporation then went into business for himself for many years before retiring to the coast.

A resident of Mendocino since 1986, he and his wife Janet were married for forty-five years until she passed away in July of 2002. Fred has three children—Kenneth, Joanne and Linda.

Many years ago, “on a dark and stormy night,” on the way down south from a business trip to Eureka, Fred and his wife stopped off for a night at the Mendocino Hotel. They fell in love with the area, bought some property and were able to retire here. What does he like best about living here? “The people, without a doubt.”

Fred loves to travel; New Orleans is next on his itinerary.

What does Fred want the listener to hear when he/she listens to the Good News Guys? “I want them to be entertained—something they can't hear anywhere else and that they'll enjoy.”

Our world is in such a turmoil, with so much change. What's music got to do with all this? Fred answers, “Music is the universal language—it gets to your emotions more rapidly than words do. It's important in this day and age, it's food for the soul.”


What's the best piece of advice he can give to others? “Try to listen to the Good News Guys whenever you can!”

**Jay Odee**
Born in Argentia, Newfoundland (an island off Maine), the son of a navy pilot, Jay grew up in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maryland, Guam and Florida. Jay attended high school in Florida, after his dad’s retirement. Jay joined the marines after college and was an air traffic controller in El Toro, California, for six years. He then
became an architectural photographer for many years before moving to the Mendocino Coast.

Sally Ottoson of Pacific Star Winery introduced Jay to his wife, Tammy Patrick. Tammy is owner of Pacific Physical Therapy in Fort Bragg and Jay’s stepdaughter is Chelsea, who is “almost” seventeen. Chelsea just returned from living in Japan for a year.

Jay moved to Fort Bragg ten years ago and has been an integral part of the community ever since. He has been very actively involved with the recent extensive renovations of Eagles Hall in Fort Bragg.

What does Jay want the listener to hear when he/she listens to the Good News Guys? “The same feeling I get from living here—what’s good about life!”

Our world is in such a turmoil, with so much change. What’s music got to do with all this? Jay’s answer: “I believe that the best music I’ve ever heard has been written in really bad times, songs like ‘Happy Days Are Here Again,’ written during the depression. Our country has always come together through hard work and adversity. Knowing where music comes from is important—we humans especially shine during these hard times.”


What’s the best advice anyone has ever given Jay? “When my dad told me ‘life’s not fair.’” And a message from his father’s college yearbook, “I never let school interfere with my education.”

**KSAY-98.5 FM**

Founded in December of 1988 by Wade Axell, KSAY 98.5 FM is a small rural radio station. The KSAY signal reaches over to Willits to the east, south as far as Point Arena, along Highway 128 and into the Anderson Valley, north to Westport and even Garberville. In short, they blanket the Mendocino Coast. Other than the Good News Guys, KSAY is an adult contemporary music station, however, Axell tells me that they are always on the lookout for locals with a specific area of expertise that they might want to share with KSAY’s listeners. For more information, call 964-5729.

**See you on the radio…**

Oops, must run, it’s a few minutes after seven on a weekday morning in Fort Bragg. “Put On a Happy Face,” their theme song, is playing on KSAY, and a couple of guys named Fred and Jay are having the time of their lives!

So, put another log on the fire, pour that second cup of coffee and listen to the Good News Guys. This article, Fred, Barney and Jay, is my serenade to you!

**See you on the Web…**

The Good News Guys love to get phone calls from their listeners with good news to share, musical requests, birthdays, anniversaries, and community events. Their number is 964-5729. They can now also be heard all over the world on their own Website at www.goodnewsguys.net.

_Gonna take a sentimental journey_  
_Gonna set my heart at ease._  
_Gonna take a sentimental journey_  
_To renew old memories._

—sung by Doris Day, 1944,  
composed by Green, Homer and Brown