A Face for Radio: A Closer Look at WITR
by Tara Martin

WITR is one of RIT’s best kept secrets. People are familiar with it, but they need to be more familiar with it,” said Jeanne Yamonaco, WITR disc jockey and member of the Liberal Arts support faculty for NTID.

For more than 30 years, 89.7FM WITR has served the Rochester area, providing an eclectic mix of music from the third largest music library in New York State. The variety of programming ranges from Reggae to Christian music.

“College music is great because we are not bound by the limits placed on commercial radio stations,” said Yamonaco. “We can play lesser known but fabulous music and expose audiences to this variety.”

Edward Steffens, former General Manager of WITR (1968-69), was there when the station moved from the College Union in downtown Rochester to its current location in the SAU basement. Before the move, WITR broadcast through a closed circuit sound system in the RIT dormitories.

Steffens, now a professor in the Hospitality and Service Management department, remembers the struggles of gaining support for the station. “We did not broadcast 24/7 back then — there was not enough demand and we did not have the staff. Our budgets were made up largely of advertising dollars from Coca-Cola, a variety of small local businesses and a small stipend from Student Government.”

Yamonaco has been with WITR for five years. Her attraction to WITR was the chance to work with deaf students. “My voice is not really necessary, but I thought it would be a good thing to be heard,” she said. After working on the air, Yamonaco realized that she had no idea how soft or loud her voice was. Now that she has her own show (Mondays and Wednesdays from 12 p.m. to 2 p.m.), she’s learned to work with the different dimensions of her voice and it has actually made her stronger.

Drew Krull, a fourth-year Professional & Technical Communication (PTC) major, is also a member of WITR. Holding office positions in promotions, and production, and General Manager, Krull has learned every facet of the radio station. His involvement in the radio station was even a reason for his decision to change majors to PTC. “I decided [physics] wasn’t for me, so I said ‘Hey, I like radio, I’ll be PTC’.” His show, “Saturday Morning Mahem,” is broadcast every Saturday morning from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Ron Bauerle has a similar story. He transferred from Computer Engineering to PTC. He currently hosts a metal show called “Sudden Death Overtime” on Saturday nights at 10 p.m. and Sunday mornings at 4 a.m. When asked if he wants to stay in the radio field, Bauerle said, “If I stayed in radio I’d rather work on talk radio. On commercial radio, you have to play what they tell you to play.”

Students, faculty, and community members are always welcome and encouraged to become a part of the station. Many of RIT’s degree programs such as PTC and Marketing lend themselves well to positions at WITR. Promotions, engineering, finance, production, and, of course, announcing are just some of the numerous departments that keep the station alive.

On a personal note, I switched to PTC from photography because I wanted to pursue a career in music. PTC, to me, was the most practical way to accomplish my goal. Working at WITR has taught me both the business and technical side of radio, not to mention hands-on experience. This knowledge landed me internships at radio stations in Philadelphia and New York and at the Grammy’s. I owe COLA and WITR for my experiences and my future. •