



**February 14, 2013**

## **MSCC to Operate Historic KWEM Radio Station; Students, Community to Benefit**

KWEM Radio, which forever changed the musical landscape by allowing unknown or little-known Memphis-area artists the opportunity to perform on air, will soon have a new home at Mid-South Community College.

MSCC's Foundation has purchased the Web-based station and numerous artifacts related to its rich musical history and will establish an on-campus "studio" that will serve as a laboratory for students, a source of pride for the community, and a tourism draw, all at the same time.

"This is a rich part of our community's history that our students, and many of our residents know nothing about," said Dr. Glen Fenter, MSCC President. "This acquisition gives us the opportunity to take the newest

in technology and make it do something 'old school' while telling a rich story of our heritage at the same time. It opens up mind-boggling possibilities for our College and our community."

Marvin Steele, chair of the MSCC Board of Trustees, said he can remember listening to KWEM while growing up in eastern Arkansas, and "I think it's a great thing. I believe the artifacts will draw people and musicians into our area, and it will give us a good opportunity to build on our musical history and heritage. I also think it will give us a lot of positive publicity nationwide."





“The Foundation is fortunate to have the opportunity and the resources to play a part in this historic effort,” added MSCC Foundation Chair Franklin Fogleman. “Our goal is to support the College in meeting the needs of students as well as Crittenden County, and this is certainly a worthwhile educational pursuit. KWEM is a great story waiting to be told, and MSCC will tell it in a way that will enrich our community and our region.”

Leigh Ann Hastings, Executive Director of Main Street West Memphis, said the College’s efforts to promote KWEM and the community are appreciated.

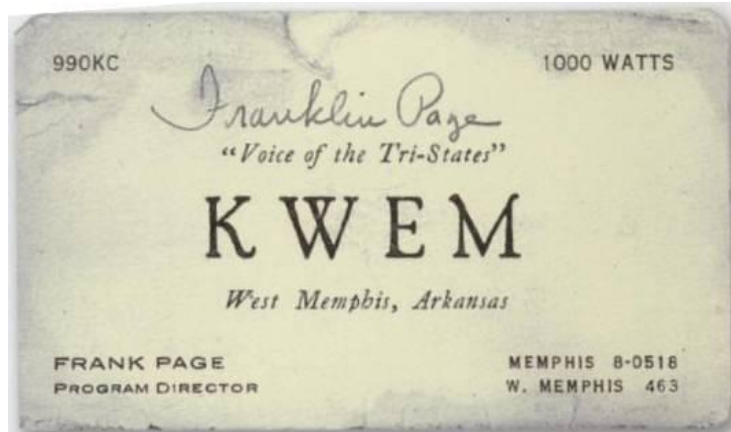
“Main Street West Memphis is very excited to see MSCC operating the KWEM radio station,” she said. “Our music heritage needs to be broadcasted, and there isn’t a better place to do it than through new technology from MSCC. My hope is people in our community will learn about the importance and the impact that KWEM radio had on music heritage and our city.”

Holmes Hammett, Executive Director of the West Memphis Chamber of Commerce, said the radio station and display at MSCC will help the city attract more visitors.

“Music is a big draw in this area, and the work Mid-South Community College is doing with KWEM will create additional tourism interest in West Memphis and Crittenden County,” he said.

“Everyone benefits when more people visit our community, and this will give us another opportunity to showcase what we have to offer.”

Dale Franklin, former station owner who is now serving as a consultant for MSCC, said KWEM “is literally one of the most important radio stations in history. KWEM gave birth to the ‘electric blues’ and started the rockabilly revolution that would lead to rock ‘n’ roll and the Memphis sound.”



“The station is listed as a significant connection and part of the origin story on the applications for both Graceland and Sun Studios on the National Register of Historic Places,” added Franklin, who has conducted extensive research into KWEM’s place in history. “Although its story is not widely known, its impact and the artists that it produced are undeniable.”

Franklin revived the station and its past while doing research for a documentary on the history of West Memphis. MSCC plans to take the effort to the next level.

“We can’t go buy a million-dollar AM or FM frequency, but we can take the new digital technology on the Web and recreate the radio station experience which Dale has been doing on his own,” Dr. Fenter said. “Dale has done a phenomenal amount of research. We’re taking a great idea, a great concept to a level that I think can significantly impact this entire community and region.”

“We are uniquely positioned because Memphis is already spending millions and millions of dollars a year attracting people to the musical heritage of the region, and those people are looking for other historic places to go. Our community can become one of those options.”

MSCC plans to create a campus-based replica of the KWEM studio which was originally located at 231 Broadway Street in downtown West Memphis (on the first floor of what is now Regions Bank). A historical music trail marker has been placed there to commemorate the station's role in the region's musical heritage.

“The thing that makes the KWEM Radio story compelling is the artists and their music, not so much the physical location of the studio,” Dr. Fenter pointed out. “It is more important to connect the essence of the KWEM Radio story and its profound impact on music history to the West Memphis identity.”

Students associated with the College's new classes in Digital Media will have the opportunity to make new history.

“Students will have a chance to produce their own programming in keeping with the station's heritage,” Dr. Fenter said. “It will be a great opportunity for them to blend the history of the 1940s and 1950s with the technology of today.”

The station's global broadcasting includes the historic music that started the station – vintage and modern blues, rockabilly and the electric blues.

KWEM hit the airwaves in 1946 as 1,000-watt, daylight-hours-only radio station. A year later, it began featuring live music performances by anyone who could purchase (or find a sponsor) for a 15-minute time slot.

The station's live play list included such legendary musicians such as Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, George Klein, B.B. King, Sonny Boy Williamson, Albert King, Ike Turner, Reggie Young, Howlin' Wolf, Little Junior Parker, James Cotton, Phineas and Calvin Newborn, Hubert Sumlin, Elmore James,



Houston Stackhouse, Bobby Blue Bland, Willie Mitchell, Willie Nix, Willie Love, Roscoe Gordon, and Tuff Green. Elvis Presley's first radio performance came on KWEM in 1953.

More than 200 artists took advantage of the opportunity to perform on the West Memphis station, and more than a few went on to sign recording contracts with SUN, STAX, Meteor, Chess, RPM, Atlantic, among others.

For information about Mid-South Community College, see the website at [www.midsouthcc.edu](http://www.midsouthcc.edu), email [admissions@midsouthcc.edu](mailto:admissions@midsouthcc.edu), or visit the campus at 2000 West Broadway in West Memphis.