

No Magic Formula At WPGC

By BORIS WEINTRAUB

WASHINGTON—Jim Collins, program director of WPGC, this city's only Top 40 station, isn't entirely sure just what has brought his station to its current position at the top of the heap.

But, whatever it is, he says the station will continue to do "more of it, and better" in the future.

WPGC is a nearly unique station in that it is a combination AM-FM tandem. The AM side is a dawn-to-dusk operation, but the FM side runs 24 hours a day and has a clearly dominant position in the 12-to-34 audience the station is aiming at.

Any number of other stations have had shots at WPGC, but all have fallen by the wayside. The last to attack the problem head-on was WRC, NBC's owned-and-operated affiliate, which dropped out when NBC introduced its all-news service two years ago. Since then, WPGC has had the Top 40 field all to itself.

One possible factor in the WPGC success story, says Collins, is the "combined knowledge" of the station's personnel.

"Four of the station's six disk jockeys have been program directors at other stations and they all have a voice in what we do, though I have more votes than they do," Collins says.

"Our music director, Jim Elliott, has been with WRKO in Boston, was with WRC when they were rocking against us and was program director at WEAM here until I hired him two years ago."

WEAM was another loser in the ratings scramble and passed through an album format before becoming a soul station last year.

Collins, who has been with WPGC for five years and has been program director for the last two years, says that it has been more than what he jokingly calls "copious amounts of talent" that has made his station a winner.

"We try to pay attention to what's going on in this city, as opposed to just what's active on the national charts," he says. "We get a lot of store reports, we watch to see what albums are selling and we pay a lot

of attention to phone research, calls.

"Every market is different. In this market now, we're getting an onslaught of FM stations now, and we have to keep up with them. We went through the big disco rush about a year ago and it seems that that is what's going on nationally right now. The trick is to keep up with what people's tastes are, without overreacting."

WPGC has long been active in the

(Continued on page 26)

No Magic Formula At WPGC

• *Continued from page 24*

contest field, with each contest aimed at a specific purpose and time.

"We try to be as innovative in our contests as we are in our programming," Collins says. "I notice that a couple of our contest ideas have turned up on other major stations, so we must be doing something right."

At the moment, the station has several contests going, including one pegged to the current cold spell that has frozen in the Washington area.

"This will be a quick one," Collins says, "but the prize will be an all-expense-paid trip to Acapulco to let the winner get away from here. We're also thinking of a contest in which the winner would get his fuel bill paid.

"We're also running a \$100 bill giveaway, in which we give the serial number over a three-hour period. That's designed to keep up the quarter-hour maintenance. And we're still running our on-going bumper

sticker giveaway, in which a cash car spots cars with our bumper stickers on them."

Collins thinks that it takes more than the right formula to make a station successful.

"Everybody tries, but everybody that tries it doesn't seem to make it," he observes. "One of the things about this station is that we're willing to invest money where it's needed—in contests, in people and in equipment.

"If you tune across the dial, you notice that our signal is one of the strongest. We have one of the best engineers in the country, and our signal is tops."

The FM signal has 50,000 watts of power, the AM signal 10,000. Collins says that roughly two out of every seven listeners tune in on AM and the rest to FM.

Despite WPGC's solitary position at the top, Collins says that it doesn't lack for competition. He says that several other stations, all on FM, are

aiming at one portion or another of the 12-to-34 age group and that many of them play the same records.

"WMOD plays a lot of the same records, WASH plays a lot of the same records and DC-101 is going after many of our listeners, too," he notes.

Collins, a native of Kansas, first came to the Washington area in 1969 when he was in the army, and worked as a night disk jockey at WPGC while stationed at Walter Reed Army Hospital. He was an announcer for the Armed Forces Network while in the service and joined WPGC full-time after getting his discharge.

The station's lineup includes Tim Kelly, a veteran of WCFL in Chicago, in the morning drive time; Jim Elliott from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.; Collins himself from 2 to 6 p.m.; Ron O'Brien, another WCFL veteran, from 6 to 10 p.m.; Dino Del Gallo from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m., and Keith MacDonald from 2 to 6 a.m.