

WPGC On-Air Personalities Strike

By Don Shirley

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The on-air personalities at WPGC, the popular Bladensburg's rock'n'roll station, are on strike. The negotiations broke down between their union, the Washington-Baltimore local of the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA), and WPGC management.

The strikers include all of the station's announcers, news staff and the "Money Girls" who patrol the streets searching for cars with WPGC bumper stickers. AFTRA has formed a picket line around the WPGC building.

First Media Corporation, which owns WPGC, has imported announcers from its stations and Provo, Utah, to help replace the strikers. Those stations do not have contracts with AFTRA.

The radio station plays what is known generally as "Top 40" music, which consists of the top-selling rock and pop records interspersed with an occasional oldie but goodie. The steady flow of upbeat tunes is punctuated with various contests and a chance to win \$30 for "sound-off of the week," a complaint about a local or national issue.

According to Evelyn Freyman, executive secretary of the AFTRA local, WPGC wants to change the contract language to allow the conversion of announcers' jobs from full-time to part-time positions and "to automate the station." The new language would allow the station to require announcers to tape several days' worth of chatter in one day, she charged, and could turn the station from a live operation 24 hours a day into a station with substantial blocks of pre-taped shows.

Station manager Bill Prettyman called these charges "simply untrue." He said "there are no plans to automate WPGC" and added that the scenario in which full-time announcers would become part-timers "is not even close to the truth." He declined to give his own characterization of the strike issues.

A meeting between negotiators and U.S. mediators has been scheduled for Friday morning.

First Media bought WPGC in 1974, after the last contract with AFTRA had been ratified. The corporation is owned by members of the Marriott family, though it is unaffiliated with the Marriott Corporation.