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How WPGC toppled WMAL as kingpin of area radio

By Dennis John Lewis
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More fuel for the ratings war was delivered this weekend as Arbitron's spring data arrived at Washington radio stations. Figures from the "new book" surprised radio insiders anew as a resurgent Top 40/rock WPGC-AM (1580) and FM (95.5) posted its first victory in listener share, average quarter-hour listenership and cumulative listenership.

The new data verified advance survey figures which recently dubbed WPGC as the area's most-listened-to radio station as the rocker grabbed an 11 in listener shares compared to WMAL's drop to 9.3. Significantly, the figures represented the first time in 15 years that middle-of-the-road WMAL-AM (630) has been deprived of the top spot.

The new survey data showed:

- In cumulative metro area listening, WPGC's spring showing jumped to 633,000 from a January showing of 575,600, while WMAL's audience dipped to 576,600 from 589,500.

- WPGC's base was strong among adult listeners. Among listeners over the age of 25, WPGC succeeded in increasing its cumulative audience by one-third; and doubling its average quarter-hour audience, pulling 22,500 compared to its winter figure of 11,300; WMAL figures hit 37,500 from 38,600.

- In dayparts, among 25-to-54 year olds, WPGC posted higher listener shares in midday and evening listening periods; WMAL kept a small edge in afternoon drive and held its best audience in morning drive (Harden and Weaver) as WPGC gained listeners in both timeslots.

- WPGC's usually strong teenage base eroded from 33.3 to 26.3 despite the fact that ABC Radio's newly-designed teen-appeal station, WRQX-FM (Q107), proved a dud in the Arbitron survey *actually* dropping its teen share from its winter showing as an album rock outlet (10.4 to 8.1).

At WMAL, the grumbling over the first loss was chiefly directed toward Arbitron surveys. "Arbitron had the smallest return of rating diaries in recent years for this survey — 1535 deemed usable out of 2649 sent out," said Marshall Smith, the ABC-owned-and-operated station's resident statistician, noting Arbitron's recovery rate dropped to 57 percent compared to 71 percent for spring 1978.

Smith also explains this was the survey firm's first expanded sample frame spring book (which would tend to help stations with larger youth and minority-oriented for-

mats); the spring book is always a letdown at WMAL; and this spring represented a time WMAL started consolidating its listenership in the 25-to-54 category, with some older listeners switching to beautiful music stations.

Whatever the explanations, several industry observers foresaw changes in the dynamics of the radio market as a result of WPGC's triumph. "It will have a tremendous impact on businessmen here as industry people look to the Morning-side, Md. station to lead the way in terms of rate card structure. Every additional 1,000 listeners means added dollars charged to advertisers."

WMAL's posture was adjudged weakened by several radio insiders yesterday who forecast a realignment of programming sometime soon.