

Their avid listeners are giving St. Francis High's KSFH a Great Reception

Too bad you can't tune in outside the school's parking lot

Heather Knight, Chronicle Staff Writer
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(06-02) 04:00 PST PENINSULA -- Surrounded by colored Christmas lights, a framed poster of bare-midriffed Britney Spears and all the equipment of a commercial radio station, three high school disc jockeys work diligently into the night.

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Yes, it's a Friday in late spring and the campus at Mountain View's Saint Francis High is deserted.

Yes, the station has less power than most light bulbs (a meager 10 watts), and their four-hour radio show can't be heard more than a few miles beyond the school grounds.

And yes, the sparse CD collection they've inherited from station alums includes the likes of Weird Al Yankovich and 1980s pop sensation Tiffany.

No matter. They're having a blast, and the yellowed certificate of operation from the Federal

Communications Commission, kept safely in a glass case, proves the radio station -- KSFH at 87.9 on your FM dial -- is legit.

All in their junior year at St. Francis and all wearing some combination of baggy shorts, jeans, spiky hair, visors and wraparound sunglasses, they shout into the microphone in disgust. One of them has jokingly threatened to cue up a song from the -- gasp! -- 1970s. They weren't even born then, but know it must be bad nonetheless.

``Oh! Not the '70s!" shouts one.

``That's so terrible!" screams another, grabbing for the microphone.

They make the requisite jokes about gas and body odor and then play a favorite Metallica tune. As the opening chords resound, they make one last plea into the mike.

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``Give us a call!" shouts Mark Kolich, who goes by the on-air name, ``Glitch."

``Even if the lady says the school is closed, it's not!"

For Kolich, 17, Ian ``Evil I" Kenworthy, 16, and Tyler Martin, 16, high school life involves a lot more than algebra and proms. They and about 80 other members of the school's radio club spend countless hours hosting after-school shows, sponsoring school concerts, soliciting promotional CDs from record companies --

even dealing with the FCC.

St. Francis, a private school, has one of California's three legal, licensed high school radio stations run solely by students, according to the radio club and the school's administrators. Kolich says he knows of one at Valley Christian in San Jose and one at Clayton Valley High School in Concord. A spokesman for the FCC says the agency does not distinguish between high school, college and commercial stations and cannot confirm the number.

Established in 1977, KSFH has the highest annual budget -- between \$4,000 and \$6,000 -- of any club at the school.

In its 23 years, the station has spawned some professional radio careers, including that of Eric ``DJ Strawberry" Fielden, class of '93, who hosts a rap and dance show on San Francisco's Wild 94.9. (Fielden got his nickname at KSFH. ``I was one pound and one foot tall and had red hair," he says.)

``It's a real good outlet," he says. ``You're in control of all the stuff that you're normally not in control of. You want to hear a song or you want to hear something done on the radio, now you have the chance."

The school's teachers and administrators are among the station's biggest fans. Paul DeCunzo, 35, a chemistry teacher with platinum blond hair, has advised the radio club for 10 years. Though he and his students no longer share the same musical tastes, he has fun seeing the kids find their niche.

``Kids that really like music, they're not always organized," he says. ``They can be flaky, so it's an opportunity to get them into an organized environment."

Christie Filios, the school's director of activities, says KSFH gives students another outlet for creativity. ``They like the performance aspect of having their own shows and the technical part of learning how to operate equipment," she says. ``They've taken on a lot more leadership, as opposed to our other clubs that tend to be driven more by a faculty moderator suggesting that they do things."

As many as 25 student DJs go on the air with their own after-school shows, about a third of them girls. Julia Huang, 17, a junior from Mountain View, has been hosting ``The Wham Hour," which spotlights punk and indie rock, for a year.

``I've always wanted to be a DJ, so this was my chance to actually try," she says. ``You get to play your own music and express your individuality through it. I think that's why most of the students want to be DJs, so they can share with our community what teens

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Of course, Huang laments, that's not a huge community. ``It would be a lot nicer if people in Milpitas or San Jose and possibly San Francisco could hear our radio station," she says.

As seniors, Kolich and his pals say they'll focus on getting approval from the FCC to boost their wattage. After all, 10 watts is barely enough to power a night light.

``The feedback is, `Oh, I can never even hear you in the parking lot,' " Kolich says, shaking his head. ``It gets old having everybody put us down all the time. We get no respect at all."

That's not exactly true, judging by the fawning classmates who stop by the station just to chat with Kolich and his partners.

``They're the best DJs at the school," says Margaret Neeley, 17, still flushed after field hockey practice. ``They have the best commentary. I would listen to the station (more) if it reached my house, but I live six miles away."

Still, Kolich and the others have made major improvements to KSFH. When they joined the club as freshmen, the situation was bleak.

``We brought the station out of the gutter," says Martin, of Los Altos. ``Half the students our sophomore year didn't even know we had a radio station."

Frisky couples used to sneak into the station's lobby to make out and forget to lock the door on their way out. ``That's how all our stuff got stolen," Martin sighs, referring to the myriad CDs that vanished.

That left them with a rather unfortunate library of music.

Kolich, of Los Altos, has spent hours picking out the worst albums and banishing them to the shelf labeled ``Purged CDs." A sign taped to the shelf reads, ``Do not play. Do not touch. Do not move."

``Most of the stuff, I've never heard of," says Kenworthy, of Mountain View. ``Maybe my parents have."

Maybe. But probably not. They wouldn't have any listeners with a playlist that featured some of these obscure titles: the Junk Monkeys' ``Bliss," Col. Bruce Hampton's ``The Psyclone Rangers" and Lloyd Cole's ``Don't Get Weird on Me, Babe."

Kenworthy has worked to build up the station's collection by seeking promotional material from record companies. He's now up to about 500 CDs, with several albums by the group's preferred bands -- the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Dr. Dre, Nirvana, Stone Temple Pilots -- and their absolute favorite, Metallica.

``They've overcome losing band members," Kolich says. ``They had to live in the slums of New York. They had to live in a one-bedroom apartment with just a cooler and some bologna. And they kept playing. Now they're eating filet mignon."

And while the station is still operating on a lunch-meat budget, the students make the best of it.

The playlist centers on rock and alternative music, with some rap and R&B thrown in. Listeners won't hear any Puff Daddy or Britney Spears. The poster of Spears in the tiny pink sweater, Martin says, is ``just for our personal satisfaction."

The station also broadcasts the school's basketball games and volleyball matches -- boys' and girls' events get airtime on an equal-opportunity basis -- and there are plans to add baseball games to the programming next year. A local commercial station broadcasts the school's football games.




The boys recently set up a Web site for the station at www.ksfh.com. (``Some of the bands that come through have said, `Dude, your Web site is the best,' " Martin says). They have also installed a computerized broadcast system so music can be heard 24 hours a day, provided you're nearby, regardless whether the DJs are in class or asleep.

They also have grand plans for remodeling the studio's booth next year and hope to add new CD racks and replace the windows and countertops. In addition, they'd like to get some technical help from a professional radio engineer.

Kenworthy, who also hopes someday to earn a living at a commercial radio station, says even a high school station demands full attention. ``If we don't go into radio past high school, we want to at least make sure we made this the best it could be."

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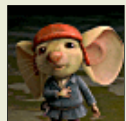
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