

Dallas McCade Kicks it up

The radio queen and her partner Cadillac Jack are driving up ratings

By Mary Welch

Of course Dallas McCade would define her life as a country song.

"I love the line by Jake Owens in Green Bananas," she says. "It goes, 'I don't buy green bananas 'cause I don't plan that far ahead. ...'"

McCade, the popular co-host of the WKHX (KICKS-FM 101.5) country morning show, might just want to take a chance on some ripe bananas. She has been a fixture in Atlanta radio since 1989 and is one of the few remaining queens of local radio who has survived – and thrived – despite program format changes, management changes, ownership changes, talent changes – or just about any other change that's thrown her way.

"The key to survival is attitude," she says. "It's all about attitude and loving your job. I love – love – what I do. I've been wanting to do this since I was little. I've been around so long that I know it's not about egos. The world doesn't revolve around me."

It's that down-home attitude that has allowed her to deftly maneuver through the latest change. Earlier this year, McCade was the morning co-host of Y106 The Eagle's morning show with Rhubarb Jones. Cadillac Jack held down the KICKS morning show with Kristen Gates (now heard in the mornings with Cledus T. Judd on the BULL). Both KICKS and The Eagle are owned by Citadel Broadcasting Co., which in March changed Eagle's format and laid off most of the on-air talent on both stations. Two of the survivors were Cadillac Jack and McCade.

"That was very tough," she admits. "On both stations those people who were affected were very nice, very talented and our friends. But, no matter how and why things worked out the way they did, it gave me and Caddy the chance to work together. We've been friends for 14 years, and I love him like a brother. We have major chemistry, and we've always wanted to work together."

She admits that it's a rare combination for the morning team to be equals but says that's the case with her. "I'd say in about 75 to 80 percent of the radio shows, the woman is the sidekick. Caddy doesn't look at it that way. He sees us as equals. I couldn't care less. He doesn't really have an ego, but I know how to get my digs in and make it fun."

The KICKS country morning show is a rapid fire one covering everything from teenage pregnancies – "Boy, were the lines burning on that one," she says – to a hysterical bit in which Caddy wished comedian Jeff Foxworthy a happy birthday. Although Foxworthy was turning 50, with each mention Caddy added a couple of years to Foxworthy's age. By the time the routine played out, Foxworthy was in his early 70s and listeners were calling to testify that they went to church or school with Foxworthy and that he was 50, while others called in amazed that the comic looked so good for his advanced years.

"No one does stupid better than Cadillac Jack," she says.

"It's all part of the job," she says. "We don't have a good cop or bad cop; we both try to be honest, serious and funny and hope our audience reacts."

Her former partner, Rhubarb Jones, says, "Dallas McCade's professionalism and care for others has put her where she is."

Part of her appeal is her realness. She talks about her husband, Tim, and her parents who still live in Alexander City, Ala. "My parents voted against the lottery in Alabama, but the first thing my Mama does when she crosses the state line into Georgia is buy lottery tickets. I say to her, 'Mama, you voted against the lottery and here you're gambling.' And she'll say, 'Don't tell your Daddy.' She gets a kick when I tell stories like that. But both Caddy and I have a line about what we'll say about our families. We draw different lines and make our own calls."

McCade, whose mother says she came into the world talking, picked her profession by the time she was 9 and got her first radio job at 14. She moved to Atlanta almost 30 years ago and "never looked back. I was a little worried about satellite radio but then, gosh, people want you to be personal. They want you to talk about the local football game or who you saw at a concert. And country music fans are so loyal. If you do your job, they'll be good to you."

When she is off the air, she is found with her husband on her 200-acre farm outside Athens, where they enjoy fishing, golfing and taking care of their cadre of animals including horses, two German shepherds, her bichon frise (Anna Caroline), two miniature donkeys and an assortment of cats. "I'm trying to talk Tim into two baby buffalos. But I'm not there yet. I'm one of those that if I could save an animal, I will."

Dr. Michael Good of Town and Country Animal Veterinary Clinic and founder of the Homeless Pets Foundation, has worked with McCade for several years. "She is passionate about helping animals. She has a good heart and treats animals like members of her family. She'll do whatever she can to help."

Why has McCade been so successful? "She's the ideal radio personality," Good says. "She's down to earth. You'd like to hang out with her. She believes in radio, and she believes in her audience. She just makes you feel great."

Although she describes her life as "just about perfect," McCade says that it is difficult for a woman to stay on top in the radio business. "A lot of women work for a while and then have a family. I made the call years ago to have a career and not children. You don't get normal 'mom' hours in radio. I understand that this is a radio business and now being run by conglomerates. That's a big change. I'm very aware that I have to keep the listeners happy, and if I don't, they sure as anything will find someone else."

Which brings her back to green bananas. "I know there's no promise of tomorrow in this business. I get up and do the best I can. Life's too short."

But 30 years into being one of the city's favorite radio personalities, she still ruling the airwaves. "I was put here on this Earth to be on the radio." ♀

I was put here on this Earth to be on the radio.



Dallas McCade
WKHX

Photo by Allison Shirreffs