

Jimmy Fink still rocking New York

BY JEANNE MUCHNICK
INTOWN WESTCHESTER

In June 2004, a middle-aged guy walked into the offices of The Peak radio station and dropped off his résumé. Program Director Chris Herrmann - who had recently moved from Boston to join the new, White Plains-based rock station - was impressed with the prospective DJ's smooth voice, calm demeanor and his laid-back persona. That night at home, Herrmann casually mentioned the meeting, and the guy's name, to his wife. "I remember her jaw dropping open and her saying, 'Jimmy Fink ... stopped by?!' "

"Hire him!"

If Herrmann was clueless, he had an excuse, other than being an out-of-towner: Fink, once a fixture of New York radio, had been out of the game for several years when he strolled into The Peak's office. On the other hand, that résumé he dropped on Herrmann's desk could read like a page out of *How to Succeed in Radio*.

Fink's career started way back in 1970, when the Eastchester native scored a DJ job at New York's WABC-FM; he had to commute there on weekends from Washington D.C., where he was still a college student at American University. After graduation, Fink went full time at WABC, which then became WPLJ, and stayed until 1983, when the station changed its format from rock to Top 40. After that, and for most of the '90s, he had a daily, four-hour show at WXRK (K-Rock), where he interviewed the likes of Paul McCartney and where his show invariably overlapped with that of co-worker Howard Stern, resulting in some - ahem - colorful banter. Along the way he also did a fair share of nationally and internationally syndicated radio programs, such as *Rock Watch* and *Rolling Stone Magazine's Continuous History of Rock & Roll*.

But in the late '90s, he got burned out. "I had had it with the radio business," says Fink, walking around The Peak offices dressed in camouflage shorts and an oversized, button-down shirt, accessorized with a gold-hoop earring, various necklaces, and a Live Strong bracelet. "I was working for a station that played the same old songs over and over again. Also, my brother became ill and so I left to help him with the family business" - a wholesale bread supplier - until the two sold it in 2000. Fink went on to other business ventures - real estate, a few freelance voice-overs - but otherwise became a stay-at-home dad to his three kids. "And I loved every minute of it," he says.

And yet, after spying a bus ad for The Peak one spring day in 2004, he found new inspiration. Fink tuned in and liked what he heard. The station, which bills itself as "world class rock in New York's backyard," plays a diverse mix of rock, from Bonnie Raitt and The Police to Guster, Modest Mouse and emerging singer-songwriters.

The privately owned station also relies on its Peak Listener Advisory Board to keep track of local musical tastes. "The station has a library of about 3,400 songs and 1,260 in active rotation," Fink explains, "whereas a normal classic-rock station would have 250 to 400 songs on its playlist."

Once Fink had established his own position at The Peak (107.1 FM) - broadcasting weekday afternoons from 3 to 7 p.m. - he embraced his new freedom. "I don't think of it as a job," he says. "It's fun. At a more mainstream station, I would have no input as to what I played on the radio, but here if there's something I want to play off my iPod, I can do that."

For example, he once demonstrated for listeners how Tommy Tutone's '80's hit "867-5309/Jenny" sounds just like the new Bruce Springsteen song. "I know not to be self-indulgent on the air in terms of the music I play," he says. "But I also know listeners like things 'out of the box.'" Simply put, he says, "We have the 'Stairway to Heaven' Rule. Meaning, we don't play it."



Stephen Schmitt/The Journal News

Eastchester native DJ Jimmy Fink feels right at home on the air at The Peak radio station in White Plains.

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Given his "backyard" audience, he also gets to be more personal, relishing his role as a longtime Scarsdale husband and father (he has three kids: twin girls, ages 15, and a son, age 17). "I like that I can really zone in on the local aspect of what we do," he says, "and talk about schools, charities or town events that you never hear about on a big NYC radio station."

Off the clock, Fink is very active with the Pediatric Cancer Foundation, which he got involved with when a friend of his son became ill, and the Open Door Family Medical Centers, which provides quality health care for the local community. Fink says those are some of his proudest accomplishments. "Sure it's great to be the guy that turns you on to new music, but raising money for worthwhile causes is really what it's all about," he says. "That has the potential to change people's lives."

Indeed, after a few decades in the business, Fink is past the age - and the ego - to be very enthralled with his own celebrity. He says he's been surprised, on more than one occasion over the years, when artists such as Pete Yorn and The Spin Doctors' Chris Baron tell him how excited they are to meet him.

"Meanwhile, I'm the one excited to meet them," he says. "They're amazing performers and singers. I'm no one. I'm just a DJ."