

The Ten Defining Events Of The First Decade Of My Show (1989-99)

10. Day one of the show March 9, 1989. When in my first opening monologue I announced all of the things the show would not be. Specifically, it would not be a show with tips on how to "spackle your drywall." That was a clear message that my show would not be like the dreck served up for years on WTMJ-AM which trivialized the notion of talk on the radio and made total effort to avoid ever saying anything of relevance.

9. Bambi. I wasn't the first media outlet to try to expose the obvious miscarriage of justice in Lawrencia Bembenek's murder conviction. But I reported on the story relentlessly and gave a platform for the digging of investigator Ira Robbins who blew massive holes in the whole case. All of this was before her prison break that brought the story to national attention. I am to this day convinced she didn't kill Christine Schultz but am ambivalent over whether she may have known about it.

8. McGee. I called out Milwaukee Alderman Michael McGee Sr. for his threats to commit acts of terror in Milwaukee and likewise called out pathetic public officials who were too timid to do anything about it. He threatened to blow up the Bradley Center and throw burning tires on I-94. The rest of the media was too weeny to do anything about it.

7. Bureaucrat Watch. Calling local government officials on Friday afternoons to see which of them had bugged out of the office early became a classic and has reached almost legendary status. It was also illegal. I had to stop after the FCC made it clear you couldn't people live on the radio without their approval even if you told them in advance they were on the air. I continue to believe that ruling is a violation of the First Amendment but no one on the planet agrees with me.

6. Bob Reitman's Poetry Corner. I really had nothing against the host of WKTI's morning show other than he was treated like sort of radio genius by the other Journal media outlets that pumped up a show on a radio station owned by their company. I just felt the whole Reitman and Mueller act was trite and certainly not funny. I got my hands on a brutally terrible poetry recording Reitman made in

the sixties and played one poem each day for about a week. The audience found it hilarious and Reitman and Mueller were so pompous and dull that they weren't even commenting on the fact that I was doing it.

5. Calling for the firing of Brewers Manager Phil Garner. Let's face it. The sports media in Milwaukee has mostly been just awful for decades. There is no other city that would have tolerated a guy sticking around year after year despite almost always having awful seasons. Plus, he was a strategic moron. I rode the guy for years while nobody else in the media even criticized him. A guy on our own station even defended him which is why I guess he calls himself a homer. But I always wanted Phil to succeed. One year on opening day, I commissioned one of those airplanes to fly over County Stadium with a banner that read " Belling says Good Luck Phil."

4. New baseball stadium. Nobody championed building a new Brewers stadium more aggressively than me. My role was critical because a lot of phony fiscal conservatives opposed the plan. They never figured out that most government spending makes communities worse but investment in quality of life attractions makes a city great. Facilities are irrelevant in education and government but the lifeblood of sports and entertainment. I never pandered to the audience and refused to oppose something just because some in the audience wanted me to oppose it.

3. Sandbagging Mike Wallace. The 60 Minutes legend was famous for ambushing newsmakers with interviews they weren't prepared for. I gave Mike his own medicine. He was coming to Milwaukee to do a story on Michael McGee (see above). So I called Wallace live in his office and to my absolute shock he picked up the phone! I interviewed him on the spot and challenged him not to sugarcoat the terroristic nature of McGee's threats. All I did was call CBS News and ask for Mike Wallace. To this day I am astonished I could just call him up and he would pick up his own phone. I also admired that Wallace, who humiliated people who ran away from his sandbag interviews, had the integrity to be interviewed when I sandbagged him.

2. Old Joe Greco. The Menomonee Falls Village president back in the 80s and 90s probably wasn't a bad guy but his style of governance personified how truly rotten many local governments were. Spending government money on non-

profits who were wired into city bigshots, sucking up to Milwaukee rather than standing up to it, caving into calls for regional government which merely meant the suburbs paying for Milwaukee's stuff, empowering awful school board members and superintendents. Menomonee Falls over the years has produced the absolute worst local government officials of any community in the region with the possible exception of Milwaukee. I called them out over and over even long after Old Joe was thrown out of office by the voters. They finally have mostly good elected officials up there but it took me all 35 years of work to help get the community there. This one is high on the list because my show has been the only outlet to really ever hold officials in conservative suburbs to account for governing in a liberal way.

1. The Sentinel scoop. I've written about this one elsewhere on belling.com but it was the story that made clear that I was not only the best talk show host in town but also the best reporter. That was saying something back then but a pretty easy feat to achieve now that journalism in Milwaukee is essentially non-existent with only a few exceptions (Bice, Dan O'Donnell and a few others).