

# Refuge

**Ex-commercial radio reporter finds his bliss at UIS**

**By AMANDA ROBERT**

Rich Bradley, news director of WUIS (91.9 FM), fulfilled a lifelong dream when he built Springfield's only public radio station from the ground up in 1975.

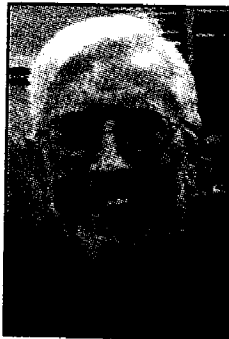
Not only was he given free rein to develop a broadcast model focused primarily on news and cultural programming, but he was also relieved to leave his hectic commercial radio days far behind.

"We used to have five-minute newscasts; 90 seconds was commercial, the rest of it was news and weather," Bradley says. "A news consultant told us we had to fit 11, 12 stories, plus the weather, into three-and-a-half minutes. It was a zoo."

Although the length of news stories is not an object of concern for WUIS, thanks to the availability of airtime and reporters' ability to post extended interviews on the Internet, Bradley says that public radio usually finds its own struggle in the form of funding.

Commercial radio stations sell advertising, but public radio stations must rely on their host institutions (in WUIS' case, the University of Illinois at Springfield), a mix of federal and state funds, underwriting, and listener contributions.

As the number of public radio stations has increased, federal and state sources of money have decreased, forcing stations to rely more heavily on fundraising. WUIS was affected this year when Gov. Rod Blagojevich cut nearly \$1.5 million from the Illinois Arts Council grant for public radio and television, equaling a \$15,000 loss for the station, Bradley says.



**Rich Bradley**

But what could have spelled disaster for WUIS turned out to be a blessing — "dumb luck," Bradley jokingly says. Last month the station completed its annual fall fund drive, employing a "go green" message and a promise to plant trees around the community. Bradley says the station far surpassed the goal of \$126,000 when listeners pledged \$142,000. Now, not only can WUIS plant nearly 900 trees in Springfield, he says, but the station has more than recovered its lost dollars as well.

Bradley says that credit for WUIS' popularity with listeners lies with its special features, such as "Skirting Convention," a series that profiles a dozen distinguished Springfield women, and investigative news stories, including a recent five-part series on school-district discipline and a two-part piece on gangs.

"In terms of news, it's the quality of the product and also a product of the time that we make available to develop story ideas," Bradley says. "Commercial radio, commercial television — I can't imagine going back to that." ■

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