

Freedom Radio

CADET LED RADIO STATION KAFA HAS A GROWING GLOBAL REACH.

By **Crystal Ross** Photos by **Lewis Carlyle**



In the late 1960s cadets with dreams of hitting the local airwaves petitioned the Academy for a radio station to call home. It took a few years but, in 1972, KAFA radio was born. Nearly four decades later, what started as a ten-watt station filled with “dead air” has now blossomed into a unique way for the Air Force Academy to promote itself worldwide, but more importantly, disseminate some rad tunes.

For years KAFA’s broadcast reach was limited to within a few miles of the Academy, but in 2008 the station was able to go global after the AOG offered to

fund internet streaming service for the station. “KAFA didn’t have a way to pay for it,” said Dave West, the station’s civilian advisor. “We wanted a quality stream, which costs more. I wanted the Academy’s radio station to measure up to what the Academy is.”

West and his cadet disc jockeys say the station gives them a chance to tell the public about the good things that happen at USAFA, things that are often overlooked by regular media outlets that only want sensational stories.

“KAFA tells the story about the Academy,” said West. “There’s a ton of stuff that goes on unnoticed



up here—*good* stuff. We're a good way to get the word out about the wonderful cadets we have here. It's a great way to brag on the Academy."

West said, despite what some may fear, the cadets are very good about what they broadcast, and the station hasn't had to be reined in by USAFA staff. "For the most part, they let me run with it. I understand that we want to represent the Academy in a good light," West said, adding that he works closely with the Academy's communications and public affairs offices. He also mentioned that USAFA Superintendent Lt. Gen. Mike Gould, '76, has been

known to listen and that the General sees the station as a community outreach opportunity.

"People don't hear that message—for instance, the research cadets are doing in our labs. I'm always a sponge looking for stuff to promote," said West.

But the station, found at 97.7 FM, is much more than just a public relations tool. It's a release for cadets—for those who listen to it and the 22 who work for it.

"For a long time, KAFA was looked at as a station only for cadets," West explained recently from the control booth he helped build in Vandenberg

Hall. Before he became the advisor, West said the station didn't have much direction and cadet DJs would play just about anything they wanted. That changed in 2007 when West and the cadet general manager of the station decided to set the format to modern rock.

"We were all over the road" before that decision, West said. Ultimately his general manager told him, "Let's just be a cool radio station, and cadets will start listening." That's exactly what has happened, despite the unique life of USAFA students. "Cadets don't have time to listen to the radio," said West. "They get a lot of stuff thrown at them—you *have* to do this, you *have* to do that."

Now, everywhere West goes, people tell him they listen to KAFA. Despite the fact that the FM signal reaches only a few miles beyond the Academy's gates, the CD-quality internet stream is world-wide, and now the station is included on the Academy's smart phone application as well as in iTunes. Reports West

receives from the station's online streaming service indicate KAFA gets 1,200 to 1,600 web listeners each week. The station has enjoyed an impressive jump in online listenership the past year. During the first six-month rating period over 17,000 hours were streamed by online listeners. In the past six months that number has ballooned to almost 29,000 hours, or the equivalent of over three years of streamed programming.

The reports don't indicate where those listeners are located, but the station gets email messages from around the world. "We get a lot of deployed troops who listen to us. They say it's nice to get a taste of home," said West. "Some are enlisted guys too, so we know they're not grads."

DJ and Boston native C3C Joe Bomar said he has friends who listen to his show during their college classes at civilian schools. Firstie DJ Zach Schneider has family from one coast to the other who tune in to hear him in action. He said he's seen email from listeners in the Middle East and bases all over the world.

In addition to pure entertainment, KAFA helps the cadets who volunteer as on-air talent. "We don't have broadcasters here," West explained, adding that cadets come from all academic disciplines. He doesn't require that cadets have a golden voice or a smooth delivery, only that they have a

LISTENERS' GUIDE

Call Sign: KAFA

Frequency: 97.7 FM

Genre: New Alternative Rock

Suggestion Line: 719.333.KAFA

Website: www.usafa.org/KAFA

C3C Lauren Linscott prepares to record her show at the KAFA Studio in Vandenberg Hall.



commitment to the station. He said broadcasting on the radio helps cadets with their public speaking skills and in learning how to deal with the media, skills they'll use after graduation. Also, he sees a certain degree of leadership at KAFA. "I've tried to pattern KAFA after the way the Academy works, with the upper classes nurturing the lower classes. They need some structure."

Cadet Third Class Lauren Linscott grabs one of the microphones that hangs precariously on a metal arm resting by the soundboard of KAFA's Vandenberg Hall studio. "Hey, this is DJ Lin at KAFA 97.7." Appropriately, Linscott opens each of her Saturday afternoon shows with the song "American Girl" by Tom Petty.

She got into the station as a doolie when her C3C coach mentioned he was a DJ. "Freshman year we weren't allowed to listen to music all year long," she said. "So it was nice to get in the studio, record stuff, and you get to hang out and just *be* for a while without upperclassmen breathing down your neck."

DJ Lin said since joining the station in January, her public speaking skills have increased ten-fold. She also finds volunteering at KAFA to be a release from the work of being a cadet. "It's just fun for me to come down here and listen to new music, being able to have an influence on what goes on the air, and the people I work with down here are pretty amazing."

Linscott and the other cadet DJs are very appreciative of the Association of Graduates' funding of their club and they are aware that KAFA wouldn't be what it is today without that help. "I'd say thanks to the AOG for letting us do this," Linscott said.

"You beat me to it," added Class of 2014 rock jock Andrew Chapman. For Chapman, like many of the other DJs, KAFA is more than a radio station; it's one of his favorite things about USAFA. "It's what keeps me sane," he laughed. ✓

AOG Corporate Sponsors

The AOG thanks our Platinum, Four-Star and Gold Sponsors

Platinum and Four-Star Sponsors

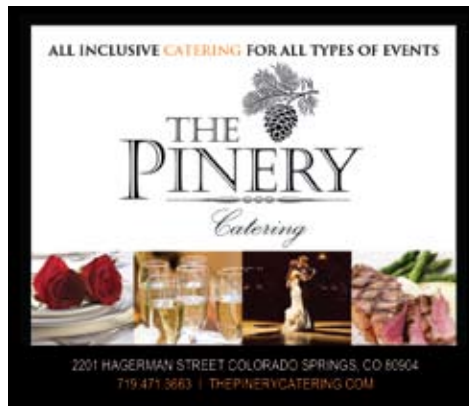
Gold Sponsor



Henley-Putnam University.
INTELLIGENCE
COUNTERTERRORISM
PROTECTION

**EARN YOUR MASTER'S
OR DOCTORATE
IN STRATEGIC SECURITY**

Find out more:
HENLEY-PUTNAM.EDU



ALL INCLUSIVE CATERING FOR ALL TYPES OF EVENTS

THE PINERY
Catering

2201 HAGERMAN STREET COLORADO SPRINGS, CO 80904
719-471-3663 | THEPINERYCATERING.COM



AIR FORCE VILLAGE

AIR FORCE Village

(800) 891-6029 • www.airforcevillages.com