April 19, 1998---

Somewhere in America there is one disc jockey who doesn't do blue. He plays happy songs like Carl Carlton's ``Everlasting Love." He telephones his 86-year-old mother Rose every morning.

Schlock radio?

More of the media should exhibit such grace.

Dick Biondi is that jock. He can be heard nightly on the Chicago oldies station WJMK-FM (104.3). What's so great about Dick is how he hasn't changed over a 48-year career. He may play oldies, but he's young at heart.

Tune him in any weeknight. Is it Dick's first gig in 1950, two weeks out of high school at WCBA in Corning, N.Y.? Might be. Or maybe it's Dick during his 1960-63 heyday at WLS, where he was known as ``the Screamer." Nawh, it sounds more like Dick, a.k.a. ``the *Wild I-Tralian*," circa 1967-72 at Chicago's WCFL.

Dick has been around longer than Mick (as in Jagger).

But time is on Dick's side.

"When I was growing up in upstate New York, I dreamed of being the No. 1 disc jockey in the United States," Dick says during a frantic interview before his shift. "This is no lie. I say that very humbly. And it happened, between 1961 and '62."

While he was at WLS, Billboard named Dick top jock.

Now, at age 65, Dick leads the list of Chicago personalities who have been nominated for induction into the Radio Hall of Fame. This year's Hall of Fame winners will be inducted Oct. 11 at a black-tie ceremony and national radio broadcast at the Chicago Cultural Center. Dick has previously been named to the radio shrine of the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland.

``Dick is a refresher," says Bruce DuMont, president of the Museum of Broadcast Communications and the Radio Hall of Fame in Chicago. ``Not so much that he's a throwback, but that he's the real thing. He was the real thing then and he's the real thing now. He speaks to the teenager in us all."

Dick says, ``It's exciting to be nominated. You got some heavy guys on that list: Jim Dunbar, who was the guy the Zodiac killer turned himself in to on the air in San Francisco. Michael Jackson, the radio guy from L.A. who is huge."

Dick takes a rare pause. And a breath.

``How can I say this?" he wonders in a wave of humility. ``I'd like to continue to be one of the few jocks who started before rock 'n' roll that's still doing a full-time shift in a major market. There aren't too many left."

Dick and former WLS morning man Clark Weber are the last jocks from the mid-1960s golden age of Chicago rock 'n' roll radio still working. ``Mother Weber's oldest son" hosts a Friday morning show on WAIT-FM (105) in Crystal Lake.

In the late 1960s, Chicago rock jocks were personalities, pure and proud. They never talked down to their audience. They were accessible, spending weekend nights introducing concerts at places like Dex Card's Wild Goose, the Blue Village in Westmont, and the Cellar in Arlington Heights.

Dick was a conduit for the innocent music he played. A 1967 hit like the Hombres' ``Let It All Hang Out" was considered risque.

On the Oct. 12, 1967, WCFL Sound 10 Survey featuring Dick, the Hombres checked in at No. 7, one behind Van Morrison's ``Brown Eyed Girl," and ahead of Wilson Pickett's ``Funky Broadway" (No. 12), Sam & Dave's ``Soul Man" (17), Jimi Hendrix's ``Purple Haze" (19), and the Doors' ``People Are Strange" (25).

What a time it was.

High schoolers like myself would come to the city from the suburbs to watch Dick, Larry Lujack or Jerry G. Bishop spin records and work behind a glass studio window. (Well, Uncle Lar' was known to close the studio curtain.) Radio was bigger than life. But the longer you live, the smaller radio's magic.

Unless you're Dick.

Dick still talks with unbridled energy. He still spends weekends spinning records at high school hops. Dick does not sit down at work.

While on the air, he stands behind a large console punctuated by a new Audio Vault computer that programs the oldies. A dozen black felt-tip pens are on the table before Dick, for no apparent reason.

During a recent visit to the WJMK studios on North Michigan Avenue, Dick was wearing black corduroys and an immaculately pressed white shirt. When Dick gets excited about a song or a caller's request, he extends his arms and waves them in the air. He looks like one of the Four Seasons taking an encore. But then, Dick lives in an endless summer.

Dick has certainly heard the Beatles' ``Please Please Me" a million times since 1963, when he debuted the record from Chicago's Vee-Jay label. Dick's high

energy makes it sound new.

In the middle of a recent show, Dick reminds listeners that ``...`West Side Story' and Walt Disney's `Absent -Minded Professor' were big hits on the screen. In Chicago, on TV, Garfield Goose was driving Frazier Thomas crazy. The big toy fad (his voice builds) in 1961 is YO-YOs! (a pause; his voice drops) ... named after our boss. President Kennedy and the first lady travel to France. And in early 1961, this group - from San Diego - managed their one and only hit record. By the way, the lead singer is still doing appearances on oldies shows out in L.A., and from what I understand she still looks gorgeous. This record peaked at No. 5. HERE'S ROSIE AND THE ORIGINALS!" The computer kicks out ``Angel Baby."

No one has time to grow old in Dick's fast-paced world.

``I think I'm that way because of sports," he says later. ``I started doing a lot of playby-play and I was hyper. That's the way I came across. And I still get excited. I've only had one cup of coffee today.

``I get up by 10 in the morning. I find my `Forgotten Oldie' (a regular segment on his show). I call my mother. I get more fun from her. A couple days ago she says, `You can't be a disc jockey anymore. You've been in this so long, you must have been promoted by now.' "

Dick debuted on the air in the summer of 1945. Harry Truman had just dropped the Atom Bomb on Japan. And Dick was reading a commercial drop for Brotan's, a ladies' clothing store in his mother's hometown of Auburn, N.Y., about 70 miles from Endicott, N.Y., where Dick was born and reared.

``After that, I started hanging around the radio station (WNIR) in Binghampton," he says. ``Rod (`Twilight Zone') Serling was there. I'd go get coffee for him. A sportscaster named Bob Cullings took an interest in me. I wanted to be a sportscaster.

``He taught me how to talk. I couldn't say the word `three.' I'd say `tree.' I started spotting for him at football games. I'd spot the visiting team. I still have scars on my leg from when he kicked me (for mispronunciation). He was a nice and patient man."

Dick carries those lessons with him.

``All of show business takes itself too seriously," says Dick, who lives with wife Maribeth in a northern suburb. ``All we do is entertain the people who do important things. How can we compete with the guy who operated on Jack Brickhouse's brain? Now that's important."

Dick's late father Mike, an Endicott fireman, encouraged him to follow his dream.

But Dick only lasted at WCBA in Corning for a couple of weeks before he landed a job as a sports broadcaster at KVOB in Alexandria, La.

``I was 16," he says. ``I took a Greyhound bus to St. Louis and changed to Trailways. I packed my clothes and left. I was ready."

The guy who hired Dick moved to KSYL in Alexandria in 1951. And that's when Dick began spinning records. ``I did a late-night show, real soft," almost like late WGN drowse-master Franklyn MacCormack, Dick says. ``We were the only ones in the middle of the state that played black music.

"We had a show called 'Jammin' Jive.' On Saturdays they let me do it. We were playing Fats Domino before anybody heard of him. And I'd go to the Greystone Grill on lower 3rd Street in Alexandria. It was the black nightclub. I'd see Joe Liggins. Buddy Johnson. The Original Blind Boys. And I was the only white guy in there."

Dick has worked at 23 radio stations in his career.

How many times has he been fired?

``23," Dick says with a smile.

After Alexandria, the road dances through York, Pa., Youngstown, Ohio, Buffalo, N.Y., Chicago (WLS), Pasadena, Calif., Chicago (WCFL), Cincinnati, North Myrtle Beach, and WJMK, where Dick has been since 1984.

``WLS was my favorite," Dick says. ``It was 38 states and all of Canada. They heard us in Cuba during the missile crisis. Last year a guy came up to me at an appearance I was making at St. Michael's church festival in Orland Park. He was crying. I didn't know what I had done. He said he was on an aircraft carrier in the Pacific. He was so homesick, but one night he heard WLS. He kept doing it every night. It helped cure him. And he didn't know how to say `Thank you.' At 'LS you never knew who you were talking to."

Dick was around for the payola scams of the late '50s and early '60s. ``People forget payola was not illegal," Dick says. ``It was not reporting it that was illegal. I wasn't important enough when it was real hot to get anything, but I knew disc jockeys who did. When a record promoter walked into a station, he'd hand them a rate card. It would have payoffs depending on how much they'd play a song per night or week.

``Sure, I was taken to dinner. And in Christmas, '61, the boss at WLS made a big deal about payola. Chess Records sent every disc jockey a box of steaks. I checked. The actual cost was \$27, which was \$2 over what we could accept. So I took the box and wrote a note, `Dear Mr. Beaudin (WLS' general manager), I'm not accepting this because it's over \$25.' And I left it on his desk from Christmas to New

Year's. Do you know what meat smells like when it's been out that long? He almost killed me."

Dick keeps in touch with the old WLS jocks. Dunbar, now in San Francisco, worked at WLS. Dick says Art Roberts is semi-retired in Carson City, Nev. Ex-WLS jock, program director and general manager Gene Taylor died last year. It was Taylor who fired Dick from WLS. At the time, Dick was so popular, his show was jammed with commercials.

``I went crazy one day," Dick says. ``There were too many commercials during my 10 o'clock (p.m.) hour back in '63. I had five minutes of news at the top of the hour, Dick Clark for five minutes at 10:25 and then 21 one-minute commercials! I complained there was no time for music. The sales manager starts swearing at me. We went at it. I literally don't remember what I did, but when I came to, I had two engineers holding me down. I had a letter opener in my hand. Gene told me to `go home.' I took that as being fired."

The firing became an urban legend.

Rumors swirled through Chicago that Dick had been canned for telling an obscene joke on the air. ``Bob Hope told the joke," Dick says. ``The night I got fired he was on TV and they bleeped him. He said, `If women's skirts get any shorter they're going to have two cheeks to powder and . . .'"

Well, let's keep the mystery.

``Hey, in '63 that was pretty rough," Dick says. ``You didn't dare say `damn' or `hell' on the air. But I never said it. I got fired for the fight."

Dick is such a positive force that he's never been bummed out about being fired. ``I remember reading that Jackie Gleason said that whenever he was out of work, he'd go to Toots Shor (a New York bar) and throw a party," Dick explains. ``He'd say, `Everything is great, folks,' and things would start coming back. Maybe that's part of what I did. If I get fired today, I can do one of two things. I can always say, `Welcome to Venture!' or, `Do you want fries with that burger?'

``And I'm still on the air."