

Interview with Greg Versen aka “The Professor”

After a few email threads and matching our schedules, I finally sat down with Greg Versen and picked his brain on retirement, music, and radio in general.

Versen’s presence is in a word: warm. Immediately as he entered the room, he greeted me, gave me a firm handshake, and asked me how I am and how he could help me. After I explained my reason for meeting with him, Versen laughed. “The Professor” was more than happy to answer my questions.



When asked what his favorite aspect of hosting *Blues Valley* was, Versen wistfully responded with “[having the] ability to relate with listeners through the music”. For Versen, the real magic of hosting was doing his show live and having people call in to either request a song or just talk.

“*Blues Valley* has evolved a bit since its debut,” Versen told me as he adjusted his wire-framed glasses into place. In recent years, Versen has tried to incorporate holiday themes for his show whenever possible. He noted that finding blues related music to Halloween was a bit more of a challenge than expected.

Since he began hosting *Blues Valley*, Versen has been exposed to countless new types of blues. He noted that Buddy Guy, Dianna Greenleaf (one of the newer female blues voices), and Johnny Rawls have recently entered his musical collection. To determine whether the Professor likes a song or not, he showed me a CD. On the CD was a check mark for good and an ‘x’ for bad next to specific songs. Versen laughed at its simplicity. A simple method of choice for a seemingly complex man.

As a tribute to his service to the station, Pale Fire will be holding a performance to commend Versen’s radio achievement on November 10th. Fittingly, the Central Virginia Blue Society will have the Jon Spear Band perform in the *Blues Valley* host’s honor.

The Valley Voice Program

The Valley Voice Program is a reading service for the blind or visually impaired who may not be able to read newsprint. On air, Mike Houlston reads the local valley news distributed from the Harrisonburg *Daily News Record*, Staunton's *News Leader*, Waynesboro's *News Virginian*, and the Charlottesville *Daily Progress*. There are 15-16 readers on staff with approximately 4,000 listeners tuning in each week. Valley Voice is heard through Comcast Channel 3 public access. Additionally, people with a microwave signal box (distributed by the VA Department of the Visually Handicapped) can tune in.

Prior to Houlston's time as a reader, four years ago, the Valley Voice was a live program. The program has since switched to broadcasting recordings. A recorded broadcast versus a live show meant fewer mistakes on air and that readers could record, hit pause, and then resume their broadcasting. This creates a more seamless transition from one story to the next.

Presently the impact of the Valley Voice program is invaluable and immeasurable, providing those in need with access to local news. Looking to the future, there is a possibility of bringing back the Winchester Star station, effectively widening Valley Voice's reach. Until then, Shenandoah Valley residents who can tune into Valley Voice will get local news from local people.

The logo for Valley Voice, featuring the words "VALLEY" and "VOICE" in a large, bold, sans-serif font, stacked vertically.

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