

Promoting the Arts and Loving it!

Diane Mack Touts the Cultural Scene on WWNO

By Dean M. Shapiro, Senior Editor

PHOTO COURTESY OF DIANE MACK

When cultural arts organizations and individual participants in the Greater New Orleans performing arts scene want to get the word out on their upcoming events, one of the key people they often go to is Diane Mack.

As a producer and host of the “Louisiana Considered” program over WWNO/WRKF, originating from New Orleans and Baton Rouge, Diane helps promote opera, dance, classical and stage productions with her profound knowledge and enthusiasm for those specific live art forms. And it’s not just a job for her: it’s something that she loves doing as much as she loves the art forms themselves.

“I enjoy them all equally,” Diane said during a break in her busy schedule. “I really enjoy interviewing arts people; helping them tell their stories and shining the light on them. Culture is such an important part of our communities’ legacies.”

For nearly 30 years, Diane was the host of the popular weekly “Inside the Arts” program over WWNO, broadcasting from the campus of the University of New Orleans. During that time she interviewed hundreds of guests representing all of the major cultural arts genres and she shared, over the airwaves, valuable information about upcoming shows. The exposure that her program gave to her guests’ organizations was very influential in helping them increase attendance and revenues for those that charged admission.

However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, with live performances almost completely shut down, “Inside the Arts” went on hiatus and a new format was introduced with the “Louisiana Considered” program. The show airs five days a week for 30 minutes a day from 12:00 noon to 12:30 p.m. and repeating at 7:30 p.m. Three of those days are broadcast from New Orleans and the other two originate from Baton Rouge, with multiple hosts from both of Louisiana’s major media markets. Diane’s show airs on Tuesdays.

“So now the format is a mix of news and culture and I usually have two features involving the arts in New Orleans, Baton Rouge and Lafayette,” Diane explained. “So it’s kind of a well-rounded approach to news, arts and culture in south Louisiana. We’ve broadened the audience in both range and subject matter.

“My show is arts-heavy,” Diane added. “It’s also news but it’s largely focused on the arts. The other hosts during the week also have arts segments during their on-air slots.”

Raised in the Uptown neighborhood of New Orleans, Diane attended John F. Kennedy High School in Gentilly. Having grown up watching “The Mary Tyler Moore Show,” she had aspirations of going into television news and she enrolled in an internship program sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce. The company she worked with was called Gateway Productions.

“It was back in the days when news was recorded on film,” she explained. “I learned how to do a standup, how to write a story and all of the other things you did for TV news.” While learning these skills she was also earning academic credits.

Following graduation from JFK High School, she went on to attend college at Loyola University where she majored in mass communications and studied under former CBS foreign correspondent, Peter Kalischer.

After receiving her B.A. from Loyola, Diane was hired by KATC-TV in Lafayette as a news reporter and morning news anchor. The experience she gained there prepared her for what was to come four years later when she came onboard with WDSU-Channel 6 in New Orleans as a general assignment reporter.

“I was very happy to come back home,” Diane said. “You don’t

often get to work in the place where you were born so it was a grand homecoming for me.”

Almost immediately after being hired by the station in 1982, she was sent out to Kenner to cover the July 9 crash of Pan Am Flight 759 which took the lives of 153 people and devastated much of a residential subdivision. “Being there in that neighborhood and seeing what happened was absolutely horrifying,” she recounted.

There were also hurricanes that she was assigned to cover in various parts of the city. “We would be up all night in places that were heavily impacted,” Diane said. “I’d be standing there, holding the microphone and getting blown around by the wind. I’d be walking in high water with a



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Diane in the WWNO studio with NPR's "Morning Edition" host Steve Inskeep

photographer trying to get interviews with people and getting pictures of those who were being rescued and moved to higher ground. It was very challenging.”

But it wasn't always bad news and challenging assignments for Diane. There were some fun times as well. She especially enjoyed covering Mardi Gras and she even got to ride in the Zulu parade.

After more than a decade in TV news, however, she decided to make the move into the more sedate medium of radio. Given the opportunity to host a program dedicated to promoting New Orleans'

thriving arts culture, Diane jumped at the chance to do it.

“To have the opportunity (to promote the arts) fall right into your lap was too good to resist,” she said. “We have a very creative culture here in New Orleans. You never know what to expect. There's always some good stories and so many arts organizations here.

“When people are doing good things and we're telling their stories, I think that's important because it inspires others who might be thinking about going into the arts. You're listening to these stories of everyday

people and how they made their dreams come true. You can see yourself in someone else's shoes and find out how they did what they did and you think, ‘Maybe I can do that too.’”

Wrapping up our interview, Diane said, “I absolutely love my job. I work with a talented group of dedicated professionals who share a committed effort to cover the news and culture of south Louisiana. WWNO is a wonderful, serene place to work. It's really like home to me and I can't think of anything better.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF WWNO

You can hear Diane Mack on WWNO, 89.9 FM, on weekday mornings hosting “Morning Edition” and later on the “Midday News Updates.” She can be heard on “Louisiana Considered” on Tuesdays between 12:00 noon and 12:30 p.m. and re-broadcast at 7:30 p.m. Podcasts of “Louisiana Considered” can also be heard on Apple, Spotify, Google and the RSS Feed.

To contact her about scheduling an interview go to diane@wwno.org