

PAUL CASTRONOVO

The Voice Of South Florida

By GLENN R. SWIFT

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NOT EVERY TALK-RADIO jock rents a crane to hoist a car 10 stories into the air so that he can drop it onto a bull's eye. Then again, not too many guys get their nose hair waxed on camera either.

Unless, of course, you're Paul Castronovo.

Recently named the *New Times*' "Readers' Choice: Best FM Radio Personality for 2007," Castronovo, 47, has racked up numerous awards working for several of the most high-profile FM stations in the Sunshine State during his 24 years in broadcasting. These days, Castronovo and Ron Brewer, his radio partner of 18 years, host "The Paul and Young Ron Show," which simulcasts live each weekday morning from 6 a.m. to 11 a.m. on FM superstations Big 105.9 WBGG in Fort Lauderdale and West Palm's 98.7 WKGR "The Gater." The show is extraordinarily successful, and KGR's recent decision to bring the show to the Palm Beaches has been well received. So much so that ratings for "Paul and Young Ron" are now equal to those of several of their syndicated rivals.

Despite Castronovo's notable accomplishments, his career path has seen more than a few bumps in the road. In fact, it's no exaggeration to say that in a parallel universe, one might find the ever-colorful broadcaster living in an artists' colony in California painting seascapes. Born in Brooklyn, Castronovo and his family moved to Lake Worth when he was 11, where he wanted to embark on a career in the arts.

"In high school I excelled at art and set my sights on becoming a cartoonist. That wasn't exactly what my mother and father wanted; they wanted me to be a lawyer. Well... I finally convinced them it was an OK thing to be an artist, and my senior year we drove to the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale. The campus was located next door to the old Elbo Room, a real hell-raising joint in those days [late 1970s], and just as we're driving up a guy was getting the crap beat out of him in the parking lot. My folks weren't too impressed, and my plans for art school ended rather abruptly."

Castronovo entered Palm Beach Community College with the ambition of going on to law school. But for better or worse (South Floridians would say better), the former football star and class president of Lake Worth High School began imitating his favorite WSHE DJs while spinning records at parties.

"Unlike now, the coolest DJs were at SHE back then," Castronovo says. The new shtick took hold, and it wasn't long before the jock-to-be began to seriously consider that radio might well be a career option.

"After finishing up at PBCC, I transferred to the University of Florida with the idea of getting into radio and TV. But I was very frustrated; there wasn't a single class on how to get on 'Saturday Night Live.'"

Despite his trepidation, Castronovo took the advice of a neighbor (Rich Fields of "The Price Is Right") and began working at the college radio station. Following graduation from Gatorland in 1984, Castronovo began looking for a job in the Gainesville area.

"I had a demo tape and the first place I went, the station manager took the tape and threw it, telling me to come back when I had experience. Last I heard, the guy's working for Chick-fil-A."

After a brief stint of doing straight news, something Castronovo's

the first to admit he "wasn't cut out for," the budding star landed his first successful assignment at Gainesville's Rock 104. Two years later, Castronovo accepted an offer from Orlando's Q96.

"I was always a South Florida guy and wanted to get back here," Castronovo says. "When we moved here, I thought I had died and gone to heaven. Immediately, I became an avid outdoorsman, embracing the ocean, the beach, the Intracoastal. I really never wanted to leave."

As fate would have it, Castronovo's decision to move back to South Florida would be made for him. What went wrong in Otown? Here's the scoop:

"I knew several of the bellhops at some of the large hotels at Disney. They would call in and give us the names and room numbers of celebrities who were staying there. Then I'd call them while live on the air... at 6:30 in the morning."

Not everybody was amused.

"One morning we called [Academy Award-winning actress] Shirley Jones, who didn't appreciate the wake-up call."

Apparently, neither did her husband, Marty Ingels.

"Before the show was over, the lawsuit was filed and I was fired," laughs Castronovo, who found himself at WSHE 103.5 in Fort Lauderdale and later Miramar's Zeta 94.9.

In the last year and a half alone, Castronovo has interviewed a wide range of diverse celebrities, from Alonzo Mourning and Robert Schimmel to Borat and Frank Oz, the voice of Yoda. There is, however, one underlying theme.

"When you come on our show, you better be funny," says the good-natured Castronovo, who prides himself at being neither a "shock jock or a straight guy." Needless to say, he continues to use a number of unique approaches to get laughs. Interestingly, Shirley Jones was once again the recipient of one of Castronovo's off-the-wall tactics.

"I had her on the air last year, and she had no idea I was the guy who woke her up 20 years ago in Orlando. So I went ahead and broke it to her. She said that it was really her husband who had been upset and launched the lawsuit."

So what did Castronovo do? He called Ingels while on the air.

"Apparently, time had not healed the pain. We went at it pretty good for 10 minutes or so."

Lately, Castronovo is dealing with the aftermath of a tragic automobile accident that nearly took the lives of his wife and mother on Christmas Eve.

"Spending Christmas Eve in the hospital not knowing if two of your most precious loved ones were going to make it and telling your 7-year-old son that Santa was still coming really put a lot of things in perspective," says Castronovo, who was very touched at the outpouring of support from the local community.

"It's a miracle, but both of them are going to be fine."

Regarding the new gig with The Gater, "It's great to be on the air in West Palm. I'm right back where I grew up with my family and a lot of my old friends. It's really a dream come true."

For a lot of Palm Beach County radio gurus, the feeling is mutual. Welcome home, Paul.

