



## MID-SOUTH COMMUNITY COLLEGE

May 27, 2015

### **MSCC Adds KWEM-FM Station to Keep Music History/Heritage Alive**

Mid-South Community College has added KWEM 93.3 FM to its efforts to keep the musical heritage of Crittenden County alive and provide listeners with local flavor and information. The low-power, terrestrial station is scheduled to go on the air Monday, June 1.

“KWEM-FM provides yet another venue for us to tell this huge story with major historical implications,” said MSCC President Dr. Glen Fenter. “We consider this a significant step in helping people recognize how powerful the legacy of KWEM is in today’s popular music, and it’s a very important story to continue to tell.”

“We sincerely believe our effort to publicize this story has the chance to forever change the way that the rest of the world looks at eastern Arkansas. We’re taking an old - - and in many instances almost forgotten -- story and packaging it with new technologies and plan to infuse unbelievable levels of talent that exist in the young people of this region. We have everything necessary for a perfect storm.”

MSCC resurrected KWEM a year ago as an Internet-based station and has been broadcasting music created and influenced by legends who performed in West Memphis



before they became famous. The FM station will mirror some that content but will also feature live programming and information of local interest.

“While we have several radio stations licensed and operating in Crittenden County, none of them actually serves or has a real connection to Crittenden County,” Dr. Fenter said. “KWEM-FM will feature music that originated here and will allow us to provide other news and informational programming of value to our community.”

The college will also incorporate the station into its Digital Media program. Lead Faculty Anwar Jamison says students will benefit from the opportunity to tell the KWEM story.

“Education is great in and of itself, but when you can marry practical experience to it, it increases the potential exponentially,” Jamison said. “To know that you will be able to do something that will be heard right away and will mean something to so many people is great. I’m excited about the opportunities this is creating for our students.”

In addition to the Web and terrestrial radio stations, the college also owns numerous artifacts related to KWEM’s rich musical history. A campus-based replica of the KWEM studio, originally operating at 231 Broadway Street in downtown West Memphis, is located in MSCC’s University Center on the South Campus.

Mid-South is also working toward a KWEM-themed dining/entertaining destination in Crittenden County.

“KWEM creates a pivot point between Memphis and the area of the Arkansas Delta between Helena and Dyess Colony,” Dr. Fenter said. “We believe the revival of this part of West Memphis’ music history will generate additional tourism interest in Crittenden County.”

“We are perfectly positioned because Memphis is already spending millions of dollars annually to entice people to experience the musical heritage of the region, and those people are looking for other historic places to go. West Memphis can certainly become one of those options.”

MSCC’s upcoming merger with the Arkansas State University System, pending approval by the Higher Learning Commission, will also help with efforts to put West Memphis on the music heritage map.

The original KWEM gave unknown or little-known Memphis-area artists the opportunity to perform live when it opened for business on February 23, 1947. The station offered an enticing concept to musicians: anyone who could pay the \$15 to \$20 fee (or find a sponsor), could play music live.

Howlin' Wolf, B.B. King, Johnny Cash, Albert King, Scotty Moore, and others stepped up, paid up, and performed their magic on KWEM. People listened and loved what they heard.

More than 200 artists took advantage of the opportunity to perform on the West Memphis station, and many went on to sign major-label recording contracts.

KWEM also played an important role in the creation of Stax Records. Jim Stewart of the KWEM Radio House Band, the Snearly Ranch Boys, started Satellite Records in 1957. In 1958, Estelle Axton, Stewart's sister, entered the partnership, and Satellite Records became Stax Records.

When the station closed its doors in 1960, its mark was clearly made on music history. KWEM is listed on the National Historic Buildings applications for Sun Studios and Graceland as having been a major influence on Elvis Presley and the Memphis area in the birth of rock and roll.

For information on KWEM, see the website at [www.kwemradio.com](http://www.kwemradio.com). For general information on Mid-South Community College, see the website [www.midsouthcc.edu](http://www.midsouthcc.edu).