



IDLE AMERICAN

Hot Air or Dead Air?....

Commentary by Dr. Don Newbury

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My friend Rex Tackett, as community-minded as anyone I've ever known, is admired for always taking the high road, and--when necessary--the high wire as well.

He takes life on with cheer, always confident of sunrise tomorrow, no matter how many clouds--dark as they may be--fluff up the sky today. He and his wife, Mariann, are stalwarts in their hometown(s) of Brownwood and Coleman, where they own and operate radio stations.

Easy-going and armed with funny stories for all occasions, he is collared to speak at various functions in both communities, sometimes venturing into adjoining counties. He's an easy mark for civic meetings, particularly if it involves Kiwanis International, where he has been a kingpin for years. Rarely would casual observance suggest that he's a no-nonsense kind of guy, but frigid weather--rare as it is in central/west Texas--can peel back several layers of concern....

The weather challenged a few days ago when thermometers flirted with negative figures. At the Tackett household, priorities changed quickly to red alert.

He rushed through Brownwood stores hours before temperatures tumbled, eager to stock up on critical provisions. At the top of his list was cat food, since he and Mariann are--without

intent--cat "harborers," often with a dozen or so meowing at their door. They are compassionate people, far more generous to neighborhood cats than their dog--a red healer named Maybelline--thinks is necessary.

Before exiting one store, he checked to see if money could be saved when hair dryers are purchased by the case. Huh?...

This drew smiles from store personnel who asked why he'd ever need so many hair dryers.

He patiently explained that a transmitting tower for one of the Tacketts' radio stations rises from the peak of Santa Anna Mountain.

Some 460 feet tall, it reaches skyward above one of the highest points in the area. Emitting therefrom--he carefully explained are signals that fly through the air into home receivers, replacing radio silence with radio sound. (This is helpful information for the likes of us who barely know how to turn a radio on.) Such high-flying technology works, however, when towers don't freeze over. When they do, Tackett added, one might think that friends could be called on. But, he hasn't even tried, despite toying with the idea of running extension cords to the mountain top for hair dryers to plug in. In a perfect world, friends might rally there, pointing hair dryers skyward, thus keeping radio signals moving right along. (There he was, dreaming again.)...

Well, the situation ended well. The tower continued to do what towers do, and they didn't miss a lick at the radio stations located a few miles to the east and west.

The public continued to be served, a nameless cat population remained well fed and Maybelline shook his head about his masters--unashamedly "dog people"--befriending felines in all kinds of weather.

Coming out of the 90-hour freeze unscathed, Rex recalled an old sign that used to hang in one of the Tacketts' radio stations. Faded and dim, it spoke volumes: "God Save Us From Dead Air."...

Actually, not much happens in radio that Tackett hasn't seen before. He has reaped numerous honors, including induction into the Texas Radio Hall of Fame in 2012. This Cross Plains native has logged 55 years in sales, general management and ownership of radio stations formatted for all types of programming.

He has managed leading radio stations in four major cities while employed by national broadcasting networks before owning and operating Wicks Radio, the Tacketts' group of 19 radio stations in five states.

He and Mariann have lived the good life in Brownwood, her place of birth, since 2001. All-round community servants, they continue their support of noble projects great and small. If you

run into either of them, ask about their cats and dog. Then, press Rex for a hand-on-Bible answer: Does he really have cases of both cat food and hair dryers in his storage shed?...

Dr. Newbury, longtime university president, continues to write weekly and speak publicly. Contact: 817-447-3872, newbury@speakerdoc.com.