



## Community radio station aims to keep Hub in Touch

Howard Manly

The basement office of Touch FM has a handful of rooms, and all of them are cramped.

One of the radio station's owners, Charles Muhammad, has an office that doubles as storage space. Stacks of paper cups occupy one corner. An old Lou Rawls album resides in another.

His desk is cluttered with papers and awards, most noticeably a dark gray obelisk given to him last February by none other than Mayor Thomas M. Menino, trumpeting Muhammad's community service.

Despite the mess, he is comfortable sitting behind his desk. As a partial defense, a sticker reads, "Einstein's desk was messy, too."

Make no mistake, Muhammad clearly has other things on his mind. Chief among them is growing the low-powered radio station that he, John Laing Jr., owner of Laing Enterprises, and Leroy McLaurin, a former news photographer, started last November in Grove Hall.

After all, a radio station is not about the office space, but about

the programming, and Touch FM is clearly rolling. The music is old school rhythm and blues, hip-hop and everything soulful in between, including reggae and rap.

The Delfonics and Blue Magic are not strangers here. Neither are Afrika Bambaataa and Kurtis Blow. And that is the way Muhammad likes it.

A disc jockey himself, Muhammad prides himself on playing music that doesn't degrade women, use a lot of profanity or promote violence.

"It has to be 100 percent clean," Muhammad says. "Now, because we have 40 or so different personalities that work here, everyone has different perceptions of what clean means. So I get around that by saying it has to be 'extra clean.'"

The station is more than the music. What is turning people on is the programming. As a community station, Touch FM reflects the needs and talk of communities of color, focusing on everything from substance abuse to black history, community empowerment to financial advice.

"This is the evolution of the revolution," Muhammad says. "We are

doing the right thing, and nobody is here to speak to our community with our perspective."

That is an understatement. With the departure of WILD-FM last year, Boston's black community has few local options. All of that changed when Touch FM hit the airwaves nine months ago.

With a five-foot antennae perched atop a small building on Cheney Street, Muhammad says he has just under 100 watts to serve as the "fabric of the community." It's not much, but then again, it doesn't have to be right now.

The 100-watt cutoff is key, because the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requires a license if a radio station exceeds that amount of power. As a nonprofit educational entity, Muhammad says

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R&B legend Al Green was one of 31 acts that thrilled an estimated crowd of 15,000 people last weekend at the JVC Jazz Festival-Newport. (Kevin T. Cox photo)

## Two films reflect on Boston street violence

Toussaint Losier

Though recent reports would seem to suggest a decline in shootings in Boston's high crime neighborhoods in the past few months, a pair of films featured at this year's Roxbury Film Festival showed just how heavily gun violence still weighs on the minds of local residents.

Screened earlier this month,

"Bullet Full of Knowledge" and "Shots in the Hood" are two films by local filmmakers focusing on the issues of young people and gun violence.

"Bullet Full of Knowledge" depicts the story of Devaughn Woods, who was 14 when he was shot and paralyzed. A cautionary re-telling of Woods' true life tale, the first half of the film details the life Woods was living the day he was shot, while the

second half looks at the events of that day from a different viewpoint — the broadened perspective Woods gained following the shooting.

Driven by an old school hip-hop soundtrack, the film follows Woods' character through his morning routine, first into the streets, and then off to school. Woods, who co-wrote the screenplay with director Jibril Haynes, provides the film with a haunting narration that slides easily from humor to pain. Woods and Haynes also have the actors perform without dialogue, creatively using T-shirts to identify particular characters as "O.G.," "Tattletale" or

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State Sen. Dianne Wilkerson, D-Boston (right) listens to the testimony of Roberta Fitzpatrick, counsel for Arbella Mutual Insurance Co., before a Senate panel at the Statehouse on Monday, Aug. 13, 2007, in Boston. The panel met with representatives of the auto insurance industry to debate

Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick's plan to open the state's auto insurance industry to more competition. Arbella Mutual is opposed to Patrick's plan, as is Wilkerson, who lives in a neighborhood with some of the highest insurance rates in the city. (AP photo/Kevin Martin)

## Lawmakers skeptical of new insurance plan

Steve LeBlanc

Gov. Deval Patrick's plan to open the state's auto insurance industry to more competition is coming under fierce scrutiny on Beacon Hill.

Members of a special Senate panel said Monday they're worried the plan doesn't include enough protections to guard against discrimination by companies offering insurance products.

"I think this is just the worst economic policy," said state Sen. Dianne Wilkerson, D-Boston, a member of the panel. Wilkerson lives in a neighborhood with some of the highest insurance rates in the city and said she's worried the plan doesn't do enough to protect good drivers who live in urban areas.

Another panel member, Sen. Mark Montigny, D-New Bedford, also said

that before opening up the market to more competition, the state needs to do more to block companies from discriminating against groups of drivers.

While the law already bans companies from using race or gender as a factor in determining insurance rates, state Insurance Commissioner Nonnie S. Burnes didn't rule out allowing insurers to use other socioeconomic factors, like occupation or income, to set rates.

Burnes, however, said the insurers would have to show that those factors are legitimate and that they did not result in discriminatory practices.

"We're going to be very cautious in allowing the use of socioeconomic factors," she said. "We will make sure that rates are not discriminatory."

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