

The Boston Globe **RADIO TRACKS**
'ChickChat' keeps it light

By Clea Simon, Boston Globe Correspondent | February 14, 2007

What are two long-distance friends to do? When Heidi Hanzel and Lara Dyan met in 1996, while working in separate offices of one telecommunications firm, the answer seemed to be talk often. Only, let others join in the conversation.

For Hanzel, who lives in Virginia, near Washington, D.C., and Bostonian Dyan, that conversation became "ChickChat," now heard weekdays on Brockton's WXBR-AM (1460) , 8-10 p.m.; Fridays, 4-5 p.m. on XM satellite radio; and streaming and through podcasts on chickchatradio.com.

The idea came from Hanzel's husband, himself a part-time business radio host. "He'd come back from these radio conferences," says Hanzel. "And he'd say, 'We're all old fat white bald men. You should start something.' "

Once the idea was planted, says Dyan, it made sense. After all, people seemed interested in what they had to say. "When we would [get together and] go out, people would fall over each other trying to eavesdrop on our conversation," she says.

The show, launched in 2002, continues that long-distance friendship with Hanzel broadcasting from Washington, D.C., and Dyan broadcasting from her Back Bay home. And while they are still struggling to get on larger stations, the team has been honored by trade publication Radio and Records as "rising stars."

What their ongoing conversation covers can vary widely, but the tone remains consistently light. As the duo invite listeners to relax with a drink in their imaginary on-air "Cheetah Lounge," they aim for a frothy "Sex and the City" vibe. Topics range from articles in Cosmo and Glamour magazines and whether men and women can truly be friends to besmirched Miss USA contestant Miss Nevada and her fight to repair her reputation.

"The only time we talk about politics is when it's election time," says Dyan. Even then, she explains, they keep the tone flirty. "If it's two male candidates, [we'll discuss] who would you want to be on a desert island with." The main conflict they return to is Hanzel's "war on frumpiness." And when Hanzel reported on the recent State of the Union address, adds Dyan, "she had a full fashion report."

Such a featherweight take on serious subjects could be seen as a disservice to women's empowerment, and the two acknowledge that feminism -- which Dyan calls "the 'f' word" -- is not on their agenda. Hanzel, who was an NFL cheerleader, believes the women's movement wouldn't have her because of her days spent cheering the Redskins. Dyan says, "I was raised by a feminist. . . . That word to me sounds kind of militant."

But the two insist that their show does empower their listeners. "Once you're out of college, it's so hard to find new friends and new groups of people," says Dyan. (Both hosts are in their 30s.) "This feels to me a little bit like community building."

Besides, Dyan notes, there are other outlets for serious news and issues. "You get that everywhere else," she says. "People who want 'ChickChat' want a more fun take."

"When I was commuting in my car, after a long day at work, I didn't want to listen to something serious," says Hanzel. "I wanted to have fun and kick back." ■