



News release

December 3, 2025

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**Gateway's WGTD radio turns 50,
holds open house at its station**

Gateway Technical College's public radio station turns 50 this month, and to celebrate, the station is holding a coffee-and-kringle open house 7:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. Dec. 12 at the station located in the Inspire Center on the college's Kenosha Campus, 3520-30th Ave.

Listeners will also have a chance to tour the station, meet the staff, pick up a program guide and record brief birthday greetings that will air in the coming weeks, said station manager David Cole.

"We're excited to celebrate the station's first 50 years and want to set the stage for the future," Cole said.

WGTD 91.1 FM went on the air for the first time on Dec. 23, 1975.

The anniversary celebration includes a new episode of "Kenosha Voices" that features Gary Vaillancourt, Greg Berg and Cole. The oral history project is produced under the auspices of the Kenosha History Center in collaboration with Kenosha Public Media. The videos are available online.

In addition, Cole is seeking to form a WGTD listener ambassadors group that will interact with other listeners as well as staff tables and tents at various community events in 2026 in order to promote the radio station's services.

WGTD beginnings

In applying to the Federal Communications Commission for an available license, the Board of Trustees of Gateway Technical Institute sought to establish a radio station that would offer cultural programming – steeped in a strong commitment to news and public affairs – to serve as an alternative to commercial radio and also become a teaching and learning tool.

Frank Falduto, a Kenoshan who wore many hats in the community, was tasked with conducting a feasibility study. He eventually became project director. Falduto later would serve as station manager.

Vaillancourt was among the first hires. He became station manager after the man originally selected for the position died unexpectedly within months of the station hitting the air.

Back then, establishing a brand-new station and figuring out how best to serve the public with the resources available was a sort of a feel-as-you-go mission, Vaillancourt said on a recent edition of WGTD's Morning Show hosted by Berg.

"I keep going back to it, but people need to understand that we were an unknown," he said. "People had expectations because they were used to certain

types of radio stations, so we had to crack those expectations and do it professionally which I believe we did to get people to want us back.”

Another milestone in the station’s history occurred in the early 1990s when WGTD, partially in reaction to a need to cut costs, started carrying programming from Wisconsin Public Radio. Among other things, the move meant stronger Wisconsin Legislature and regional news coverage with the ability to air WPR reporting, allowing the staff to focus on local news and public affairs.

WGTD today features expanded services

In a WPR station realignment in 2024, classical music gave way to the WPR News network, further strengthening WGTD’s ability to keep the public informed.

These days, WGTD’s services are varied and cover a multitude of platforms.

They include WGTD’s flagship news and information service at 91.1 FM, with translators in Elkhorn (101.7) and Lake Geneva (103.3). 24/7 Jazz is available on WGTD HD2. WPR’s classical music network airs on WGTD HD3 for over-the-air listeners that are beyond the reach of WPR’s Milwaukee outlet, WHAD 90.7.

WGTD maintains the Gateway Radio Reading Service with programming for visually-impaired residents. Local high school football and basketball games are videocast on WGTD’s YouTube channel. Top local stories are available

online at wgtd.org, along with archive versions of local public affairs programs.

WGTD HD1 and WGTD HD2 are available via the free WGTD app.

In his Morning Show interview with Berg, Vaillancourt reminisced about the uncommon opportunity that he had in the 1970s to build a new radio station from scratch.

“At the same time, I think about what Dave Cole ... and what people like you have done to just make this place blossom because it truly has turned into something I think everyone wanted and you guys made it happen with your staff,” he said.

Other individuals who played a role in the early days WGTD are appearing during December on Berg's Morning Show. They include former Gateway Board of Trustees Chair Emily Mueller and radio station staffers Jayne Herring and Barb Axelson.

Gateway Technical College's mission is to deliver industry-focused education that is flexible, accessible and affordable for our diverse community. The college collaborates with communities in Kenosha, Racine and Walworth counties to ensure economic growth and viability by providing education, training, leadership and technological resources to meet the changing needs of students, employers and communities.

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