

Kathy's Extra: Phoenix Mourns KEZ's Bill Austin

Written by Written by Kathy Shayna Shocket

"The AZ Insider" with Kathy Shayna Shocket: Get the inside scoop on Arizona's social scene and celebrity news.



This week: A special tribute column in memory of radio personality Bill Austin.

It's emotionally challenging to write this column – sharing the news of **Bill Austin's** passing. I feel fortunate to have known the beloved radio personality and it's with a heavy heart to write that at only 55-years-young, Bill lost his battle with bladder cancer on Wednesday, June 2, 2010. Family, friends and fans are heartbroken and Phoenix is mourning his loss.

I first met Bill when he was a weatherman at the KNXV-TV, the NBC affiliate in Phoenix, and I must say he always looked stylish in a suit and tie. Most of us will remember Bill sporting one of his colorful scenic casual shirts. And oh how we enjoyed asking him to do his Johnny Carson and other impressions.



It's hard to picture Bill without **Beth McDonald**, his friend and KEZ radio partner of 20 years on the top-rated "Beth & Bill" morning show. Bill would often joke how most marriages don't even last that long.

"Bill was not just my radio partner," stressed Beth. "He was the brother I never had. A couple of days before he passed, while at the hospital, he told me, 'I sure miss doing that little radio show.'"

Some people may not remember that before officially giving up his weather gig at KPNX-TV, Bill juggled working at both Channel 12 as the weatherman and anchoring the morning KEZ show for four years. His talent, great sense of humor and signature low-key laugh were well known in the Valley of the Sun.

In February of this year, after 20 years in radio, much to the surprise of many of his listeners – Bill announced his retirement on the KEZ morning show he anchored with Beth from 6 to 10 a.m. A very private person, he did not speak of his personal health issues on the air. In his last few days he was in hospice care. The morning he passed, Beth noted that "in true Bill fashion, he signed off at exactly 10 o'clock."

Bill is pictured here on Halloween with employees who came dressed as Bill Austin.



Clear Channel Radio's **Jeff England** says it's a sad time. "I've received so many calls from Phoenix and around the country about Bill," says Jeff, the president and market Manager for Clear Channel Radio and Digital/Phoenix, the parent company of KEZ. Jeff points out that Bill was well respected and admired. "It's tough to be in the TV and radio business that long and not upset or offend someone- but he was popular with everyone."

Bill's friend and co-worker, radio personality KEZ's **Marty Manning** who feels fortunate to have worked with Bill for so many years, says he treasures the good times and the laughs he shared with Bill.

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Funeral arrangements have not yet been announced. However, from 6 to 10 a.m. on Friday, 99.9 KEZ will air a tribute to Bill on the morning show which has continued as "Beth & Friends." The tribute will feature memorable on-the-air moments.

The cherished memories of Bill will live on among the countless lives he touched.



Kathy Shayna Shocket is a Phoenix based writer. If you have a good item for *The AZ Insider*, you can email her at redkarpetgirl@aol.com.