



Meet the insanely interesting people in
New York City's most diverse neighborhood

Astoria Characters: The Voice of Chinamerica Radio

February 5, 2018

The first time **Steve Warren** stepped in front of a radio-station microphone, he was wearing a bow tie.



Photo by Nancy A. Ruhling

Steve's the voice behind Chinamerica Radio and The Country Oldies Show.

“I was in third grade and sang *White Christmas*,” says Steve, a tall man with an easy-going, ear-pleasing voice. “An organist in a suit was playing the music live. They gave me a wristwatch.”

The timepiece, which Steve wishes he had preserved as a souvenir, turned out to a prescient present.

Steve, the host of Envision Radio Network's [The Country Oldies Show](#), America's longest running weekly radio program featuring the greatest country hits from the 1950s to the 1980s, has spent his entire career in radio.



Photo by Nancy A. Ruhling

Chinamerica Radio started a decade ago.

Since 1999, he's been producing the oldies show, which made its debut in 1994, from a studio-apartment-size space on Jackson Avenue in Long Island City. The studio also is home to his [Chinamerica](#), the only 24-hour Internet Chinese global radio station.

Radio was a logical choice for Steve because his father was in the business. That's how he got that bow-tie holiday gig.

The family lived in New Albany, Indiana, which is right across the Ohio River from Louisville, Kentucky and is home to WNAS, the first public high school FM station in the country.



Photo by Nancy A. Ruhling

Steve made his first radio appearance when he was in grade school.

“My dad didn't stay in radio,” Steve says, “but he managed regional country music stars and later distributed music for Decca Records.”

Steve got to know the stars.

Some of them, African-Americans, used his bedroom as a dressing room because they were not allowed to stay in Louisville hotels under Jim Crow laws.

By the time he was a senior in high school, Steve was producing a weekly 15-minute program for WNAS, which broadcasted from Louisville. After graduation, he worked for a local rock-and-roll station.

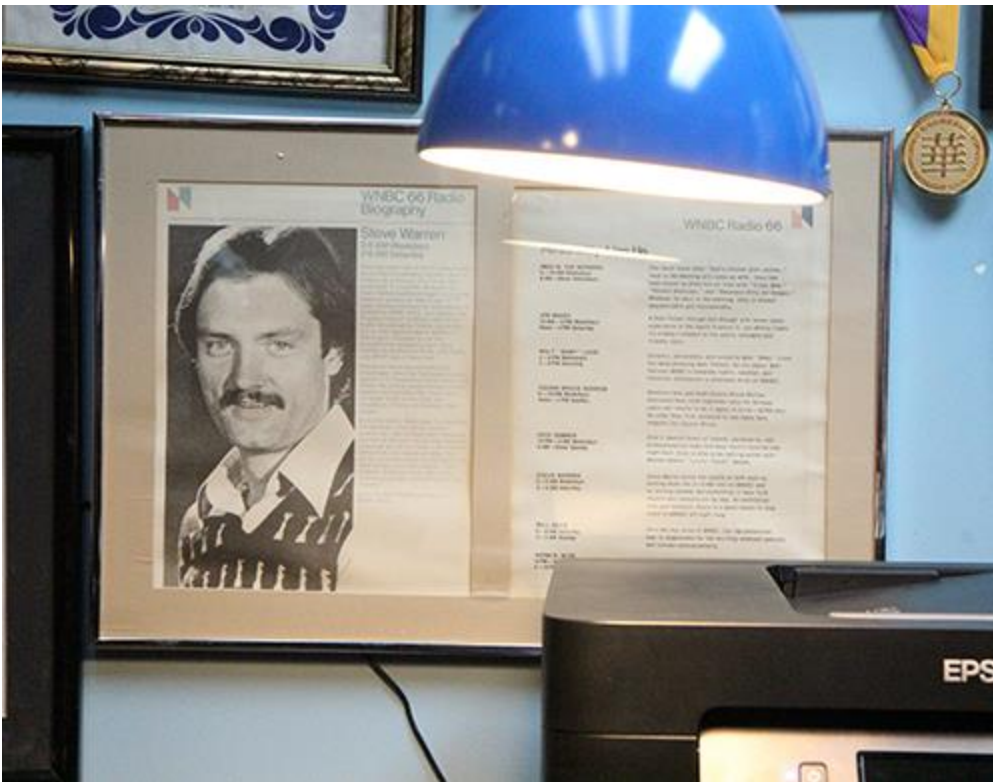


Photo by Nancy A. Ruhling

Steve in his WNBC days.

He worked full time in radio while earning a speech and theatre degree from Indiana University.

Instead of heading to a Broadway stage, Steve opted for a broadcasting booth.

“I used radio as my theatre venue of choice,” he says. “It was just me and the microphone. It was like doing improv — nothing was scripted.”

His eye and his voice were on Manhattan, so he worked his way across the country, station by station as he zeroed in on the Big Apple.

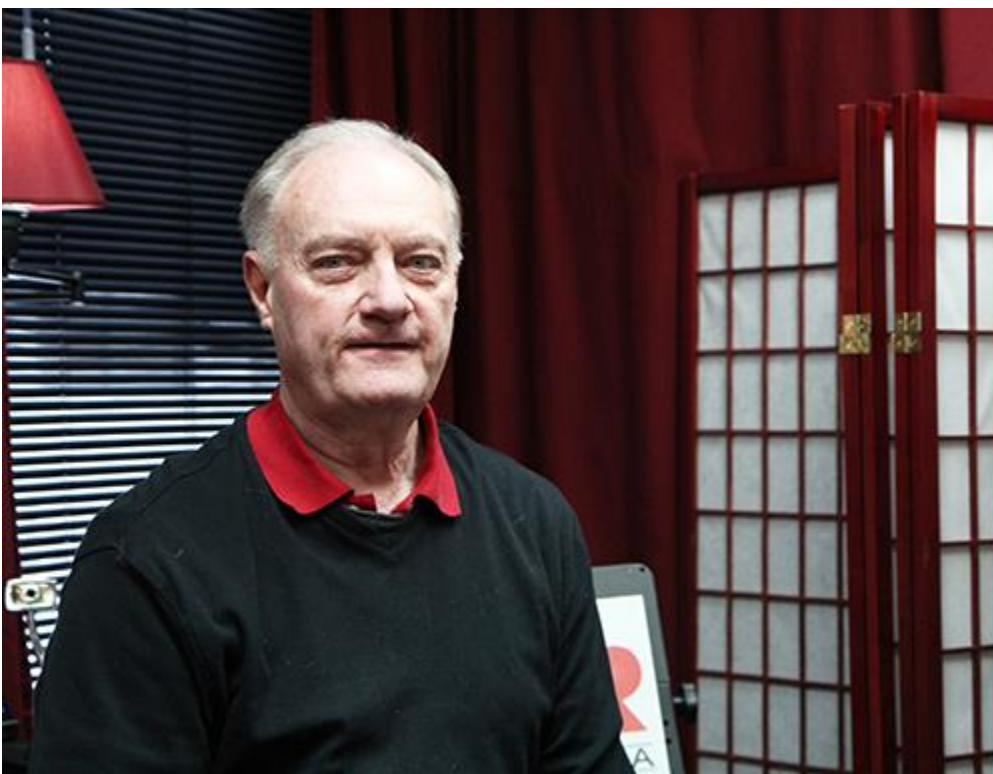


Photo by Nancy A. Ruhling

Steve worked for several NYC stations, including WHN, the city’s first country station.

In 1971, he made it: He got a job with WPAT.

Later he worked for CBS Radio Network, WNBC Radio and WHN, the first country station in the city.

He traded DJing for program management and established his own consulting company.



Photo by Nancy A. Ruhling

Paper umbrellas and microphones.

For a couple of years, he was editor of Radio Ink Magazine.

When satellite radio was being developed, he designed and implemented the country music channels for Sirius.

Later, he helped launch the Martha Stewart Living channel on Sirius and became the news anchor for The Howard Stern Show.

Along the way, he made [personal appearances](#) and MC'd shows for stars like Johnny Cash, John Denver and Buck Owens, wrote [RADIO: The Book](#), a best-seller on programming, appeared in episodes of *The Sopranos* and in several feature films, including *It's Complicated*, and served as an adjunct instructor at the International Academy of Broadcasting in Montreux, Switzerland.



Photo by Nancy A. Ruhling

Chinamerica Radio opened up a whole new life for Steve.

Then, 10 years ago, when he was close to retirement age, he met someone from the Chinese Consulate in New York City.

“He introduced me to the pop music of China,” Steve says. “That’s what got Chinamerica started.”

The station, which has a listener base of nearly a million tune-ins per month, plays Chinese pop music. Announcements, ads and interviews are in English.

“I couldn’t believe that nobody else had thought of this,” he says. “The Chinese-American population alone is 3.8 million.”



Photo by Nancy A. Ruhling

Each person interviewed gets a fortune cookie.

Steve has a founding-partner in Beijing who comes to New York for a couple of weeks each year. In turn, Steve visits China and Taiwan at least annually. He has a staff of regulars who handle promotions, translations, the website, music, and a few more part-timers when he needs them.

Steve mans the station from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. every day then attends local Chinese-Community events at night and on weekends.

“The station has grown entirely on relationships,” he says.

Steve, who just brought back a suitcase full of CDs from Taiwan, says Chinamerica is a fulfilling endeavor.



Photo by Nancy A. Ruhling

Steve hopes a mainstream station gives a voice to Chinamerica Radio.

“Learning new music, a new language and a new culture has extended my lifetime,” says Steve, who has spent 56 of his 72 years working in radio. “I’ve got something to wake up for every morning.”

Although Steve is having too much fun to retire, he’d like to create a secure future for Chinamerica.

“I would feel vindicated, if at some point, I am able to get this music and this demographic acknowledged by mainstream media,” he says.

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