

LIMITED EDITION ORNAMENTS AVAILABLE

BAYTOWN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

By Matt Hollis

If you like to “Rock Around the Clock” this Christmas, think about picking up one of the Baytown Historical Preservation Association’s limited edition tree ornaments featuring Baytown’s early rock ‘n’ roll radio stations KREL.

The ornaments come in shades of black, blue, green, and white on a satin marron glass ball measuring 3 ¼ inches round.

The ornament takes you back to 1954 when Baytonians were introduced to a different kind of radio station thanks to a new disc jockey, Bill “Rascal” McCaskill. He played the blues music of the Black culture to the white teens in the area instead of the regular playlist filled with crooners and big band era musicians.

McCaskill arrived at the nondescript AM radio station at Wade Road and Decker Drive that only put out 1000 kilowatts of power and bore the call letters KREL. The station’s call letters were derived from the local high school, Robert E. Lee High School. Thousands would listen to his “Night Train” program from 7 to 10 p.m. along the Gulf Coast in

Baytown, Houston, Galveston, and even in Lufkin. Roy Hamilton would close the show by delivering a final message, “You’ll Never Walk Alone.”

In between songs, McCaskill would offer advice on relationships, emphasize how important homework was, and would read dedications of songs to that special someone. He received a remarkable 25,000 mail-in requests every year he was on the air.

Many teens would gather at the Quack Shack to listen to the tunes played on KREL.

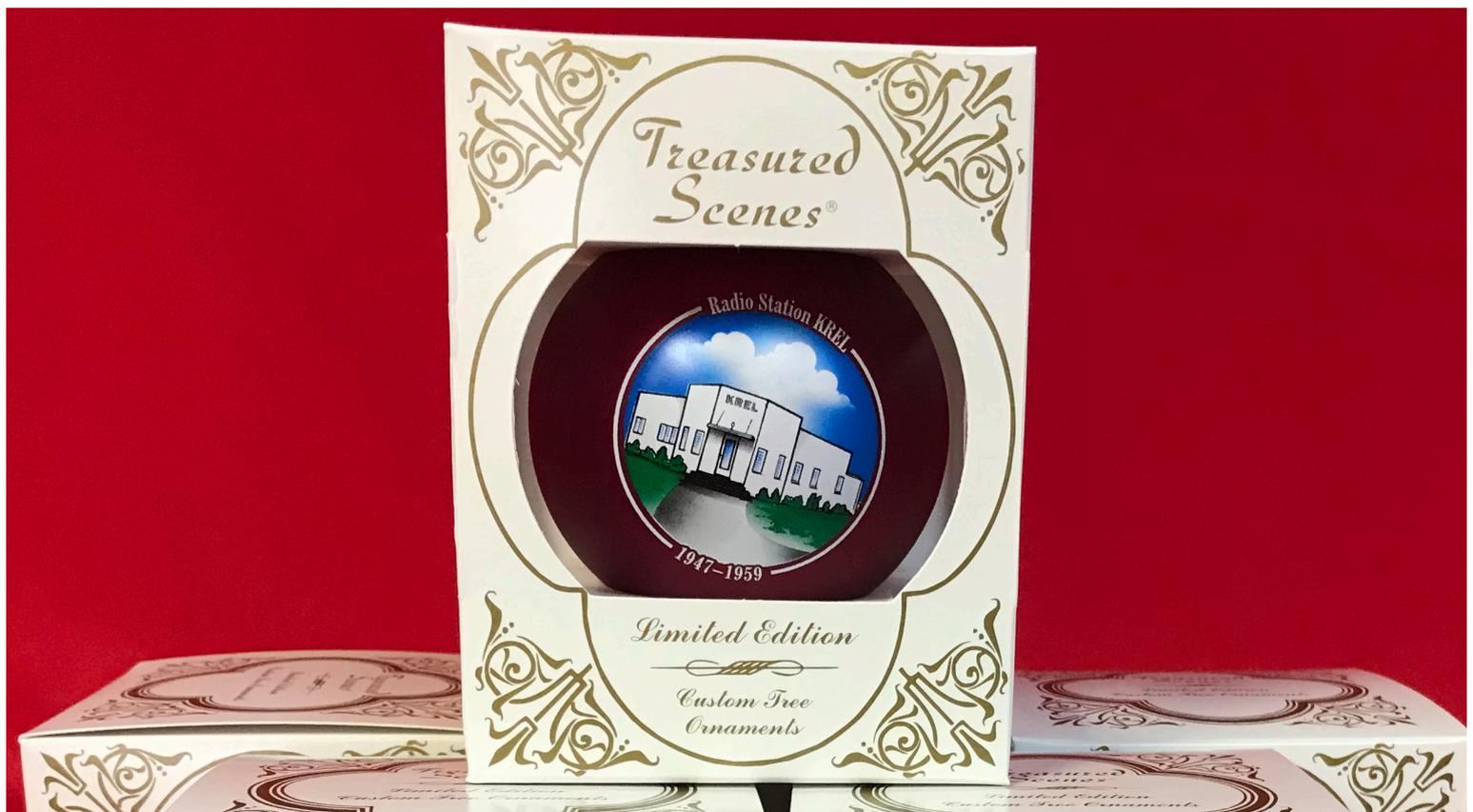
McCaskill became an honorary member of the REL Class of 1957.

Booking Elvis

McCaskill booked three musicians for a sock hop at Magnolia Gardens near Crosby because he wanted live music instead of just playing records. The musicians were Bill Black, Scotty Moore and a singer named Elvis Presley. They played for three hours for 230 or so teenagers. McCaskill described Elvis as “well-mannered” and “polite.”

KREL history

KREL was first owned by The Baytown Sun, whose then-publisher was Robert Matherne and editor was Fred Hartman. Sports editor Dan



Shults would report on games played by the local teams, and Buck Young, who later became a Baytown historian, assisted him on the school sports beat.

Fishing news came from Byard Sooy, who was employed at Exxon, then known as Humble Oil. A.L. Banks provided news on city government, schools, and general community happenings. Jean Froneberger and Johnella Boynton read women's news on the air.

Joe Arrington was a Carver High School student that also had a show on KREL. He was first known as Jivin' Joe, but later became soul singer Joe Tex, and scored a dance hit in the 1970s with "Ain't Gonna Bump No More (With No Big Fat Woman)."

In 1959, the station was sold, and the call letters were changed to KWBA and later to KBUK. The KREL building still stands by the railroad track at Decker Drive and Wade Road as KWWJ.

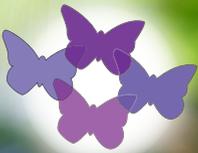
In 2013, McCaskill died. According to former Sun managing editor Wanda Orton, McCaskill said in 2010, "Looking back over my life, I wouldn't change a thing. I really enjoyed what I did for a living. I believe I reached a lot of young people as a disc jockey and hope I had a positive influence on their lives."

To order an ornament, you can use a credit card or PayPal, with a minimum service fee, and email info@baytownhistory.org with the number of ornaments you would like to purchase. Indicate if you want the ornament mailed or if you want to pick them up. For additional information, call 281-421-2099 or email info@baytownhistory.org.

The association also has a limited number of ornaments from Christmas past. This includes the Battleship Texas at the San Jacinto Battleground, the Baytown Post Office on Market Street, the Interurban Railbus at Missouri Pacific Depot on East Texas Avenue, Humble Refinery's No. 1 Catalytic Cracking Unit decorated as Christmas tree, the famous San Jacinto Inn, the Harris County Library — Goose Creek Branch, the 1894 one-room Wooster Schoolhouse, San Jacinto Memorial Hospital, Baytown's first fire station on Minnesota Street, and Lillie-Duke Hospital.



HOME OF KREL and KREL-FM on Decker Drive west of Baytown.



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