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“Personalities INSIDE RADIO”

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by Mike Kinosian, Special Features Editor

Considerably beyond the relaxed early-morning sans tie fashion statement which underscores his cordial accessibility beats a genuine breath of professional fresh air.

Undeniable camera-friendly good looks are obvious yet fall far down an exemplary and tremendously lengthy list of attributes applicable to one of media's hottest commodities.

At a time when some pundits robotically spew myopic talking points, often punctuated with highly distasteful vitriol and venom, [Joe Scarborough](#) towers over the pack with an unmatched penchant for fairness and intelligent calmness.

Not only does the former Republican Congressman masterfully and gracefully handle MSNBC's 6-9am “Morning Joe,” he dutifully prepares in the ensuing hour for his 10am-Noon Citadel Media talk program which debuted four months ago (12-8-2008).

Grossly Exaggerated Obituary

Once “Morning Joe” took off, it was inevitable Scarborough would be inundated with radio inquiries. “[Citadel Chairman/CEO] Farid [Suleman], [former Citadel O&O Radio Group President] Mitch Dolan and [ABC News Radio VP/GM] Steve [Jones] said we would begin immediately with a live clearance on WABC/New York, so I told [‘Morning Joe’ and ‘Joe Scarborough Show’ co-host] Mika [Brzezinski] that was just about as good as it gets and we should consider it,” Scarborough remarks. “We said we’d be excited to do the show but wanted to do something different [as] we’ve done with ‘Morning Joe.’ We felt we had a great chance to pull in newsmakers from all sides and to break news every day.”

Such foresight and spirited enthusiasm reinforced positive feelings Citadel Media/ABC Radio executives possessed for Scarborough. “I also [happen to] think they’re ‘Morning Joe’ fans and wanted us to do on radio what we’re doing on television,” the former Florida Sun Publisher/Editor opines. “It took three to six months to get our footing on ‘Morning Joe’ as we figured out exactly what we were doing.”

Fronting a daily radio program isn’t virgin territory for the graciously affable Scarborough who was heard on Westwood One in 2005 but he asserts, “That was one guy talking into a microphone and spouting an opinion for three hours. What Mika and I are doing

is completely different from that show [which] was rooted in the past [whereas] we’re currently trying to find the future of the medium. [NBC News Chief White House correspondent] Chuck Todd said radio was dying, but that’s like the guy who said bands [such as] the Beatles with guitars were on their way out. Radio isn’t dying – it’s critical. Chuck’s seen the error of his ways and has apologized to us and the tens of millions of people who listen to Talk radio every day.”

Already replicating what he accomplishes with “Morning Joe,” Scarborough attracts and chats with an impressive number of 25-54s on the radio venture. “That’s younger than many other talk shows and we’ll probably have more [appeal among women] than on traditional talk programs like the one I did before,” he forecasts. “People who watch our television show are bright, ‘thought-leaders’ who shape the news. Our radio audience is smart, younger and hooked-in. People working on the [radio] show who’ve been in [the medium] for 25 years tell us they’re surprised because our callers are younger and there are many more women.”

Imus Irony

Self-depicted “radio nerd” Scarborough lived in upstate New York and joyfully recounts how he’d lock himself in his room at night and incessantly sample as much radio as possible. “George Michael was spinning discs on WABC and I’d listen to CKLW [Detroit/Windsor], WLS/Chicago and WOWO/Fort Wayne, IN. [Even though] I work in television I never really had a romance for it. I’ve been to the White House and done some really big things, but the first time [Executive Producer] Chris [Licht] and I walked into WABC, we stood back and had to pinch ourselves.”

Transformation from a political career to deftly occupying the host’s chair of MSNBC’s nightly “Scarborough Country” eventuated completely by accident. “[MSNBC President] Phil Griffin saw me on [MSNBC’s ‘Hardball with Chris Matthews’] and called to ask if I wanted my own television show,” a still startled Scarborough explains. “I wondered if that was a trick question. I was doing billable hours in a law firm, a job I just hated so I told Phil I’d love it.”

Another momentous Scarborough-Griffin phone conversation transpired following the aftermath of Don Imus’ now infamous comments about certain members of the Rutgers University women’s basketball squad. “I immediately called Phil and told

him I was better-suited to do a [three-hour] morning show where we can get into deeper conversations. Phil agreed so we shifted our efforts to 'Morning Joe.'"

Life can often be fraught with a maze of intriguing ironies and there's a real Imus-Scarborough doozie.

Subsequent to his aforementioned termination from MSNBC and CBS Radio, Imus secured a morning drive radio endeavor with ABC Radio Networks (now Citadel Media) where the person on directly after him is ... Scarborough ... a longtime "I Man" devotee. "When I was growing up, Don Imus was the legend, a guy I loved listening to," Scarborough assuredly maintains. "We're thrilled to be following Don. He gave us a great opportunity by building a format on MSNBC where people wanted to listen to Senators talk policy for 15 minutes. We took what Don started and expanded on it and [it's] working very well."

Fiery Friends

Indicative of his refreshing open-mindedness, Atlanta-born Scarborough's political influences range from former US Attorney General and New York Senator Bobby Kennedy to Ronald Reagan. "I was amazed at how one man could make such a big difference in the course of a nation," he declares of RFK. "Reagan was inspiring for a completely different reason."

Faithful "Morning Joe" viewers detect a particularly fond twinkle in Scarborough's eye when he chats with or discusses Air America Radio "Ring of Fire" co-host Robert Kennedy Jr. "We've been friends for a while," proudly declares Scarborough, who as a GOP Florida Congressman attempted to rename the Justice Department after Bobby's late father; the other "Ring of Fire" co-host is Mike Papantonio, Scarborough's former law partner. "Ideologically [Bobby and I] don't agree with each other very often but I certainly learn from him every time I hear him talk and whenever we get together."

Role model for "Morning Joe" was Tim Russert. "Phil Griffin told us we had an audience of one and that was Tim," Scarborough explains.

Quite simply, the credo was if veteran "Meet The Press" host Russert wouldn't be proud of something – it shouldn't be done -

and Scarborough believes that was a great "Morning Joe" guiding light. "Having Tim come on regularly helped give us needed credibility to get where we are. Rush Limbaugh taught me that radio isn't about ideology, guests or callers. It's about learning the art of entertaining people [so] they'll keep listening. He has the same gift Reagan did which is to boil down complex issues to their bare essentials. I don't agree with all [Limbaugh's] positions but it doesn't matter - he's a great broadcaster and a great entertainer. The lesson for all of us is we can't build an audience [by simply] spitting out words."

Enormous post-PAC attention showered on Limbaugh proved to be priceless for him and the medium. "If Barack Obama really thinks he's hurting Rush by going after him, he and the White House are sadly mistaken," contends Scarborough who holds a University of Florida law degree. "Americans understand it's all a distraction. Rush Limbaugh is a Talk radio host. By the time people vote, they'll be thinking of the candidates in front of them – [not Limbaugh]."

It's also Scarborough's assessment that Democrats will have a tough go attempting to resuscitate any semblance of the Fairness Doctrine. "They've already overreached in many areas and it would be a terrible tactical mistake," he comments. "I have to believe that will be seen as the broadcasting equivalent of FDR trying to pack the Supreme Court because he didn't get [the one] he liked. Talk radio is a vibrant alternative to mainstream media. I don't think there's the willpower to come in and, basically, censor the free marketplace of ideas. That's what Talk radio is. This isn't Great Britain: We don't interfere with free speech and the BBC isn't our major outlet. We have a strong, robust First Amendment and don't want to interfere with it. Democrats aren't going to be stupid enough to do that."

Proper Priorities

Controversy of sorts engulfed Scarborough in 2001 when the then 38-year-old Congressman, possessing abundant charisma he exudes on radio and television, opted to pull the plug from a promising political career. "My 13-year-old son told me he couldn't continue with a father who was only home 200 nights a year," candidly recounts Scarborough the first Republican to represent his district since 1873. "I left a job I absolutely loved at an historic time. Everybody around me was panicking and people were telling me about all the things I could do. Washington [however] will be

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there five years from now and ten years from now.”

On one hand it was the most gut-wrenching judgment Scarborough ever made yet he also points out it was the easiest because, “I saw myself as a father before I saw myself as a congressman. Even though I’ve missed Congress a little bit, I haven’t regretted that decision. I have a more exciting life and a better platform now than if I had [been elected to higher office].”

Even so he’s routinely quizzed if a return to that world at a higher level is in the cards. “I think we have as much influence here as I ever would in the House or Senate,” confides Scarborough who turned 46 last Thursday (4-9-2009). “I am, however, becoming impatient with my Republican brethren at their inability to craft a conservative message that’s relevant to the 21st century. Much of what these guys are saying sounds like what I heard in 1991. This is a new time and we’re in a new place. The conservative movement needs to be relevant again. There are times I get frustrated and wish I were out there fighting the good fight. Somebody needs to say what needs to be said.”

Being teamed with Brzezinski on both radio and television is rooted in “Scarborough Country” days when its host was in Florida while New York-based Mika did newsbreaks on the half-hour. “I noticed she was making fun of me,” Scarborough states with his voice registering a hint of feigned resentment. “The show had been on for three months and, despite seeing her every night [on the monitor] I hadn’t met her until I went to New York.”

As Scarborough introduced himself, he told Brzezinski he know she was mocking him. “Without blinking an eye and with a straight face, Mika asked how she could make fun of a show she’s never seen,” recounts Scarborough, breaking into laughter. “She said she just did cut-ins and never watched the show. From the very beginning, I could tell [Mika] wasn’t like everyone else. She’s not an airhead who [simply] reads a Teleprompter. There’s great substance there. The second we did the show, she and I knew it was a perfect fit.”

No longer though does Scarborough enjoy the luxury of originating his MSNBC responsibilities from what he often refers to on-air as “the redneck Riviera” and he misses Florida. “It is home but we can’t do ‘Morning Joe’ from there,” the former Pensacola (FL) Catholic High School QB realizes. “We mainly bounce back and forth between New York and Washington. [The warmth of the Florida sun is nice], but there’s such an intellectual charge by being in the media capital or in DC. It’s very exciting to get to talk to the people we meet every morning, first on television and then on radio.”

Shoeing Away Pain

Hitting the air at 6am on MSNBC necessitates Scarborough answer an unforgiving 4am alarm. Upon returning home from the radio program, he typically devotes seven hours a night authoring “The Last Best Hope” which reaches bookstores the middle of next month. “It’s a pretty crushing and lousy schedule,” he acknowledges. “When I wake up, I’m exhausted but the time flies

by on television. The fun really starts when we come over to radio. The two hours really go by quickly. Radio is more opinion-driven and I get to speak [a bit more freely].”

Essentially reproducing what he did when he was in Congress, Scarborough divides his time between work and family – nothing else. “It would be nice to get up to Boston to watch a Red Sox game and perhaps I could pick up golf,” he muses. “I’d really like to do something other than being under fluorescent lights for [what seems like] 20 hours a day.”

Excruciating back issues have plagued Scarborough in recent years but he reports those aches and pains have subsided slightly.

Prolonged periods of sitting can exacerbate the situation but he asserts, “It’s much, much better than it was a few years ago. It’s amazing what wearing good shoes will do for your back.”

Respected Radio Revolutionist

Evolution of Scarborough the broadcaster is evident on “Morning Joe” and he’s already clearly established himself in radio’s upper echelon of communicators.

One can’t help but respect him, in part, because it is that very element – respect - he so often overtly demonstrates. “Everybody’s opinion is welcome - nobody will get shouted down,” he stresses. “Especially with people [with whom] I disagree, I go into every interview looking at it as a chance to learn something.”

Dinner conversations in nurturing households have parents inquiring what their children learned in school that day.

That’s how Scarborough concludes his television program among his cohorts and it underscores his thirst for knowledge. “I hope to continue creating smart radio and television every morning,” he emphasizes. “If we can get people to say our radio show is revolutionary, we’ll be absolutely thrilled.”



WHO: Joe Scarborough
WHAT: “The Joe Scarborough Show”
WHERE: Citadel Media
WHEN: M-F, 10am-Noon (ET)
HOW LONG: Since Dec. 8, 2008

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