

# Dig That Radio

by Liesel Schmidt

If you find yourself scanning the radio, wondering what to listen to during your morning commute that won't involve syrupy lyrics chronicling teenage angst or thumping beats that feel like an assault on your no-quite-fully-caffeinated brain, WUWF 88.1FM might have the perfect solution. Every weekday morning at 7:33 a.m., Dr. Judy Bense lends her voice and her archaeological expertise to the airwaves, introducing listeners to the rich history of Northwest Florida and all of the spectacular finds literally buried in our backyard.

Before she started manning the mike on "Unearthing Florida," Bense founded the UWF program of Anthropology/Archaeology and established the University's Anthropology Institute in 1980, where she served as director for 20 years. In 2001, she became the chair of the Anthropology Department and founded the Florida Public Archaeology Network in 2005. Clearly, Bense knows her material. "There's no one more knowledgeable and passionate about 'public' archaeology than Dr. Bense," says Sandra Averhart, executive producer of "Unearthing Florida." Which might be one reason her voice carries with it not only a certain pleasantness, but also an unmistakable air of authority. As she expounds on Florida's rich past, Bense takes her audience on an educational journey through a history layered with culture and the artifacts that whisper its tale.

"'Unearthing Florida' provides a twist to the typical history module, in that the focus is on archaeology," says Averhart of the 90 second segments. "Historical records are necessary to provide context, but every effort is made in the segments to include some artifact or archaeological feature, which I believe are essential in heightening interest and giving our listeners [a better] picture of the subject matter."



submitted photo

**Sandra Averhart and Dr. Judy Bense discuss the latest archaeological finds on their morning radio program, WUWF 88.1 FM.**

"[We hope] to promote the protection, preservation, and public appreciation of Florida's archaeological resources," says program researcher and writer Mike Thomin. "Florida has such a rich and fascinating history; this year [marks] the 500th anniversary of the first documented European landing in North America, and Native American prehistory in Florida goes back over 10,000 years. There are literally tens of thousands of recorded archaeological sites [here], on land and underwater; and we have such an amazing mixture of cultures over this long period of time," Thomin continues. "Archaeology is incredibly important to help unravel this often complex history, but it's a lot more than just digging up pretty objects. In fact, most archaeologists spend a majority of their time analyzing what

continued on page 22 ►

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## Dig That Radio

◀ continued from page 12

they find in a lab." It is the significance of this analyzation that Unearthing Florida hopes to emphasize, giving the public a more-fully realized picture of the crucial need to preserve and protect archaeological sites. "Unfortunately, the destruction of Florida's archaeological sites is a very real threat; and when sites are looted or disturbed, we lose the valuable information that comes with it," Thomin says. "While all of Florida has some really incredible archaeological sites, we are very fortunate here in Northwest Florida for the simple reason that we have such a wide variety of different sites from many different time periods right in our 'backyard.' Such sites include ancient Native American villages and the temple mounds in Fort Walton Beach, remnants of an American Revolutionary War fort in Pensacola, one of the oldest water-powered mills in Milton, and a number of shipwrecks scattered across the Panhandle that people can actually dive on," notes Thomin.

In 1998, in celebration of the 300th anniversary of the first permanent colonial settlement in Pensacola at Presidio Santa Maria, WUWF 88.1FM News Director Averhart collaborated with Bense to create a series of minute-long radio segments about UWF's excavations at the site. The radio series was a noted success, both in Pensacola as well as in surrounding areas, spurring the creation of Unearthing Pensacola. "For the next 14 years, these short, informative pieces captivated listeners and brought Pensacola's archaeology to a large audience," Thomin says. Soon, however, the program's city-focused material seemed limiting, and Averhart and Bense began to envision even greater things. "Unearthing Florida was a way to bring the archaeological activities conducted on a state-wide level to the public via radio," Thomin recalls. After its first airing during Florida Archaeology Month in March of 2012, the program continued to gain listeners and now reaches 38,000 weekly listeners.

Funded by WUWF Public Media and the Florida Public Archaeology Network, Unearthing Florida is the skillfully created brainchild of Bense, Thomin, and Averhart, a collection of information gathered from interviews and archaeology reports from across the state. Future hopes for the program include expansion to other radio stations throughout the state, and "NPR member station WGPU Public Media based in Fort Myers became the second public radio station to use Unearthing Florida episodes as part of their weekly programs," Thomin boasts.

Digging in the dirt isn't just child's play.

### Puzzle answers from page 30



### King Crossword — Answers

Solution time: 21 mins.

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G	A	G	A		F	R	O		C	L	U
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