



On Air Duo: Parr Lumber employees Corey Valdez (left) and Tony Cookston man the mikes on Parr's *Weekend Warriors* radio show.

Radio Days

Parr Lumber's weekend airwaves adventure creates a wider audience for the Oregon-based dealer.

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Parr Lumber built it—the logo says it in black and white—but the Hillsboro, Ore.-based dealer didn't use a stick of lumber or a single fastener to do so.

What Parr created, out of, er, locally available materials is *Weekend Warriors* with Tony & Corey, a home improvement radio show that Parr owns and produces weekly at KPAM, an AM radio station in Portland. The Saturday morning program launched early this year has turned two Parr employees into local celebrities, created a potential new source of revenue, and helped Parr reach its goal of being the go-to store

for the robust Do-It-Yourselfer.

Weekend Warriors is hosted by Tony Cookston, manager of the dealer's Forest Grove yard, and his buddy Corey Valdez, an outside sales rep in Parr's West Linn operation.

"We operate the show as informative entertainment," says Corey.

"That's it exactly," says Tony. "People do call in, but we don't really ask." He says the duo might be an hour into the show, so completely into the morning's topic, before Corey might ask, "Are you going to give them the numbers to call in?"

One of the first orders of business

was to come up with a name for the new show. So the guys did what they normally do when hashing over something: They went out to eat, came up with a bunch of names, and then proceeded to shoot down each other's suggestions. *Weekend Warriors*, championed by Tony, won out over *The House that Parr Built*, *Prepare to Repair*, *Housing Around*—that would have been a good one," Corey argues—*Renovation Station*, *Breaking Down the House*, and *House Pains*.

While *House Pains* didn't make it, the phrase did trigger a regular segment called "Pain in the House," in which the

hosts recall distressing memories (usually highly embroidered, when they come from Corey) of home repair projects that went sadly awry. The first one, courtesy of Tony, involved an ironing board, a can of spray paint, a screwdriver, multiple rooms, and carpeted floors. Mayhem ensued. But it made for great radio and is an episode listeners remember.

While a radio show wasn't on Parr's radar, an opportunity arose last December when KPAM approached the dealer wanting to learn whether it had any interest in developing a show similar to the station's *Fixin' Up the House* since *Fixin's* host was retiring.

"This was one of those once-in-a-lifetime opportunities," says Nancy Cranston, Parr's marketing manager.

The deal struck with KPAM gives the dealer ownership of the show, all the content and all the ad spots. For that, Parr shelled out \$33,800, a recurring annual cost that's subject to renegotiation. Cranston and media buyer Larry Andersen put together sponsorships that Parr sold to vendors.

In the program's first year, those sponsorships accounted for \$12,820 of revenue. The dealer's out-of-pocket costs for 2012 were just under \$21,000, "but we rationalized that by saying that some of that money would have been spent on our media buy anyway," Cranston says. Tony and Corey are compensated for their hosting duties: KPAM picks up Tony's tab, the dealer pays for Corey's.

For the first year, Cranston and her team looked at the various promotions already set in place for the different seasons and built *Weekend Warrior's* calendar around those. For example, Parr heavily advertises decking and related products in April and May, so during those months, the radio show followed suit, with a show on how to build a deck featuring a builder customer, and others featuring deck vendors talking about their products. She also looks at the show's sponsors, and during that decking season might have someone from Trex come on the show and talk about the product. In turn, she looks to Tony and Corey to find complementary guests, perhaps a local deck builder, landscape designer, or lighting expert.

Once a month, Tony and Corey head out of the studio to do remote broadcasts at various locations. For Father's Day, the pair broadcast the show from one of the four Parr yards where Traeger grill reps were cooking food for customers and demonstrating their products' capabilities. Later that summer, the pair set up a remote at the local Street of Dreams, an annual event sponsored by the Portland Home Builders Association.

Whether the broadcast duo is driving customers to the dealer is "something that's hard to measure," says Cranston, but it's certainly made local celebs of Tony and Corey. "I've been at a remodeling event and had people say walk up to me and say, 'I've been listening to your show,' and it's so cool," Cranston says.

Tony had this encounter. "One day a customer, a woman, came up to the front counter, and said, 'I've got this

The show may be a bit loosey-goosey, but it works because its presenters have worked together inside Parr for years. Says Tony: "We are just a couple of goofballs with experience in the industry."

project. Now I'm a weekend warrior, I can do this myself.' She used the phrase twice. Fifteen minutes in, she says, 'I've been listening to this radio show, and they said I could do it, and I want to make sure that I have everything I need.' And I said, 'You listen to the *Weekend Warrior* show? That's my show.' She pulled back, looked at me and said, 'It is you.' She was so happy. She did the project and sent us pictures. She did a great job." On remote from the Street of Dreams, Tony and Corey offered listeners 15 free tickets—all they had to do to claim a ticket was show up and say they listened to the program on KPAM, says Cranston. "They were gone within half an hour."

Tony and Corey broadcast every Saturday morning from a nondescript basement room at the KPAM station on Portland's Southeast Lake Road. Is it a

Big Chair, No Worries: "Corey never gets nervous," Tony Cookston says of co-host Corey Valdez, shown here. "He has nerves of steel."



PHOTOS: LEAH NASH / NOVUS SELECT

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well-rehearsed gig? Well, no.

“Monday, we’re busy and don’t talk,” says Corey. “Tuesday, Tony calls and says, ‘Let’s talk.’ I say okay, and put something together, and then I don’t call. Friday, he calls and says, ‘Are we going to talk about this?’ So we hash it out.”

They usually roll into the studio just before air time after having met for breakfast, usually at Biscuits Cafe in West Linn. Corey orders oatmeal. Always oatmeal. “I get in, I look at everything,” says Tony. “A breakfast menu is brutal. So many choices.”

The show may be a bit loosey-goosey, but it works because its presenters have a long history together. (“Our wives do know about this,” deadpans Tony.) They’ve been friends since the first day they met on the job, eight years ago, when a manager exchange program landed Tony at the the West Linn yard where Corey was a new hire.

Says Tony: “My guard was up, and I didn’t know what to expect and Corey was new, and when we realized we were feeling the same things, we had each other’s backs from the first.”

They kid each other relentlessly on the show, and whenever they’re together—Tony is forever making fun of Corey’s facial hair, regardless of whether he’s even sporting any. “I just choose something, funny eyebrows or big gums.

“Corey likes to say [something] is huge like your gums, so I’ll say it’s small, like your sense of humor,” Tony says.

When Tony took a rare Saturday off to go fishing—“I did call in,” he says with mock hurt, when Corey gives him grief over this absence—Corey told his guest of the day, organizer Penelope Rose Miller, that his radio partner was a hoarder, and the lighthearted show took a serious turn.

“Of course it’s not true,” says Tony. “Corey is a minimalist, so compared to him, maybe I am a hoarder, anyway, she became very sympathetic to the situation. We got into a bit of a pickle.”

Originally, the show was designed

to showcase one radio personality, but Tony found it hard to sustain on his own. “It’s difficult to fill in two hours with your own voice and mind,” he says. “You’re talking to the wall, and you second-guess what you said.”

“Then you wonder whether anyone is listening,” adds Corey.

“I called Corey, and he was all over it,” recalls Tony. “We enjoy each other’s

company, and we do have a lot of fun.

“Corey can be difficult to keep in line,” says Tony, a comment that elicits hoots of laughter from his partner. “If he’s not in the big chair (commanding the console), he’ll put up his feet and pull his cap over his eyes.”

Says Tony: “We are just a couple of goofballs with experience in the industry.”—*Kate Tyndall*



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