

# Eddie Edwards

## Easy Being Himself



**Gras, Brah:** Edwards (l) serves as King of the Krewe of Grela during New Orleans Mardi Gras in 2002.

## Country Radio HALL OF FAME

*Marvelously unique at a time when unique isn't always celebrated, Eddie Edwards is a third-generation showman who has left an impression on most everyone he has met. A personality in every sense of the word, the California native has made himself a household name from the West Coast and Great Plains to the most culture-rich cities of the South and south of the border. KLAC-AM/Los Angeles, WMC-AM/Memphis, KAJA/San Antonio, WSIX/Nashville and XEPRS-AM/Rosarito Beach, Baja California, Mexico are just a few stations that have blasted "Crazy" Eddie across their airwaves. For more than 20 years, the honor has belonged to WNOE/New Orleans. It's in the Big Easy that Edwards says he came into his own and found out that it's okay to be "Catholic and Country."*

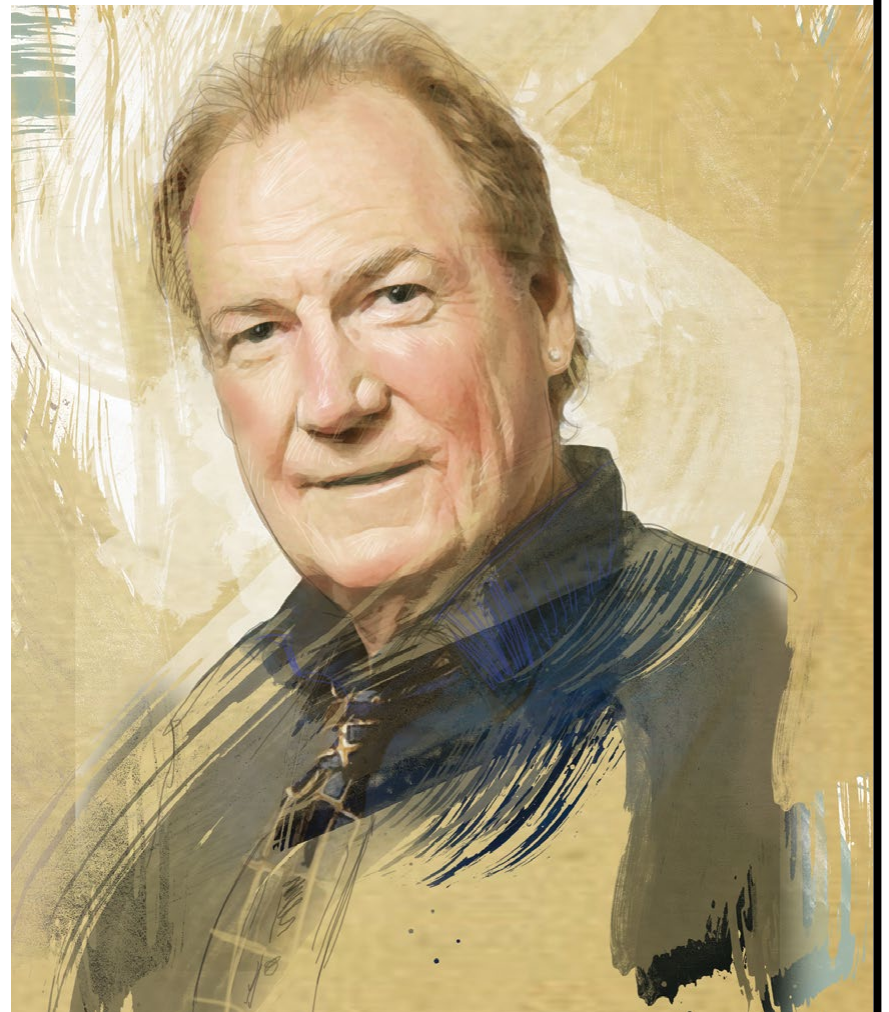
**My dad was in show business.** He was in bands and had TV and radio shows on the West Coast. His dad had worked on the radio, too. So when push came to shove, that was the only talent I had, though I didn't recognize it right away. One of the classes I had to take in college was Speech. One day the teacher came up to a couple of us and asked if we'd like to make an easy grade. He told us that if he could get 11 people together, he could have a broadcast class. Of course we said, "Yes." They eventually had everyone in the new class make tapes and invited a guy named Art Way from KOGO-AM/San Diego to evaluate them. Afterward, he gathered us together and said, "Most of you might want to think about another part of the business beside the talent end of it, but there is one person here who has an instinct for it." To my surprise, he said my name. He ended up putting me in touch with a friend of his who had a radio station and the rest is history. At that time, being in college and working part-time, making money and being on the radio was pretty attractive.

**One of my fondest memories** happened during the first few days at my first job. It was KLOT-AM/Barstow, CA. I would pull up at the station each morning at 5am and see the strangest-looking stray dog. I identified with it because it looked so skinny and scared, and I gave it part of the sandwich I had made for my lunch. The next day when I showed up, there were three dogs, so there went my all of my sandwich. By the next day there were like nine of 'em. A little later when my boss asked me how the job was going, I said, "Man I swear this place has the weirdest dogs I've ever seen! I'm having to bring extra sandwiches to feed them and jump out of the passenger side of my car and run for the station door every morning!" Well he told me they were coyotes! I had to get inside every day before they cornered me.

**I started playing the harmonica** because my dad was a musician and I grew up around music. I was also looking for something else to do besides just intro local bands when the station sent me out. I thought it would get me more face time and hopefully attract some of the waitresses. There is a big blues scene in Portland and I got this local street musician to teach me what he knew. And from the first time I did it, I was onto something. People would say, "Hey, why don't you come out and play harp with us?" I guess that kind of became part of my act and it made me one of the guys. Since then I've played with Gary Allan, Brad Paisley – I even played guitar for Garth Brooks once. I play at all kinds of festivals around town, too. I always play one number to leave 'em wanting more. And the way I play, that's enough! Only the musicians know I'm just a mediocre player!

**People wouldn't think that Crazy Eddie would be a big Ralph Emery fan, but I am.** Him and Gerry House. It was when I heard Ralph that I thought, "Oh, man, that's a more modern way to work." He didn't do the corny stuff, not that I have anything against that. He greatly influenced my interviewing style. The best Country disc jockey of all time, though, was Gerry. I replaced him a couple of times and those employers wanted me to sound like him. So I kind of had to study him. But it was Gerry that finally told me, "You know, you should just be yourself." And he was right. Once I stopped trying to copy people, I fell into my own. That's why I've had a big run here in New Orleans. That and, more recently, Don Gosselin. He's a great PD and a lot of fun.

**New Orleans was the only place you could be Catholic and Country.** It's the Bible Belt, but it's the Catholic Bible Belt. I call it the Rosary Belt! I remember a consultant coming through one time when I was doing mornings – and you have to understand, there have been a lot of consultants – and he said, "I just got off the plane and I have no idea what you guys are talking about." The discussion had been on altars and lucky beans or something and I quickly realized it was useless trying to explain it to someone who wasn't Catholic and from New Orleans. He finally asked, "Well what about people like



us that get off the plane?" And of course I said, "Well we really don't care as long as you come here and spend money."

**Hurricane Katrina was like being at the end of the world.** Initially we all left. Then we got back together about 60 miles north at [Clear Channel's studios] in Baton Rouge. We joined with Entercom because we had the facility and they still had the New Orleans signal. We called it "United Radio" and it ended up becoming the voice of the whole catastrophe. We were taking phone calls, finding out information, relaying it, and living and eating together for months. It was truly a historic broadcast that will never happen again because now everyone is prepared for that kind of thing. It was scary, too. There were curfews, military helicopters, transport vehicles and National Guard soldiers all over the place for what seemed like forever. When I went back in, I remember taking a picture of sniper units on the roof of a school just in case things went bad somehow. People were just desperate. Also, when I was in Oregon years earlier, Mt. St. Helens blew. So, basically, I do disasters.

**Working with St. Jude is one of the things I'm most proud of.** In the mid '80s, I worked at WMC/Memphis not too far from the hospital, but had no idea what it was. It wasn't until I got to New Orleans and Randy Owen and Ted Stecker got us going with the radiothons that I figured it out. I've seen people come by who were going through treatment who I didn't think were going to make it. Then I would see them come back years later with wives and kids – just absolute miracles. I'm most proud of that, and having been married 30 years and raising three wonderful children. My daughter is a lawyer with the SEC, so write a nice article or I'll get you audited. I have two sons – one is in the financial business and the other works in the hotel business here in New Orleans.

**Being inducted into the Hall of Fame is validation.** There is no higher honor than to be noticed by others in the industry. It's almost too big an honor for me to really grasp or react to. I certainly have had an adventure and a lot of fun. When people ask me if they should get into radio, I always say, "Look at me. You could end up in the Hall of Fame. And you could literally make hundreds along the way."

**CAC**

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**iHarp Radio:** Taking the stage with his harmonica during a New Orleans Brad Paisley show in 2001.



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