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It's Howell & Cotto as WIND morning duo

After 17 years of spinning country music records at WUSN-FM (99.5), Big John Howell is about to reinvent himself as a talk show host on news/talk WIND-AM (560).

Confirming a report here Wednesday, Howell has been hired to host a new local morning show for WIND, under a three-year deal negotiated by agent Steve Mandell. Howell's contract as morning personality on CBS Radio's US-99.5 was up Thursday.

Joining Howell as co-host at the Salem Communications station will be Cisco Cotto, former news anchor and reporter at ABC-owned news/talk WLS-AM (890). The new duo will replace Bill Bennett's Washington-based morning show, syndicated by Salem Radio Network.

Tentative start date for Howell and Cotto's show is Sept. 25.

"It's a big risk, but if I didn't take it, I'd kick myself forever," said Howell, 46, who's formulating plans for a "full-service morning show based on topical issues."

Before joining US-99.5 in 1989, Howell co-hosted a morning talk show for 18 months with Stephanie Miller on WCKG-FM (105.9), then an album rocker.

The move is a coup for Dave Santrella, WIND's vice president and general manager, who long has been hoping to step up with a major local morning show.

"Chicago is an awfully big town that doesn't live vicariously through any other city," Santrella said. "This market can sustain a number of fabulous radio stations, and we're excited about joining them with this new show."

Dave Robbins, vice president and general manager of US-99.5, had sought to renew Howell, but gave him a gracious sendoff: "We know John has had a passion to do talk radio for years, and we wish him great success," he said.

Until a permanent replacement for Howell is named, mornings on US-99.5 will be hosted by Ray Stevens and Lisa Kosty.

◆ Pointing to more changes down the road, **Steve Buchman** has resigned as producer of **Mike North's** morning show at CBS Radio sports/talk WSCR-AM (670). He joined the Score from Tribune Co.-owned news/talk WGN-AM (720), where he produced **Steve Cochran's** midday show.

"My family and I have decided that we are at a point where I am ready to change my career path, and we have a few opportunities to do that now," Buchman said.

◆ **Gene Dailey**, who was program director of CBS Radio's WBBM-AM (780) in the early 1950s, died Monday. He was 93.

Tracking: 'How We've Changed'

◆ News anchors **Ron Magers**, **Kathy Brock** and **Cheryl Burton** will host "9/11: How We've Changed," a half-hour commercial-free special at 10:35 p.m. Sunday on WLS-Channel 7. Reports on security, civil liberties and religious tolerance will be followed by panel discussions with experts and government officials.

Earlier that night, the ABC-owned station will air the opener of the controversial two-part