

Rick and Bubba morning show moves to WZZK

By **BOB CARLTON**
News staff writer

Rick and Bubba have found a new home.
And the neighborhood just got pricier.

After seven years at Birmingham radio station Y 94.5 (WYSF-FM), the popular morning team of Rick Burgess and Bill "Bubba" Bussey has signed a five-year contract with country station WZZK (104.7 FM) that is believed to be the most lucrative radio deal in the history of the state.

They were expected to be on the air at WZZK this morning. Their last show on Y 94.5 was Tuesday.

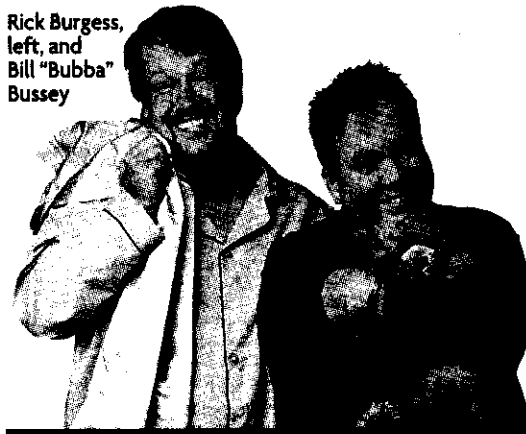
Neither Burgess, Bussey nor their attorney would discuss the financial terms of their contract.

However, Citadel Broadcasting, which owns Y 94.5, had offered them and their staff a combined \$2.2 million a year to stay, according to Dale Daniels, vice president and general manager for Y 94.5.

"We tried very hard to keep them, but I just couldn't afford them," Daniels said.

See RADIO | Page 8A

Rick Burgess,
left, and
Bill "Bubba"
Bussey



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"RICK & BUBBA SHOW" TIMELINE

- ▶ **1992-1999:** WQEN/WAAX in Gadsden/Birmingham
- ▶ **1999-Tuesday:** WYSF-94.5 FM in Birmingham
- ▶ **Beginning today:** WZZK-104.7 FM in Birmingham. Also syndicated to 29 stations in nine states.

RADIO: Popular morning show moving

From Page 1A

Cox Radio submitted "a package that we view as a significantly better package than the next-best offer," attorney David Marsh, who represents Burgess and Bussey, said.

Marsh, who has represented other radio personalities, including John Ed Willoughby, said he knows of no one in Alabama who has ever gotten a better deal.

"This is the largest package that I'm aware of in the history of the state," Marsh said.

Both Burgess and Bussey said they were not unhappy at Y 94.5, but felt obligated to shop their show around.

"It wasn't that we were mad or unhappy or looking for another place to go," Burgess said. "It was the first time we had been free agents in seven years, and we felt like we owed it to our employees and our families to test the market to see what the market would bear."

As was the previous contract with Citadel, the new deal with Cox was signed not by the individuals but by Rick & Bubba Inc., which owns the show.

"Our situation is a little bit different because we have to start looking at what's best for our company," Burgess said. "We have employees — our producers and our Internet director and all of that — so when we start looking at deals, it's a little bigger than two guys who have a morning show looking for the next place to go in Birmingham."

"The Rick & Bubba Show" is syndicated to 29 stations around the Southeast. Syndication agreements with stations outside of Birmingham will remain in place, Burgess said.

As their contact with Citadel came up for renewal this month, three companies — Citadel, Cox and Clear Channel Communications — made bids to land Burgess and Bussey.

"We had three good companies make three good-faith offers," Marsh said.

Their previous deal with Citadel, which was signed in January 2003, was worth a reported \$6 million over four years. At the time, it, too, was believed to be the largest in the state.

Burgess and Bussey's new contract with Cox also includes a state-of-the-art digital studio that will become the new home for their show, Bussey said.

The show itself, though, won't change. Loyal listeners still will hear from "Rick & Bubba" regulars Calvin "Speedy" Wilburn, DeMarco "Don Juan" Williams and Ryan Greenwood.

"The show is what it is," Burgess said. "I don't think we are talented enough to change it if we wanted to."

According to the Arbitron ratings service, "The Rick & Bubba Show" has consistently been one of the top two morning radio shows in Birmingham, right behind the syndicated "Tom Joyner Morning Show" on Kiss 98.7 (WBHK-FM), which Cox also owns.

The show is an ideal fit for WZZK, said Ray Nelson, the station's vice president and general manager.

"It brings two heritage icons together — Rick and Bubba and WZZK," Nelson said. "Their show is clean and family-oriented and it addresses a lot of things — marriage, family and politics — that kind of go in tandem with a country audience."

Burgess and Bussey will replace WZZK's "Cash and Kari" morning team of Keith "Cash" Connors and Kari Powell. Nelson said Tuesday it was uncertain if Connors and Powell will remain with WZZK or Cox in another capacity.

"We are looking where we can utilize them," he said. "It's up in the air right now."

Until Citadel finds a replacement for Burgess and Bussey, Daniels said Y 94.5 will simulcast "The Mark & Mack Show," which began airing on sister Citadel station WAPI-AM 1070 last month.