

MADISON, Minn. - The sound of Madison, Minnesota, is up before the sun.

"Donna Erickson is going to be teaching you how to make lefse," the solitary figure informs his listeners. "I'm looking forward to Jerry Osteras's Lutefisk-filled Bismarcks, however."

Fifty-nine-year-old Maynard Meyer sits at the microphone, facing out through a picture window, as downtown Madison comes to life.

Running through his fingers and then across his lips are school lunch menus, the latest obituaries and information about an upcoming Christmas concert. Meyer is 13 miles from South Dakota and light-years from major market radio.

Meyer is co-owner of [25,000-watt Q-92 FM](#). Or, put more accurately, co-owner and then some. "General manager, chief engineer, morning DJ, news director, program director, women's ski report," Meyer laughs as he rattles off his titles.

Meyer is also music director for a format he calls "bar band," meaning on any given day you might hear Michael Jackson followed by Alan Jackson. You just never know.

But mostly what Meyer does is talk.

His voice has been wafting across the prairies since 1983, when Meyer ignored the doubters who said he'd be crazy to build a radio station in a town of 1,500 people... and one giant cod. The [25-foot fiberglass fish](#) sits at the edge of town welcoming visitors to "Lutefisk Capital USA," which gives context to Meyer's Bismarck quip from earlier in the morning.

Meyer talks and people like Karen Stensrud listen. A lot. "Yep, always there," says Stensrud, who runs the Madison Beauty Shop and keeps a small clock radio tuned to Meyer. "First thing I turn on when I get here and the last thing I shut off when I leave."

Meyer announces Madison's birthdays and deaths, anniversaries and recently, a plea for the return of a lost hubcap from the city bus. "Sure enough," says Meyer, "a gal was walking, found it and brought it in and called the bus driver. He came and got his hub cap."

In October Meyer set off a municipal stir when he took a vacation to Hawaii. "People around were saying, 'Maynard's gone on vacation! Maynard's gone on vacation!'" recounts Sue Clark from the chair at the beauty shop.

It speaks to how much people in Madison have come to depend on Meyer and his voice.

Norma Larsen appreciates the frequent rundowns of community events. "As you get older the memory isn't the greatest you know. It's nice the day of the thing, that he's reminding us."

But Meyer is not just a voice on the radio. He emcees so many of Madison's events he started traveling with his own public address system. Among his recent engagements: the annual combined talent show and Lutefisk eating contest.

Meyer teaches Junior Achievement, served several years on the school board, is executive director of the chamber of commerce and is the longest serving member of the Madison City Council.

In fact, as Meyer conducts the public's business at council meetings, he takes notes for the news story he'll read about the meeting during his newscast the following morning.

"Conflict of interest is kind of a real problem in western Minnesota," he chuckles, "because everybody is involved with everything."

When Madison's only movie theater went belly up, Meyer worked with the owner of the local newspaper to keep the Grand Theatre open. Today he runs the theater with Kristi Kuechenmeister, the office manager at Q92.

"It needed to be done," says Meyer, if only for the traffic the theater brings to Madison's main street on weekends.

And as if that's not enough, Meyer also runs Madison's local access cable television station out of a back room at the radio station.

Meyer's one run for a seat in the Minnesota House of Representatives ended in defeat. It was probably doomed from the start. Kuechenmeister swears she heard more than one person say, "Well, what would we do without Maynard? We can't have him out of town. We want him to stay here."

Ronda Helgemo is one of those folks who can't imagine Madison without Meyer. "I don't know where Madison would be. He keeps everything going."

Helgemo keeps Meyer on for both herself and her daycare kids. They smile and nod as she mentions the over-the-air birthday greetings they receive from Meyer each year.

In the garage, there's another radio tuned to Meyer to keep Maggie, the family dog, company. "If you turn it off, she'll sit outside and bark," says Helgemo.

Earlier this fall, when Meyer was inducted into the [Minnesota Broadcasting Hall of Fame](#), he accepted his award on behalf of the dwindling number of mom and pop radio stations - large voices in small places.

Of 350 radio stations in the state, the [Minnesota Broadcasters Association](#) says just 21 are still stand-alone, locally owned and operated stations.

"The big guys can't figure how in the world they're going to compete with the iPods and XM and Sirius and we don't care," Meyer says.

No need to worry, as long as there are school lunch menus to read and lost hubcaps to find in a town that begins and ends each day with Maynard.