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Nathan Grimm | The Telegraph
 WBGZ radio staff and RiverBend Growth Association members outside the WBGZ studio in Alton. The radio station was awarded with the RBGA's Small Business of the Month award on Wednesday.

Radio station honored

WBGZ gets nod for commitment to community, local coverage

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ALTON — WBGZ recently became available worldwide, but the Alton radio station received local recognition Wednesday.

The radio station, which began broadcasting on 94.3 FM in January and can be streamed across the globe, was honored with the RiverBend Growth Association's Small Business of the Month award for June. RBGA members surprised WBGZ staff with the presentation Wednesday morning.

"We're honored to have

been honored," WBGZ general manager Sam Stemm said.

The FM availability and option to stream the station worldwide is new, but the station itself has been broadcasting since 1948. Then, it was under the call letters WOKZ; with an ownership change in 1984, it became WBGZ.

RBGA director of member services Joell Aguirre said their history as a staple in the community was one of the biggest reasons the station was chosen for the honor.

"One of the main reasons that they were awarded this month was

their length of service and their commitment to promoting small business," Aguirre said, "and the community outreach that they do that supports the businesses that make up the community."

The FM signal has made a huge difference for the station's reach, Stemm said. With the higher-powered signal — the 1570 AM broadcast has to power down at night, whereas the FM station can stay at full power — the station can be heard as far south as the I-64 corridor and as far north as Litchfield, Ill., according to Stemm.

"That's been a major

improvement, something we've been working on for a number of years," Stemm said. "But that doesn't change our dedication to being everything local."

That local coverage is what sets the station apart from music services like Spotify and Pandora, Stemm said, and keeps it going strong despite the prevalence of those services.

"It all comes down to content," Stemm said. "We have on over-the-air broadcast radio content that people are looking for. Pandora can play the same music that radio stations everywhere play, so their content is not unique. But what Pandora doesn't have is the local news and information."

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