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# HIGHLAND PARK NEWS



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Highland Park sisters Betsy Brint (left) and Sally Higginson put together their own radio show every week. **Page 9**

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Photo by Joel Lerner Staff Photographer

# Radio days

## Highland Park sisters welcome all topics on talk show

JOANNA PLUTA BROWN  
CORRESPONDENT

Highland Park sisters Betsy Brint and Sally Higginson work 24 hours a day and endure 90-minute commutes to their DeKalb office. Still, they love their jobs.

How else, they say, would they be able to investigate and talk about everything that piques their interest?

Brint and Higginson host a talk radio program on WLBK-AM 1360, DeKalb County's News and Information Station. Entitled "Walking on Air with Betsy and Sal," the two-hour weekly call-in program, offers hostesses and listeners opportunities to explore the challenges and joys of being women, mothers, wives, working professionals and friends.

"I think what women are learning now is that you don't have to be just one thing," said Higginson, a 42-year-old mother of two. "You can pick a lot of things. It gets confusing, but it's very liberating."

Neither Brint nor Higginson have any radio experience, and their journey toward this dream job is best described as untraditional. Higginson was vacationing with family on Cape Cod a year ago when a conversation with her husband's uncle Frank Osborn sparked an idea.

"Frank was talking about how every morning he drove to work past pairs and small groups of women who were walking together, gesticulating wildly and having very intense conversations, and he wondered what they could possibly be talking about with such energy that they never got bored," Higginson said.

A fitness walker herself, Higginson knew immediately what her uncle had described. She saved many questions, funny stories and conundrums for discussion during walks she shared with Brint, her sister. When Higginson explained it to him, "Frank said that would make a great radio show."

She and Brint worked quickly to act on Osborn's suggestion. They recorded

demo tapes and trained with radio consultants, and ultimately convinced the DeKalb County station to give untrained, inexperienced talk show hosts a chance. Higginson had worked as a high school English teacher and a magazine photo editor, while Brint, a 40-year-old mother of three, was a business woman and a trained actress. But by October 2004 Brint and Higginson were live on the air.

Early shows focused largely on their own families, and issues they were facing at home every day. But their range quickly expanded as they found support from listeners.

"Some topics are silly things, like what kitchen appliances do we like," Higginson said. "And for that we had on with us a woman from The Pampered Chef talking about what was the most

popular tool they sold and what were the newest. We even had a male judge who called us to say that his wife had put them on 'appliance probation' and he wasn't allowed to buy any new tools because she didn't like what he was buying."

Another show discussed an increasingly popular trend toward preplanning your own funeral. An 84-year-old listener unexpectedly called to talk about the details of her funeral, for which she had even selected a caterer.

There is no topic, Brint and Higginson agreed, that is not appropriate for their show; they have addressed how to discuss sensitive topics with a child's teacher, living wills and uses for algebra in everyday situations.

Professors from nearby Northern Illinois University frequently come on to

discuss literature and areas of Women's Studies, including the changing image of cheerleaders. The sisters have an ongoing debate over skirts as acceptable fashion.

"Anything that tickles our fancy," Higginson said. "Anything that gets us energized."

Like the day that Higginson arrived at her home to find water flowing from the dining room ceiling and dripping from the chandelier — while her husband was out of town and she was preparing to host 30 guests. She immediately took her frustration to the radio, where callers helped lower her blood pressure by sharing their own stories of water damage, party catastrophes and toilet repair.

Even though their time on the air is short, Higginson and Brint spend the rest of the week preparing. They find experts, friends with personal experiences to share, and academic research to strengthen their arguments.

"We're not experts, and we don't pretend to be," Higginson said. "We seek out experts. If I talk to someone during the week who I think has something interesting to say, I'll ask if they are available to talk about it on the radio Wednesday.

Most of the time they say 'sure, it's DeKalb, what the heck?'"

"Walking on Air with Betsy and Sal" is not heard in Highland Park. Brint said her goal for the show is to break into the Chicago market, where Brint and Higginson will likely find listeners more like themselves.

But in the meantime, they are discovering many commonalities with the listeners of DeKalb County.

"We decided from the very beginning that we were not going to change who we are for the show," Brint said. "I talked a lot about planning my daughter's Bat Mitzvah on the air, and maybe the people there haven't done that specifically, but everyone's planned a big event like that for some reason, and so there were a lot of things there we could all relate to."



Joel Lerner/Staff Photographer

Highland Park sisters Betsy Brint (right) and Sally Higginson travel to DeKalb together once a week to do their talk radio show, "Walking on Air with Betsy and Sal."