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## WMNF Show Host Is Tuned In To Animals

By CURTIS ROSS, The Tampa Tribune

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TAMPA - Unlike Doctor Doolittle, Duncan Strauss can't talk to the animals. But he does talk about them - and a host of issues related to them - twice a month on his radio show.

Strauss is the host of 'Talking Animals,' which airs on listener-supported radio station WMNF, 88.5 FM, on the first two Wednesdays of each month, from 11:30 a.m. to noon.

It's not just a show about pets, although it covers pet issues, nor is it purely a forum for animal rights advocates, although they often appear on the program.

'It can be about animal rights, but sometimes it's just about animals,' Strauss says. 'I thought if a listener likes cats, maybe they'll be interested in broader issues as well.'

The show covers animal topics through a mix of interviews, music and comedy.

'It's important to have music and comedy to temper shows that sometimes cover tough topics,' Strauss says.

It's a tall order for a 30-minute show, but Strauss does a deft job of handling a main interview, callers and even a name-that-animal-tune contest.

The show began in 2003 on KUCI at the University of California-Irvine, before Strauss relocated to Florida and began airing the show on WMNF in late 2005.

His guest list includes officials from PETA and animal rescue organizations as well as veterinarians, biologists and animal trainers.

The show also has featured interviews with animal-loving celebrities such as Chrissie Hynde, Kinky Friedman, Merrill Markoe and Margaret Cho, who will return for the next episode of 'Talking Animals,' which airs Wednesday.

For Strauss, a former music journalist and comedy talent manager, it's a way of combining his love of animals and desire for public service with his passions for music, comedy and radio.

'I have a genetic predisposition to public service,' Strauss says.

His father, Donald, was committed to public service and education, he says. When he died in 1997, Strauss' mother, Dorothy, established The Donald A. Strauss Scholarship Foundation to help college students start and carry out public service projects.

'I wanted to carve out my own little public service niche,' Strauss says. 'I started to think about how I could make more of a contribution, and I knew I wanted to get back into radio.'

His spark for radio burst into full flame in the late 1970s when he was a student at the University of California, Davis, where he began working at the campus station.

The campus also was a regular tour stop for then up-and-coming new wave acts such as Elvis Costello, Talking Heads and The Police, further fueling Strauss' love of music.

After graduating in 1981, he freelanced for the Los Angeles Times as well as magazines such as Musician and Trouser Press. As the decade wore on, Strauss became more entranced with comedy and moved into talent management and consulting.

He met his wife, Colleen McGarr, in 1991, when both were consulting for a comedy festival. McGarr had managed comedy clubs on Florida's east coast and serves as a consultant for Gator Growl, the annual homecoming event at the University of Florida.

They married and formed a management-consulting agency that handled comedians such as Bill Hicks.

Strauss eventually tired of the 24/7 demands of management and began plotting a return to his first love, radio.

'Every decade or so, I make a career change,' Strauss says. 'I don't know if it's restlessness or what.'

'Talking Animals' has built a steady audience, and WMNF recently bumped the show from once a month to twice.

Strauss also is one of the hosts of the station's afternoon drive-time show, 'Sonic Detour.' He lives in Jupiter Farms with his wife, their 3-year-old son, Mike, and three cats, Curtis, Homer and Elwood.

Strauss says a pond on their property is home to an array of fish, turtles and birds.

'Talking Animals,' with guest Margaret Cho, will air at 11:30 a.m. Wednesday on WMNF, 88.5 FM. Previous episodes are archived online at [www .talkinganimals.net](http://www.talkinganimals.net). Curtis Ross can be reached at (813) 259-7568 or [cross@tampatrib.com](mailto:cross@tampatrib.com).

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