

Chick's remarks cut deep

Local country stations take cues from listeners, refuse to air Dixie tunes

By **JULIA KENNEDY**

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Folks in Bakersfield are still fuming about the derogatory remarks Dixie Chicks lead singer Natalie

"We just heard from a lot of very passionate listeners who were offended by their remarks."

— **Evan Bridwell**
Program director at KUZZ

affiliate of ABC Radio Network.

The stations are sticking with their plan to honor the wishes of listeners, who they poll weekly by phone and Web site for updated sentiments. So far, the station reports that the majority of KUZZ listeners would rather not hear the sweet-voiced trio, in spite of their enormous popularity.

"We just heard from a lot of very passionate listeners who were offended by their remarks," KUZZ program director Evan Bridwell said.

A casual survey of country listeners around town revealed that it's almost impossible to find anyone to defend Maines' statement to a London audience on March 10 that she was "ashamed the president of the United States is from Texas."

However, there are some Dixie Chicks fans who point out that

Maines was just exercising her right to free speech.

"I think the Dixie Chicks should be able to be played everywhere," said Phyllis Brooksby, 60. "They got a right to talk just like anybody else."

Dixie Chicks fan Mel Groat, 57, said not playing the music unfairly penalizes the rest of the band for Maines' comments.

"I don't think the rest of the group should suffer for what she said," Groat said.

Personnel at Sam Goody in Valley Plaza mall have noticed a decrease in sales of the Dixie Chicks' Grammy-winning album "Home" in the last month. According to a radio industry publication KUZZ receives weekly, sales of the album have dropped 19 percent, Bridwell said. The decrease in popularity is fine with those who maintain the Dixie Chicks don't belong on the air.

"As (country music artist) Aaron Tippin says, they can 'kiss this,'" said Jimmy Boyd, 62, a self-labeled country music fanatic who was in the Navy for 30 years.

"They don't bad-mouth our president if he's good, bad or indifferent. Regardless of what he's done or how he's done it, he's our commander in chief."

By not playing the Dixie Chicks, KUZZ is making a statement, said 55-year-old Derial Reeves — and he agrees with it. "It's saying the majority of Americans don't share your opinion and that the majority support the things that our president is doing," Reeves said.

A DJ at Trout's who served for 20 years in the Air Force, Reeves immediately pulled all Dixie Chicks music from his collection when he heard about the remarks.

"If they stayed as a trio I would never play it again," he said.

Formerly in the military, Sam

Goody sales associate Lindsey Eoff, 19, was also offended by Maines' comments against her commander in chief. But she still listens to the Dixie Chicks because they are not the only musicians whose views she opposes.

"I wouldn't stop listening to it because of that," Eoff said. "There are a lot of celebrities I don't like as a person."

Jessica Whiting, 28, and her husband were both angry at Maines' comments, but they still listen to the band's latest CD. Whiting said she doesn't feel guilty for doing so, although she has a friend who threw out all his Dixie Chicks recordings.

"I like their music," Whiting said. "It's just they should keep their opinions to themselves."

Whiting, a cashier at Western Warehouse, said KUZZ's decision not to play the Chicks makes sense from a customer-service point of view. "My reason for not playing it would be because of what the public wants," she said.

Will KUZZ play the Dixie Chicks again? Bridwell says that's up to the audience.

"We're not using the word 'ban' or 'censor' or anything like that, but we're just giving it a rest," he said. The station will continue to poll listeners and take its cue from other stations nationwide.

Country music lover Fern Milligan, 66, agreed the best way to decide is by popular consensus.

"If the people wanted to hear 'em, fine," Milligan said. "And if they didn't, it's still fine with me."

As for not being able to hear the Dixie Chicks on the air, Milligan said she isn't devastated.

"Alan Jackson and Toby Keith," she said, "I might be ready to raise a little hell if they didn't play them in Bakersfield."