

WYSU undergoes \$220K makeover in digital switch

The last time WYSU FM installed new broadcasting consoles was 1982: Ronald Reagan was in his first term as president, the space shuttle Columbia completed its first mission and Michael Jackson released "Thriller," which went on to sell more than 25 million copies.

"It certainly was time to make some changes," said David Luscher, associate director of WYSU, which is located on the Youngstown State University campus.

In January, the station launched a \$220,000 renovations project of its studios in Cushwa Hall, replacing everything from broadcasting consoles to furniture housing the new equipment, some of which dates to the 1970s.

The project is part of the station's ongoing efforts to switch from analog to digital audio broadcasting. The switch in technology could give FM radio sound quality equal to that produced by compact discs.

"At some point, the radio world is going to be digital, and we need to be on board," said Gary Sexton, station director.

The Federal Communications Commission has mandated that all television stations must broadcast in digital format by 2007, but Luscher said the FCC has not come out with mandates for radio stations.

Nevertheless, Sexton said market forces most likely will force most radio stations to move to the new format.

"If we don't make the switch now, we'll be behind the curve," Luscher said.

The switch to digital actually started last year, when WYSU installed a digital station-to-transmitter link, Sexton said. The new digital equipment in both of the station's studios is the next step.

"We've gutted both studios," Luscher said.

The next step is to install a digital transmitter, which Sexton said will cost about \$150,000 and will likely be completed in the next four to six years.

Renovations are expected to be finished by the end of January. Sexton said the project is being funded through a \$100,000 grant from the John Wean Foundation as well as money from corporate sponsors and member donations.