

Volume 7, Number 9, September 5, 2019

by Larry A. Quinn



MARSHALL NAMED NEW CEO OF NRRA – The Nebraska Rural Radio Association (NRRA) board of directors recently announced **Tim Marshall** will become the new CEO/general manager of the company effective January 1, 2020. Marshall succeeds **Craig Larson** who announced in March his plans to retire at the end of the year. Marshall has been with the NRRA for six years. In 2018, he was named chief operating officer of the company. Marshall grew up on a ranch near Eddyville, Nebraska. He graduated from Kearney State College with a degree in broadcasting and has had a long, successful career in media sales and management.

“I’m extremely excited and blessed to be named the next CEO/GM of the Nebraska Rural Radio Association,” Marshall said. “I appreciate the board of directors’ confidence in me to be the next leader.”

NRRA President **Ben Steffen** from Humboldt said that Marshall is a good fit for the company.

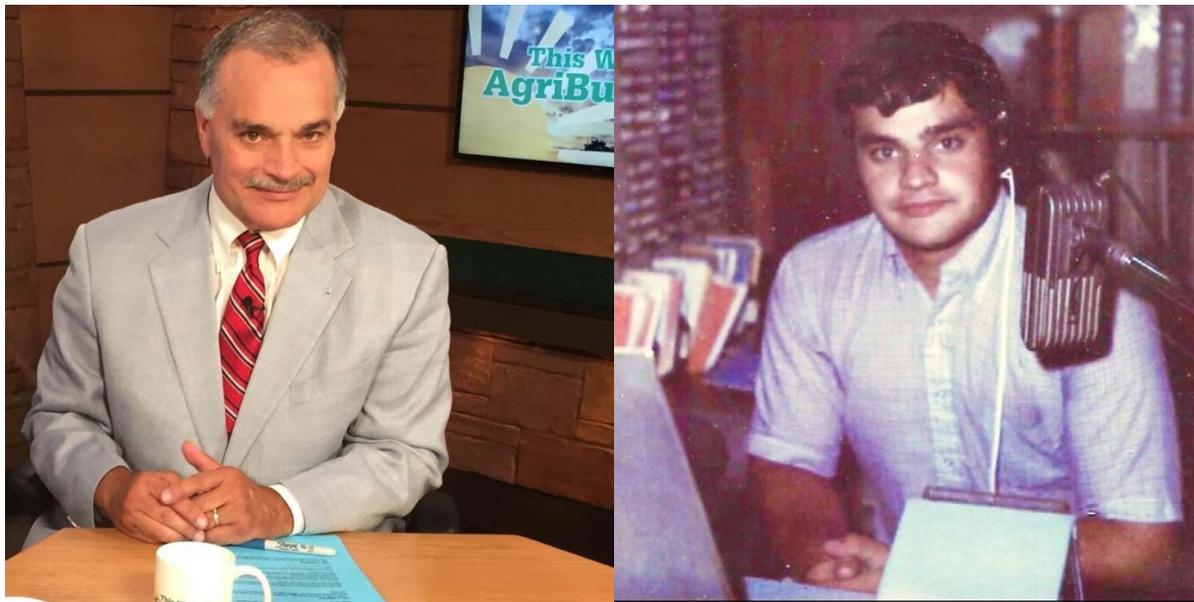
“The NRRA is a large and complex organization, and Tim Marshall’s experience is a key asset. The board of directors and I are excited to move the company forward with Tim’s leadership.”

After college, Marshall began his career as an account executive for Nebraska TV (NTV) in Kearney. He later moved into radio sales in Lincoln and Omaha. While in Omaha, he also served as associate farm director at KFAB. Prior to joining NRRA, Marshall was the market manager for a Kearney/Grand Island radio group. Outgoing CEO Larson said Marshall is well prepared for his new duties.

“I’m happy for Tim and confident that the company will be in good hands. He has been serving as COO for the past year and has been working more closely with all the markets. Tim has a wealth of sales, programming, and management experience. He understands our mission of serving

agriculture and rural Nebraska. Tim inherits a great management team along with professional and dedicated staffs.”

The NRRA is the only farmer-and-rancher-owned radio group in the country. Along with flagship station KRVN in Lexington, other stations include KNEB in Scottsbluff, KTIC in West Point, KAMI in Cozad, and KAWL/Max County in York. In recent years, the NRRA has expanded its reach, adding network affiliates in Chadron, Sidney, Nebraska City, Beatrice, and Fairbury.



FOR MAX ARMSTRONG, BROADCASTING IS PURSUIT OF A DREAM – Just thinking about how much he has loved broadcasting, **Max Armstrong** (WGN, Chicago, Illinois) offered his reflections about this business and how grateful he is for his various opportunities.

The pursuit of a dream. “I’m not sure the studio visitors believed me when I told them I really have been living a dream throughout my career. I wanted so badly as a boy to be on the radio, and better yet, I wanted to be on the radio in Chicago. My voice was heard on the air there just this morning, as it has been nearly every week for 42 years. In those days, it was an intensely competitive business. How would I be able to do it? When deep voices mattered, there were so many voices that were better for broadcast than mine. And knowledge? There were (and are) so many bright, well-educated people in radio and television. It would be hard to stand out in the crowd. But while I never realized it at the time, I now understand that my *passion* for what I do for a living has been second-to-none. I have long had this excitement for what I do. I have been absolutely awed, thrilled, and forever grateful for the opportunities I have had on the air. I was thinking just this week, as I unlocked the studio door at 3:30 a.m., that an enthusiasm, a genuine excitement, and the passion for one’s work are so crucial. In my case, the ‘fire in the belly’ has partially offset my many talent shortcomings. There’s no doubt that if you have that ‘fire’ for what you do, it can lead to fulfilled dreams.

I think my farm ethic has served me well (maybe to a fault, Mrs. Armstrong might say), but I always was so radio-crazy that I arrived at work early and left late. I know nothing else. Teamed with **Orion** and **Lottie**, of course, that was just the way we worked. I remember those early years at WGN. I was reluctant to leave on vacation: I was afraid I was going to miss something important or some high-profile guest who would come to the studio.”

Thanks to Max for sharing his passion for farm broadcasting.



FAMILY FARMING ENHANCES GOODING’S BROADCASTS – John Gooding (WGFA/WIBK,

Watseka, Illinois) was a typical farm kid growing up in rural America, participating in 4-H and FFA, and walking beans. When he graduated from the University of Illinois, where he studied economics, there really wasn’t enough acreage for him to return to the family farm. He went into banking for several years and attended The Graduate School of Banking at the University of Wisconsin.

“Sadly, in 2010, my oldest brother got cancer and eventually passed away. It seemed that this might be the right time to leave the corporate world and return to our family farm, where I farm with my other brother and help manage a Pioneer Seed dealership.”

A couple years after that, he was contacted by WGFA, the local radio station and asked to be

a farm broadcaster.

“It’s a lot to keep track of. Hopefully, my day-to-day experiences on our farm enhance what I bring to the radio,” Gooding said. “I personally know what the crop conditions are in our listening area. I know firsthand the frustration with the World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE). My broadcasts from the local fairgrounds are personal because my kids are showing cattle. My relationship with Pioneer Seed keeps me current on what pests to be watching out for and other agronomic news and trends. Lastly, my background in economics gives the listeners some insight into the financial state of farming. Farm broadcasting is important. In difficult times, like we are experiencing now, communication among all of us in agriculture is more important than ever.”

RADIO ROW AT IRRIGATION SHOW IN DECEMBER – Allied Industry member **Anne Blankenbiller** (Irrigation Association [IA], Fairfax, Virginia) has announced the annual Irrigation Show and Education Week will be held December 2-6, 2019, in Las Vegas.



“For the second year, we are including a *Radio Row* section on the trade-show floor,” Blankenbiller said.

Radio Row is a dedicated space for radio stations and podcasts from across the United States to either broadcast live or conduct interviews with irrigation professionals and experts attending the show.

“*Radio Row* is a great opportunity for all attendees to see some of their favorite ag radio and podcast hosts live and in action, and it is a great way for broadcasters to get access to leaders in the industry,” she added.

If a broadcaster is interested or wants more information, contact IA Government and Public Affairs Director **John Farner** at johnfarner@irrigation.org or phone 703/536-7080.

GLEASON: A PIONEER IN TRANSITION TO DIGITAL – Todd Gleason (Non-Commercial Broadcast Council, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois) decided to become a farm broadcaster in high school. Like many of his decisions, it was practical. He is the fifth of six farm boys from Logan County, Illinois, and it was clear there would not be a good path back to the farm for him. He decided to do the one thing that stopped everything on the farmstead. When the farm broadcaster was on the radio, everyone listened.



Gleason called the University of Illinois in 1982 and asked to speak with the advisors for the agricultural communications program; his plan was to transfer from Lincoln Land Community College (LLCC). **Jim Evans** listened, sent paperwork outlining every LLCC class he would need to take over the following two years and to which classes they corresponded at the University of Illinois. Two years and 61 transferable credit hours later, Gleason arrived on campus in Urbana-Champaign.

During his college years, he was active at LLCC, serving as the student-body vice president and traveling with the livestock judging team. He learned to give a set of reasons for the top four animals in a class and believes this is one of the foundations of his on-air demeanor today. His first job in radio came while at LLCC, too. Lincoln Land is in the same city as the Illinois State Fair — Springfield. Gleason has worked the fair since being part of the 1983 Illinois Department of Agriculture's State Fair Radio Network. It was a pop-up program that aired for 30 minutes over the noon-hour every day of the fair on nearly 100

stations around the state.

Once at the University of Illinois, Gleason took a paid internship at WILL AM580. The programming content he hosts today for WILL was established while he was a student. He had a small hand in shaping it. In 1985, the Midwest was in the depths of the farm crisis. The first Farm Aid Concert was held at the University of Illinois football stadium that fall. Gleason was there and at many others that followed, mostly as a farm reporter for WILL starting in 1989 after spending time learning how the commodity markets worked with Zwicker and Associates in Bloomington.

He still talks with **Dan Zwicker** each Thursday as part of the WILL programming. While at Zwicker and Associates, he delivered the first premium advice service to DTN over a 9800 baud modem. It was Zwicker's advice, but Gleason had written it and worked with DTN in Omaha to arrange the digital delivery. He thinks it was a "pretty cool" technical achievement in the early digital age.



Gleason introduced to NAFB. During his time at the University of Illinois, Jim Evans introduced Gleason to NAFB. They traveled to the convention in Kansas City. The association has long played a role in his career despite his having never been employed by a commercial radio station. Gleason's whole broadcasting career has been in government service in one form or another via the Illinois Department of Agriculture, NPR-affiliate WILL, the University of Illinois College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences (ACES), or University of Illinois Extension. While he could not be a member of NAFB at the time, Gleason won the 1991 Oscar in Agriculture (now known as The Doan Award). It is his most prized award. Gleason left WILL in March 1994 and moved a block-and-a-half on the University of Illinois campus to the agricultural college.

Transition to digital. His first assigned task for the College of ACES University of Illinois Extension, beyond the weekly radio programming, was to convert the radio studio to digital. He had the computer equipment purchased late that fall, and he looked at it for about four months. Then, on a Friday afternoon in the winter of 1995, Gleason took every piece of analog equipment out of the 8x8 studio from which he still works today and replaced it with the new digital gear. It took about a month for him to become as efficient with it as he had been with a reel-to-reel recorder

and a razor blade. Content production efficiency remains one of Gleason's highest priorities, and he is still willing to completely dump old ways of doing things for more time- and cost-effective ways of quality content development. He worked on the bleeding edge during the early stages of the digital transition for radio and TV. The University of Illinois sent him to San Francisco and Atlanta to learn about streaming media and mp2 files (mp2 was the pro version of mp3). He talked with engineers in the Bay Area often about codecs and "sparkle" on the top end of



streaming files. He delivered radio programs via mp2 files to the RFD Radio Network in Bloomington, Illinois, in May 1998. The 8-megabyte files crashed the Illinois Farm Bureau's email server several times.

Gleason is first member of NAFB's Non-Commercial Council. During this same period, Gleason asked NAFB if he could attend the annual convention in Kansas City and sit in the newsroom as a resource for digital production. He had transitioned to radio production on a laptop in 1996; and, by the end of the decade, he was certain farm broadcasters would be on the road with these devices. It was one of the earliest steps toward the creation of the non-commercial broadcast council membership category. Gleason was the first member of that category. He saw NAFB members as his

primary peer group and wanted to learn from them and to share with them. Gleason returned to WILL in July 2003, although he remained a College of ACES employee. In that first month, a couple of important decisions were made, and both were related to technology and the future of farm broadcasting at the University of Illinois. *Commodity Week* was put in an online RSS feed. It has been a podcast ever since, although at the time the word "podcast" had not been coined. The other decision is a guiding principal of content delivery: digital first with a primary distribution device being a phone. Today, more than half of the audience for the programming Gleason produces for WILL listens online with the bulk of those using their cell phones.

"Radio is still the best option for reaching a broad audience, but a dedicated niche market listenership is vital, and it isn't just about the voice," Gleason concluded. "Radio and the web work hand in glove. Radio is the foundation, and the internet can be the direct connection. It might be whole programs, long-form interviews, video sound bites, or a tweet. There is one more thing that makes farm broadcasters so very valuable. It hasn't ever really been about us or me. It always has been about the people we interview and stories they tell. Sometimes, it is just the

information, the weather, and the markets. It's about the politics and the policy, the dire straits, the financial highs, and the fun things we do. I think the best shows are the ones where you really don't hear the broadcaster's voice very often, where he or she is just a guide giving some direction to someone else's story."

WE WANT YOUR NEWS – Send us your stories and photos for future newsletter issues. Contact Larry Quinn at larryquinn@outlook.com or phone at **703/819-6532**. *Airing on the Side of Agriculture* is included in the blog section of NAFB.com. For an archive copy of any past issues, go to **Membership** and click on ***Airing on the Side of Agriculture***.