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by Larry A. Quinn



GRIFFITHS NAMED FARM BROADCASTER OF THE YEAR – Clinton Griffiths (Farm Journal Broadcasting, South Bend, Indiana) finds it very easy to stay busy these days.

“I never wonder what I’m going to be working on, that is for sure,” laughed Griffiths, while reflecting on an eventful 2019.

Griffiths serves as the anchor and editorial director for *AgDay* Television and was just recently named the 12th editor of *Farm Journal* magazine.

“Running the magazine is a huge honor, but there are certainly some very big shoes

to fill,” said Griffiths. “Thankfully, we have a great team and a lot of talented people that make it possible.”

AgDay is the nation’s longest running daily syndicated news program about agriculture and rural America, and *Farm Journal* was founded 142 years ago and is the nation’s oldest farming magazine. Together Clinton has oversight for two of the most iconic agricultural brands in the industry.

“I’ve now been working at *Farm Journal* and for *AgDay* for nearly a decade,” said Griffiths. “It’s flown by, but I really feel like I’m just now hitting my stride.”

That also was evident at the 2019 NAFB Convention in Kansas City. The *Farm Journal* broadcast team walked away with three first-place contest awards, including Newscast and Marketcast of the Year, and Griffiths was named NAFB Farm Broadcaster of the year.

“2019 has been an extraordinary year but winning the farm broadcaster award is a high point in my career,” said Griffiths. “It’s incredible to think I was an NAFB scholarship winner in college; and to receive one of the top honors of the organization as a professional has brought me full circle.”

Griffiths has lifelong connections in agriculture. He comes from a deeply rooted agriculturally diverse family, tracing his farming and ranching roots in the U.S. back more than 13 generations. He grew up in Deming, New Mexico, and his family runs his great-grandparents ranch in Tucumcari. Griffiths grew up showing cattle and was actively involved in FFA and 4-H. His time in the show ring helped pay his way to Oklahoma State University, where he earned a degree in ag communications. He went on to complete an MS in business administration from Wichita State University.

“The ag industry is in my blood, and being a farm broadcaster is a great way to stay connected to the work,” Griffiths said. “I try each and every day to make the stories and coverage interesting and worthwhile.”

Clinton now lives on a farm in northern Indiana with his wife, **MaryBeth**, and three young children.

“I’m proud to be raising my family the same way I was raised,” he said. “I believe the best parts of America are found down the country’s dirt roads, and I’m thankful for my career and to NAFB that I can be a part of keeping that heritage alive and thriving.”

DAVIDSON IS NEW NAFB MEMBER – Avery Davidson has taken the place of **Carey Martin** at



Louisiana Farm Bureau, who recently moved to Waco as manager of the Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network. Davidson, a native of New Iberia, Louisiana, also co-hosts the Louisiana Farm Bureau’s weekly TV show *This Week in Louisiana Agriculture* and has covered agriculture for both radio and television for a number of years.

“Avery has reported on Louisiana agriculture-related issues from several countries including Turkey, Cuba, Spain, Portugal, Thailand, and Japan,” said **Don Molino** (Voice of Louisiana Agriculture Radio Network, Baton Rouge, Louisiana).

Davidson is married to **Lauren** and has three sons. Whenever he gets some free time, you will find him either playing bass guitar, watching live music, or delving into the world known as *Star Wars*.



THORNTON JOINS U.S. SOYBEAN EXPORT COUNCIL –

Mace Thornton is vice president of communications and marketing for the United Soybean Board and U.S. Soybean Export Council.

“As I transition to enter the autumn of my career, the timing probably could have been better,” Thornton said. “Here I was, leading the strategic communications shop for one of the most influential agricultural organizations, and I was entertaining the possibility of leaving the career-goal job I had worked for 34 years to achieve.

“As many of you who attended this year’s NAFB Trade Talk event in Kansas City know, after many years of lining up interviews and doing a few on behalf of the

American Farm Bureau Federation, this year I was in a booth an aisle away doing the same thing for the United Soybean Board and U.S. Soybean Export Council.”

How did this happen?

“Honestly, it was a combination of many factors, but the numbers strongly suggested it was a good time to start looking. And since I knew I was not ready to hang it up, at a time when I feel in the prime of my career, I decided to dip a toe into the water. Given my former post, any new job would certainly have to clear a pretty high bar, not the least being a blessing from my partner in life, my wife, **Denise**. I wanted to lead a communications team for an agricultural entity at the national level. Nothing else would suffice. So, I updated my LinkedIn profile. Just weeks later, my network came through. There was a bright light on the horizon with the United Soybean Board, the group charged with administering the soybean checkoff program, and the U.S. Soybean Export Council, the group that builds preference for U.S. soy in international markets. For the first time, the two groups were putting into place a joint internal communications and marketing team to boost efficiency and effectiveness.

Over the years, I have seen a lot of great work from the soybean checkoff and was impressed by the empowering farmer leadership of the organization's new CEO, **Polly Ruhland**. Even though it was late in the process to build that new team, Polly assured me it was not too late. To make a short story even more of a whirlwind, it was a perfect match; an opportunity to work with a transformational leader at a national ag organization that could benefit from my experience. Just weeks later, I accepted the job. I had found my new zenith. Of course, my willingness to be open to new opportunities and tools, as well as my seasoned understanding of the field of strategic agricultural communications, made all this possible. And I drew from my well of experience beginning on day one at my new job.

"I wanted to lock in with NAFB the same type of relationship that had been achieved over the years at my previous organization. That would include a news service agreement and other tangible efforts because part of this new job is communicating back to soybean farmers about how they are benefitting from their checkoff investments. Nobody helps make that connection like farm broadcasters.

"So, here I am, feeling truly fortunate that all of this worked out, and I am very blessed to now be leading my second national agricultural communications team. Along with the other members of the USB/USSEC communications and marketing team – **Lisa Humphreys, George Harper, and Paul Murphy-Spooner** – I look forward to working with all of you to help share U.S. Soy's story. Some days it still feels a bit surreal. The transition and move are pretty much done. There may be boxes left to unpack in the new home, but I realize that after months of transition between Missouri and Virginia, my life now represents the juxtaposition of a sad country song that **George Jones** could never imagine: I got my dog back, my pickup truck back, and my wife back. I have a new job that I love, working for farmers, and I could not be happier."



Pictured together, left to right, are **Sam Knipp** (American Farmers & Ranchers, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma) and Thornton at the 2019 NAFB Trade Talk. Thornton and Knipp are NAFB Allied Industry Council members.



ELLIS IS A 50-YEAR AG COMMUNICATOR – Stu Ellis (WHOW, Decatur, Illinois) has been a well-known agricultural communicator in Illinois for nearly 50 years. Beginning as the farm broadcaster at WSOY (Decatur, Illinois), Ellis extended his service to Corn Belt farmers through radio, television, newspapers, newsletters, the Internet, and numerous facets of education, wanting to ensure they had the information they needed to be more profitable.

Ellis was raised on a Christian County farm near Taylorville, Illinois, and received BS and MS degrees from the University of Illinois in communications. His voice and information about agriculture have been heard on many Illinois radio stations, including reports about agriculture from six continents and all the way from Gorbachev's Russia to Reagan's White House Rose Garden. He has expanded his agricultural offerings through video reports on a wide range of issues from various locations, shooting and editing daily farm programs for WCIA-TV (Champaign, Illinois).

He also provides a daily radio program for WHOW (Clinton, Illinois) and WTIM (Taylorville, Illinois) and is in negotiation to provide daily programming to other Illinois radio stations. His farm broadcasting career began in 1972 at WITY (Danville, Illinois) and extended to 16 years at WSOY in Decatur. He was an NAFB member in the 1980s until a station ownership change upended his fun. In a mid-career pause from broadcasting, Ellis served as director of marketing for the American Soybean Association and was responsible for launching soybean ink into national use by thousands of newspapers and commercial printers. He was hired by Illinois Farm Bureau to create an educational curriculum for farmers on marketing, financial management, and risk management and conducted seminars throughout Illinois and other

states “helping farmers make more money and stay out of jail,” which Ellis says has been a life-long goal. Then he served University of Illinois Extension teaching farm management and marketing and wrote USDA’s risk management education curriculum. He still manages a farm marketing club that meets monthly.

As the Macon County Extension Agent, he and a Farm Bureau colleague were instrumental in the development of Progress City and locating the Farm Progress Show to its all-weather home at Decatur. “We gave Farm Progress leaders an offer they could not refuse, and the community was thrilled with the new partnership that brings hundreds of thousands of people to Decatur.”

Ellis is a graduate of the Illinois Agriculture Leadership Program and recently received the Torch Award, its highest honor, for his Progress City efforts. He has served as president of the Decatur Rotary Club, the Illinois Agricultural Extension Association, the Illinois Farm News Association, and he served as an advisory member to the Illinois Farm Bureau Board of Directors. He has written a weekly column for the *Decatur Herald and Review* since 2000 and has published a weekly newsletter for Corn Belt farmers for 21 years, which is also branded for many banks and agribusinesses for their clientele. Ellis has been a frequent speaker on a multitude of agricultural topics in many communities.

Ellis and his wife of 40-plus years, Cindy, have two adopted daughters and a trio of small grandkids who are being raised in their home in Decatur. For more than a decade, he has served as a part-time chaplain at Decatur Memorial Hospital. And when he’s not working, you’ll find him...well...working.

ALLMER WINS SERVICE TO AGRICULTURE AWARD – In 2019, on its 100th birthday, Colorado Farm Bureau awarded Farm Broadcaster **Brian Allmer** (Brian Allmer Radio Network, Briggsdale, Colorado) with its Service to Agriculture award. **Rachel Gabel**, reporter and assistant editor for *The Fence Post* magazine, played a key role in producing a video about Allmer, which is posted here:



<https://www.facebook.com/plugins/video.php?href=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2FColoradoFarmBureau%2Fvideos%2F1762149950585020%2F>

BOWER RETURNS TO KICD, NAFB – If you were confused when you read **George Bower** (KICD, Spencer, Iowa) is a new NAFB member, you're not alone. He left broadcasting for 10 months, but now he's back.

After eight years as the morning show host on KICD-AM in Spencer, Bower took over the station's legendary farm department in 2015 when long-time Farm Director **Dan Skelton** retired from radio.



“My goal back then was to make farm information meaningful and entertaining for the non-farm audience,” Bower said. “It’s very heartening when listeners tell me ‘I never paid attention to the farm news before, but now I listen every day.’”

Bower served as the public-relations director at a local bank for 10 months, but he stayed in contact with his friends at KICD.

“They kept asking – jokingly – if I was ready to come back. One day I finally said, ‘Yes.’”

Bower returned October 25, 2019, in the newly created position of information director in charge of both farm and news programming.

“I’ve come full-circle,” he said. “My first job in 1985 was as a nighttime DJ, but I quickly elbowed my way into the news department where my real passion was.”

From there, he did news 10 years and the morning show at KUOO in Spirit Lake 12 years, and he went to KICD in 2007. He did the morning show for eight years, then went to farm in 2015.

Bower says General Manager **Dave Putnam** and Saga Communications is why he came back.

“This is the place to be,” Bower added. “Saga respects their employees. They respect the listener and give us the tools to create solid, local content. We’re lucky to have good broadcasters already on staff here in Spencer. They know what a story is and have the ability to deliver it on the air in a way that has an impact.”

KICD also remains committed to reporting live from the big events: Commodity Classic, National Cattlemen's Beef Association, World Pork Expo, Washington Watch, Trade Talk, and all Iowa commodity group meetings. Bower said the listeners notice.

"They constantly tell us, 'You guys are everywhere,' and furthermore say, 'You make us feel like we're there with you.'"

Bower has taken that "live" philosophy to the news department where he's already instituted three major changes.

"First, we're leaving the building more. If there's a big story, we're there, with a live report if possible."

Second, Bower has stripped away the barrier between the farm and news departments.

"I consider us one team, and we are now helping each other get the big stories covered. Third, we are creating an experience for the listener."

On his first day back, Bower asked the news and farm staff what their jobs were. "

They pretty much said, 'reporters.' I said, 'You're not wrong, but from now on I want you to think of yourselves as storytellers.'"

The rest of the information team at KICD AM/FM includes: Farm Reporter **Gina Cerrentano**; News Reporters **Corey Harguth** and **Matt McWilliams**; and Sports Director **Mark Magnuson**.

WE WANT YOUR NEWS – Send us your stories and photos for future newsletter issues. Contact Larry Quinn at larryaquinn@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*.

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