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by Larry A. Quinn



HALVORSONS MARK 30 YEARS EACH IN MEDIA

This month, husband and wife NAFB Broadcast Council members **Rusty** and **Sabrina Halvorson** are celebrating 30 years working in the media.

Both Halvorsons started as young teens in June 1990 -- Rusty in North Dakota and Sabrina in California -- and then spent their lives sharpening their skills and building strong careers.

Sabrina Halvorson started as **Sabrina Wilcox**, working at her father's central California newspaper. It was her first job and the springboard into a multifaceted media career.

"I loved every aspect of it," she reminisced. "I knew that news, information, and media is where I belonged."

Sabrina worked in newspapers until the age of 22, when she was brought on as a reporter and producer for a Fresno, California, news radio and television station.

"That began my infatuation with broadcasting," she said. "I get a charge from the immediacy of it. I'm at my best when

I've got a hot story and the phone is ringing, the clock is ticking, a juicy soundbite is cued up, and I know no one else has the story because it's mine. Those are my favorite moments."

Spending most of her career working hard news in California, Sabrina has had many of those moments.

Rusty Halvorson had his first radio job at the age of 15 in his hometown of Williston, North Dakota.

"I worked with great people, who helped start what I didn't know then was going to be such a long and fulfilling career," he said. "The guidance they provided has helped me to understand how to provide guidance to people new to the industry."

Like Sabrina, Rusty worked alongside his father, **Lee**, at his first job. **Lee Halvorson** is in the North Dakota Sports Hall of Fame for his sports broadcasting, as is his brother, **Les Halvorson**.

"I'm proud to follow in the footsteps of my father and my uncle, who also spent decades in the broadcast industry," Rusty said. "The example of their hard work showed me what needs to be done."

Straight out of college Rusty went to work for the American Ag Network, and that's where he has been for more than 20 years.

"I'm most proud of achieving a goal I had set in college --being a farm broadcaster for the American Ag Network," he said.

Both Halvorsons have had their share of accolades. Sabrina has awards for her reporting and newscast producing, and Rusty earned several marketcast and news awards from NAFB. It was their careers that brought the pair together. They first met each other at Commodity Classic in 2015. Then, a few weeks later they met again as they were both part of the first Leadership NAFB class in Washington, D.C.

In January 2018, Sabrina joined Rusty at the American Ag Network. Last September, they were joined in marriage. As they look at the future together, they both plan on many more decades in media and all the adventure that brings with it.



MURLEY MARKS 35 YEARS AT KWMT – On March 3, Duane Murley marked his 35th year at AM 540 KWMT (Fort Dodge, Iowa).

Pictured at left is Alpha Media of Ft. Dodge Market Manager **Jed Burns** presenting **Duane Murley** with a custom-made belt buckle in honor of his 35 years of broadcast service.

"This is a perfect gift for an Iowa farm boy and farm broadcaster," Murley said.

Murley claims, however, that his radio career began five years before that

when he was in seventh grade, growing up in Sac City, Iowa.

"Our high school had a radio station, KSAC, that had a low-wattage transmitter that you could hear throughout Sac City, and it was broadcast over our local cable access channel. I signed up for the radio broadcasting class, and I was hooked.

"Our radio booth overlooked the high-school auditorium. I would carry a box of 45 rpm records with me to school every day. (I still have and use that box today. It is now filled with bungee cords.) I would spend one to two hours a day in the radio booth. Everybody just knew that is where I would be, often writing my own passes to get out of study hall.



"I was hired by KWMT/KKEZ in February 1985 during my senior year in high school, and my first day on air was March 3. It was quite an honor to be working at KWMT and KKEZ and still be in high school. It wasn't long after I started working at KWMT that NAFB member and KWMT Farm Director **Doug Cooper** asked me to fill in on the market reports," Murley said.

"Through the years, I filled in for all who sat in the farm-director chair before taking over as farm director nearly seven years ago. Through ownership and management changes, I have been shuffled around a bit and had other jobs but never got fully out of radio.

"Radio has given me an opportunity to meet and work with some of the greatest people in country music and in the farm community. I can honestly say that, over the years, there has never been one day that I didn't want to go to work," Murley said.

"For the past several years, I have helped a farm family near Rockwell City, Iowa, where I live with my wife, **Darcy**. The things I do on the Carver Farm allow me to really connect with my farm listeners while they are planting corn and soybeans, running tillage equipment, combining, feeding cattle, or whatever else needs to be done.

"One of the most rewarding promotions we do on KWMT is called Feed the Farmer. For eight weeks in the spring and eight weeks in the fall, we qualify listeners from around Iowa for a chance to win Feed the Farmer on Fridays. The winning listener wins a prime-rib dinner for themselves and 10 guests. Before COVID-19, I would spend the day at the winner's farm, along with sponsors, and enjoy the prime rib dinner with them. So far this year, I have remained in the studio doing reports over the phone," Murley said.

Duane and Darcy are the proud parents of daughter, **Brandi**, who is pursuing her master's degree at Oklahoma State University. As part of her master's program, Brandi recently returned from serving four years in the Peace Corps in Uganda, Africa. She worked in the northern regions of Uganda near South Sudan and The Congo.



GUZMAN GREW UP WITH RADIO –

“Radio has always been a constant in my life,” said **Chabella Guzman** (KRVN, Rural Radio Network, Scottsbluff Nebraska).

“My family lived in the country in the ’70s and there were only three channels on TV, so I often listened to the radio for music, shows, and news. I adored the DJs who played my favorite songs,” Guzman said.

“I lived in a community where you either knew someone or you worked in agriculture. I loved my childhood growing up on a small acreage farm, being in 4-H, and going to a small country school. I never thought of being a radio personality. I thought I would be a firefighter, a teacher, and then a writer. It wasn’t until college at the

University of Nebraska-Lincoln when a friend helped me choose a major. I decided to follow what until then had been a dream, radio. I graduated with a BA in broadcast journalism. My first radio position was at KLDZ in Lincoln, Nebraska, a now-defunct oldies station. The spot was an overnight stint, but after a few months, it became clear I couldn’t make enough to support myself and pay for my college loans,” Guzman said.

“So, in 1991, I broke with the media business and went to work for a Goodyear warehouse; the pay was incredible. After a few years there, I had saved enough to move to California and follow another dream of working in Hollywood. Hollywood is no place for a semi-introvert with no connections. I went to countless cast calls and did some minor grip work. After a year or so of meeting people in the business, I decided I would need to be a salesperson --of myself and my skills. Sales is not something I’m good at, so I moved to Kansas City, Missouri.

“I spent two years in Kansas City before taking another chance, this time on Alaska. I had always wanted to move to Alaska and found a job at a fishery in Naknek. The work froze off the thin layer of my fingers as I packed frozen fish all day. It made me realize I didn’t want to live where the day and night were too much like seasons. I landed back in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, my hometown, to be closer to family. Plus, I was able to get back into journalism,” Guzman said.

"In 2003, I freelanced for *The Business Farmer* while working at a drug testing service. In 2004, I landed a position as a news clerk at The Star-Herald; and in 2008, a reporter position opened. I covered three beats, but none was agriculture. I left *The Star-Herald* in 2014 to run a small weekly paper, *The Index*, in Mitchell, Nebraska. I have the highest regard for salespeople, their creative abilities and thick skins. I could fill the paper with everything but advertising. The community supported me, but after a year, I knew I would never be able to grow unless I could generate more advertising outside of the community. After 18 months, I closed the doors on my dream of owning a successful paper," Guzman said



Nebraska.

"About the time I was closing *The Index*, KNEB was looking for a farm director. I applied; and in 2016, I began working with great people in a great company. I may not be like many of the young or veteran farm broadcasters, as I didn't start in agriculture, but I made it in a roundabout way. Each day I look forward to working with my colleagues across the state at the Rural Radio Network and locally at KNEB. Mostly, though, I enjoy informing our listeners about the local and national news they can use, gather information from, and, at times, enjoy," Guzman concluded.

Photo: Chabella Guzman holds a snake when doing a remote broadcast at Riverside Discovery Zoo in Scottsbluff, Nebraska.

WJAG PREPARES FOR 100TH YEAR IN BROADCASTING – Known originally as the “Voice of the Norfolk Daily News,” WJAG (Norfolk, Nebraska) is preparing to celebrate its 100th year of broadcasting in 2022.

“WJAG is the second oldest surviving station from among the first dozen radio outlets licensed in Nebraska by the U.S. Department of Commerce in 1922,” said WJAG General Manager **Jeffrey Steffen**. “WJAG was the creation of the late **Gene Huse**, then publisher of the Norfolk Daily News, and today is believed to be the oldest single-family ownership radio operation in the world.”



WJAG staff announcer **Wayne Larson** reports from the field in 1956.

Even in 2020, echoes of the past reverberate in WJAG’s daily broadcast schedule. The noon report of the local news does not begin until approximately 12:10 p.m. In the early days, this would allow workers to return to their homes for lunch in time to hear the complete newscast. Also, WJAG hosts a monthly “Ask a Trooper” program with the Nebraska State Patrol, which had its beginnings in the 1950s.

The station's initial Staff Announcer **Karl Stefan** was later elected to Congress in 1934, no doubt bolstered by his popularity on the station. With the deepening of the Great Depression, the station provided affordable access to news and entertainment, which continued through World War II.

"The station's programming lineup has always been molded by the audience to some degree. Most Midwest communities know that as agriculture goes so goes everything. When the farmer is doing well, everyone does well, so it is no accident that the programming lineup has always focused on keeping agriculture informed," Steffen said.

"WJAG is proudly a member of NAFB and has always prided itself in following the lead of its founders, to be on the leading edge in the ever-changing media landscape," Steffen added.

In December 1959, a 59-year old Naper, Nebraska, woman stood trial in Boyd county for the murder of her son. Although judicial ethics discouraged it, **Judge Lyle Jackson** allowed WJAG's recording apparatus in the courtroom for the trial of **Sadie Dickerson**. A jury cleared Dickerson, and an edited version of the proceedings was aired on WJAG in January 1960—a first in Nebraska radio history. In 1995, the station installed a World Wide Web computer server and website, www.norfolkonline.com, which furthered the station's brand on yet another new platform.

"For decades, ag producers have tuned to WJAG as a reliable ag source. Because of its strong 90-plus years of commitment to public service, WJAG touts the three ingredients that have guided the station to almost a century of service: localism, supportive ownership willing to re-invest in local radio, and continuous exposure for the stations in its ownership partner, *The Norfolk Daily News*. Today's media platforms continue to expand, yet radio listenership stays strong. Why? Strong local connections to the communities we serve, a model first used in 1922, and will still apply in 2022," Steffen concluded.

SJEKLOCHA BEGINS INTERNSHIP WITH RURAL RADIO NETWORK – The Rural Radio Network welcomes Hayes Center, Nebraska, native **Rebel Sjeklocha** as their 2020 summer intern. Sjeklocha, a junior at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, is majoring in agricultural and environmental sciences communication and minoring in Engler Entrepreneurship, business law, and international agriculture.



Throughout the summer, she will conduct interviews, write stories, create digital content, and co-host “Friday Five” for the Rural Radio Network. She will be based out of the Nebraska Soybean Board Studios at Nebraska Innovation Campus in Lincoln.

Sjeklocha grew up on a cow-calf operation near Hayes Center. Her mom, **Susan**, is a veterinarian, and her dad, **Rusty**, owns a commercial hay grinding business.

“I’m looking forward to networking with industry professionals and taking a hands-on approach to communicate with Nebraska’s agriculture producers,” Sjeklocha said.

Outside of work, she enjoys being on horseback and helping with her family’s operation.

Her internship is made possible in partnership with NAFB Foundation, which offers internship grants to member stations and networks.

HOOSIER AG TODAY COLLABORATES ON FARM SAFETY PSA – With the arrival of spring and temperatures rising, farmers across Indiana are planting the state’s 15 million acres of crops. To keep motorists and farmers safe this planting season, several state agencies have partnered to encourage Hoosiers to be alert, slow down, and share the road with farm equipment.

“Hoosier Ag Today (HAT) has partnered with these agencies to produce a public service announcement (PSA) urging motorists to be aware of farm equipment on the road,” **Gary Truitt** said.

According to the most recent data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, farm vehicles other than trucks were involved in 98 crashes across the U.S., with two of those accidents occurring in Indiana. The video and audio PSA share actions drivers can take to avoid these accidents.

Indiana State Department of Agriculture Director **Bruce Kettler** says farmers want to move their equipment as quickly and safely as possible.

“Normally people don’t think of roadway accidents when they think of one of the dangers of farming,” Kettler said. “But each year, lives are lost due to accidents on our rural roads and highways. That is why we are encouraging motorists and farmers to be cautious this spring. Please be alert, slow down, and share the road,” he said.

The audio PSA has been distributed to all Hoosier Ag Today stations around the state for airplay during May and June. The video PSA, produced by farm broadcasters **Andy Eubank** and **Eric Pfeiffer**, is being shared on social media by HAT and the cooperating state agencies as well as a variety of Indiana farm organizations.

The video can be viewed at <https://www.hoosieragtoday.com/hat-isda-encourage-motorists-alert-patient-responsible-around-farm-equipment/>

While the term “farm equipment” encompasses a wide range of vehicles, the most common types motorists will encounter during planting season include sprayers, tractors pulling planters or tillage equipment, and large trucks hauling agricultural products. These vehicles are wide, sometimes taking up most of the roadway, and often travel at speeds no greater than 25 mph.

HAT was founded in 2006 for the specific purpose of serving the informational needs of the Hoosier agricultural community. HAT currently has 75 radio stations broadcasting its programs. In addition, HAT operates a multi-media website and publishes a daily email newsletter. In 2008, 2010, 2012, 2016, and 2018, HAT was rated the most listened to farm-radio network in Indiana by Ag Media Research. In 2019, HAT purchased Michigan Ag Today, a 16-station farm network serving the Michigan agricultural community. HAT is also part owner of the Indiana Farm Equipment and Technology Expo held each December in Indianapolis. HAT is represented nationally by J.L. Farmakis, Inc.

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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