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by Larry A. Quinn



Official White House Photos by A.J. Olnes

NAFB MEMBER PERFORMS AT WHITE HOUSE — Never in a million years did a small-town country kid from Higginsville, Missouri, ever think he would one day have the honor to perform at the White House — let alone twice in the span of two weeks.

Ben Nuelle (associate editor at Agri-Pulse Communications) resides in Washington, D.C., and has had a passion for radio, news, and politics ever since he started listening to talk radio in high school; another passion was playing the piano.

“There were very few if any times where my mother had to force me to practice,” Nuelle said. “It was something that just came natural.”

He started taking piano lessons when he was seven years old and continued through the end of college. In middle and high school, he performed for local rotary-club and chamber-of-commerce events, school concerts, talent shows, churches, weddings, and the National FFA Convention.

Performing at the White House had just been a distant dream, but that dream came true in November after he had applied to perform during the Christmas at the White House decorations tour. The theme this year was “America the Beautiful.”

“When I received word back from them, I honestly couldn’t believe I’d be playing there,” Nuelle said. “It was the coolest experience I’ve ever had in my entire life and an honor.”

Nuelle performed the evening of Saturday, December 12, for 2.5 hours as invited guests seemed awestruck and amazed by the decorations as well as his performance. The grand foyer, where he performed, featured a Steinway and Sons grand piano specifically built for the White House in 1938. It was the company’s 300,000th piano they had produced.

“I was nervous for the first few songs but then everything just fell into place, and it was fun,” Nuelle said.

He performed Christmas music from traditional Christian songs like “Oh Come all Ye Faithful” to modern tunes such as Mariah Carey’s “All I Want for Christmas is You.”

Nuelle considers the opportunity a high accomplishment and feels like it was part of God’s plan for him. He is a triplet who was not actually supposed to be born. The doctor told his mother that she should plan on having twins because the third one didn’t look like he’d make it. But a few days ago, he celebrated his 29th birthday, two days after Christmas.



“Despite ups and downs, you never know what life has in store for you, so embrace every opportunity you can,” Nuelle said.

Shortly after performing in mid-December, he was asked to come back to the White House again to perform on December 21. Faced with the decision to head home for the holidays earlier or perform, Nuelle chose to perform, not knowing whether he would ever have that opportunity again.

HALVORSON MOVES TO KFGO — After 23 years at the American Ag Network, **Rusty Halvorson** decided it was time for a change.

“I took a leap of faith,” he said. “I was at a point in my career where I knew it was time for growth and better things, so I jumped.”

Halvorson’s wife, **Sabrina**, took the leap with him. Within hours of the pair issuing their resignations, the job offers were coming in.

“I’ve never felt so blessed,” Halvorson said. “We’ve had so many people reaching out with work or with support and well wishes. I’m truly honored and humbled by the support we’ve been given.”

It didn’t take long for Halvorson to know his next step. He has long wanted to work at KFGO radio in Fargo, North Dakota, but his loyalty to the ag network built by his mentor **Lyle Romine** kept him from making the move. It was with the support and encouragement of Romine’s widow, **Terrie**, that Halvorson took the step up.





“I’m realizing that the way I can honor Lyle is by carrying on his legacy in my standards of farm broadcasting and in being part of the community,” Halvorson said. “Sabrina had an idea that we’re working on now. We’re creating the Lyle Romine Scholarship for Future Farm Broadcasters. We plan to distribute it through North Dakota State University, and it will include a student membership to the NAFB, along with as much financial support as we can raise.”

As for his new position at KFGO, Halvorson said he feels right at home.

“They’re good people and solid professionals,” he said.



Farm Director **Sarah Heinrich** is currently on maternity leave, but Halvorson looks forward to working with her when she returns.

“Sarah has a lot of respect in the community, and she deserves it. She is a top-notch farm broadcaster and farm director. It is genuinely exciting for me to be on her team,” Halvorson added.

As for Sabrina’s career move, she’s mostly keeping quiet about it.

“I’m pouring a lot into my freelancing. I’m extremely excited about doing some writing for Agri-Pulse. I’ve wanted to write for them for years.

They are absolutely the top when it comes to ag policy reporting,” she said.

She has another career announcement brewing but said the time isn’t right just yet.

“This is Rusty’s moment. I want him to live in it fully,” she said.

Halvorson credits his wife with helping to make his moment happen.

“When you have the right partner by your side, who believes in you and helps you see your worth, and who will support you through anything, that gives you the strength to make all of your dreams possible,” he concluded.

FROM TOP 40 TO AGRICULTURE — **Travis Cleven**, ag director, (WTAQ AM-FM /WDEZ, Green Bay, Wisconsin) knew the challenge facing him.

“I knew I had some big shoes to fill as I took over for **Mike Austin** once he hung up his headphones for the last time in December 2018. Speaking of that, I still get called ‘the new Mike Austin’ when we go to events. I take that as a compliment,” Cleven said.

Cleven grew up on his parent’s custom calf raising operation, Quiet Crest Farm in Greenleaf, Wisconsin.

“They bought the farm when I was born in 1994, and it kept on growing. We currently raise 4,200 calves for various dairies around Northeast Wisconsin. We get the calves through the baby stage. I remember bottle-feeding calves before school and that was just the way things went. I figured most kids did that stuff. Turns out, they didn’t,” he said.

“As a kid I loved showing at the county fair. I first showed dairy with my brother and sister when we were little, but then I bugged my dad enough that he let me get pigs and beef. Raising those animals taught me a lot about hard work, the good and the bad of agriculture, and how people don’t do it for the money. I suppose radio is the same way. I started helping at Reynders Dairy milking cows in De Pere, Wisconsin, to get experience working for someone else. Every farm kid should have to do that.

“I graduated from Brillion Public High School and went on to be an electrician for about two months. My foreman asked me if I hated my job, and I couldn’t say yes fast enough. He ended up setting me up with a guidance counselor at our local tech school to talk about what my interests were and to look at the possibilities I had. By the end of the meeting, I was signed up for their Digital Media program; and next thing I knew, I had my associate degree. While getting my degree, I needed an internship. I randomly messaged a local radio station, and their program director, **Dayton Kane**, told me that they could use an intern on their morning show.



“I had no on-air experience at all. That was the best thing for me as a person and professionally. After a while, I was hired as part of the KISS FM Morning Show on 95.9 KISS FM WKSZ and then became the program’s producer. I worked at KISS FM for about three years when the morning show was replaced. I decided to go back to college for my bachelor’s degree in communications. Working at that station was a great opportunity that got my foot in the door and taught me a lot of what I know about radio. Woodward Radio Group will always have a special place in my heart for the experiences they gave me.”



Cleven is shooting the video and interview for the November “Farmer of the Month” at Vanden Wymelenberg Dairy in Shirley, Wisconsin. He is interviewing Adam Vanden and his wife Marie.

After college, Cleven joined Midwest Communications as a part-time on-air personality for Y100 WNCY, the local country station.

“One day I saw **Mike Austin** recording in a studio and decided to go say ‘hello’ because I remembered him always interviewing us at the fair. I asked how he got his job because I love ag, and I also love radio. He told me that he would be retiring in a few months, and we should have a more detailed conversation about his job. Once we figured out the details, everything fell into place, and I ended up taking over. I can’t thank him enough for teaching me

what he knows about agriculture, the people he’s introduced me to, and how to be an ag broadcaster.

“I love my position here because I’m able to share the stories of farmers all over the state. I’m able to learn about so many different sides of ag — from dairy, to bee farms, to wine makers, and more. I may not sound or look like a polished reporter, but I’m a good storyteller. I want my listeners to feel like I’m just simply having a conversation with them while they’re driving to work or out in the barn. I want those who may not know much about farming to be interested in the stories I’m sharing and be able to understand what I’m talking about. That’s been my goal from day one,” Cleven said.



BROWNFIELD'S ANDERSON ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT

— After a 43-year career in agriculture, Brownfield Ag News Anchor/Reporter **Ken Anderson** has decided to move on to the next stage of life. Anderson retired at the end of the year, signing off for the last time December 30.

“I love what I do and working for Brownfield for the past 12 years has been a wonderful experience,” Anderson said. “But I am looking forward to a slightly slower pace, spending more time with my wife, Ardella, seeing more of our kids and grandkids, and doing some traveling, as well.”

Anderson’s career has come full circle. It began in 1977 as a farm broadcaster at KRVN Radio in Lexington, Nebraska. In

1989, Anderson joined NC+ Hybrids in Lincoln, where he worked in advertising and marketing for 15 years. That was followed by stints with two Nebraska-based marketing communication firms. In the fall of 2008, the opportunity he had been wishing for came knocking.

“In the back of my mind, I always hoped I could return to radio, my first love. When I saw Brownfield had an opening for a farm broadcaster based in Nebraska, I couldn’t believe my eyes. I gave **Cyndi Young** a call and, fortunately for me, she took a chance on an old farm broadcaster. I’ll always be indebted to Cyndi for giving me this opportunity.”

Anderson has received several awards over the years, including the National Agricultural Marketing Association (NAMA) Excellence in Marketing Communications Award in 2002 and the NAFB Farm Broadcaster of the Year Award in 2014. His work also has been recognized by national and state farm and commodity organizations. Anderson is a past president of the NAFB Foundation Board of Directors and the Nebraska Agribusiness Club. He is a graduate of Nebraska’s ag leadership program (LEAD) and served on the Ag Leadership Council’s board of directors.

Ken and Ardella live in Lincoln, Nebraska. They have four children and 10 grandchildren.

Cyndi Young, director of Brownfield & Ag Operations, said her Brownfield colleagues are honored to have worked with Anderson as an anchor/reporter for these past 12 years.



*Anderson interviews **Mike Johanns**, then-U.S. Senator from Nebraska.*

“Ken’s professionalism and passion for getting a true and balanced story, and his humility are qualities we all greatly admire,” Young says. “He is a man of considerable integrity and a good friend. We wish Ken and Ardella the very best!”

Brownfield Ag News creates and delivers original content across multiple media platforms. Brownfield includes the largest and one of the oldest agricultural news radio networks in the country. More than 500 affiliate radio stations in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin carry agricultural programming created by Brownfield’s award-winning team of a dozen full-time farm broadcasters. More information is available at www.brownfieldagnews.com.



*Photo: Anderson interviews **Zippy Duvall**, president of American Farm Bureau.*

FORMER FARM BROADCASTER USES AG PLOTS AS CRIME NOVELIST — When you read a crime novel by **JJ Gould**, you notice three things: one, the author must really know radio and agriculture; two, the characters are compelling and unique; and three, there are not a lot of wasted words.

Jeff Gould was a reporter for the Linder Farm Network in Minnesota, and the craft of writing never left him.

“I’ve always loved stories. I hear a good story, and I never forget it. And believe me, I heard a lot of good stories when I was a farm broadcaster. I remember an ASCS agent telling me about a grain inspector who was trying to poke a hole through some crusted grain at an elevator. Turns out, the elevator was empty, and he was walking around on a layer of molded crust two hundred feet above an empty elevator floor. I heard that story and thought ‘Yes, that would make a great plot feature.’”

In a happenstance meeting, Gould was sitting next to an author who was on the way to meet her editor in New York. Her interest in Gould’s stories got him hooked on the idea of writing.

“She told me two things that were compelling. The first was that the average author writes about 300 words a day. Any radio guy can tell you that a 30-second spot is 90 words, which means an author is only writing three and a half spots a day. Heck, I could do that like falling off a log. And the second thing was that a book is about 65,000 words. So I did the math and figured I could write a book in about 120 days ... so I did it!” *Dead Air* was released to Amazon in 2016. “I wasn’t really focused on marketing it. I just liked writing it. I really thought I was done writing.”



But the characters wouldn’t leave him alone.

“I grew to like the characters. I kept thinking about them, wondering what happened after the novel was over.”

This led to three other novels: *Dead Heat*, *Dead End*, and *Dead Line*. All the novels take place in rural South Dakota, all four novels feature radio stations, and all four have compelling, often dangerous and often funny characters.

“I get compared a lot to **John Grisham**, **Louis L’amour**, and **Elmore Leonard**. I like dialogue, and that is what drives my

scenes and characters. But I get my pacing from radio, definitely.”

Years as a farm reporter and even more years as a copywriter taught Gould the importance of editing and informs his process.

“I treat each chapter like it’s a copy assignment. I pick a character, figure out what other character they will confront, and then simply write down what they say to each other. When the chapter is finished, I ask myself, ‘What needs to happen next?’ and that tells me what the next chapter needs to be and who needs to be in it. I start on Ash Wednesday and write furiously until July. Then I go back and chop away, adding details that are needed and chopping unimportant stuff. Then about August, I go through a three-month process with my editor and publisher, getting it ready for a holiday release.”

Gould finds the task of writing and publishing challenging.

“I’ll be honest. I wrote these four books to please myself and friends and then asked my editor, ‘Do you really think these are good?’ She said yes and then recommended a publicist to help get the books to a wider audience. In late December, we issued *Dead Heat* to the English-speaking foreign market — namely, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and India. Things have been taking off ever since.”

Ultimately, Gould wants to carve out a niche for himself as a professional writer.

“Most of my income comes as a professional speaker; and, as I learned from COVID, like a farmer, I need to diversify my operation to weather dips in the industry. For me to have the ability to take a slow time in speaking and generate a book that continues to sell and generate income — that’s a smart idea.

“The book industry is content-driven. The more books you’ve written, the more titles sell as readers find out about you and then pick up all your books, and that snowballs into greater and greater income. Right now, I have two more books in my head that are writing themselves, waiting for a time for me to put them down on paper.”

Gould’s books are all available through Amazon (search JJ Gould) or through his website, ILikeThatStory.net.

PETERS TRANSITIONS FROM FARM BROADCASTING TO FULL-TIME MOM — With four busy boys and two more babies on the way, Assistant Farm Director **Shalee Peters** is stepping away from KRVN’s Rural Radio Network to pursue full-time motherhood and raise her children on the family farm.



Shalee Peters (KRVN Rural Radio Network, Lexington, Nebraska) is pictured in the combine cab with her husband, Ben, and four sons.

Peters, who joined the KRVN Rural Radio Network farm team in 2014, has four sons: Charlie, five; Will, four; and Henry and Walt, two. But an already-full Peters house will shortly become a fuller house. Peters and her husband, **Ben**, are expecting a second set of twins, due in January.

Peters said even though she’s stepping away from her farm broadcasting duties, she’ll continue to remain involved in the agriculture industry and be able to dedicate more time to the needs of her family and their farm.

“Our boys love tractor and four-wheeler rides on the farm with their dad and playing ‘farm’ in their spare time,” said Peters. “The transition into my new lifestyle will let me be a part of their learning and allow me to help Ben on the farm. Instead of toting them along to cover meetings, I’ll likely be toting them along to lay out pipe or pull the grain cart.”

During Peters' tenure at KRVN, she covered hundreds of events, including state and national events. She aired 10 reports daily, five reports weekly, and countless feature interviews every month. In addition, she was the midday host on 104.9 Max Country, a station owned by the Nebraska Rural Radio Association.

Some of Peters' favorite work memories include covering President Donald Trump's appearance at the American Farm Bureau Annual Convention in Nashville, Tennessee, and networking with coworkers and broadcasters at NAFB Conventions. Her colleagues said they will miss her witty comebacks, spunky energy, and insightful leadership.

"It will be different, for sure," Peters added. "I'm sad that this chapter is ending, but I'm excited to turn the page and start the next chapter with our growing family."

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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