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by Larry A. Quinn

HEEMSTRA WINS TOM BROKAW AWARD — Jody Heemstra (DRG Media Group, Pierre, South Dakota) was named the 2021 recipient of the Tom Brokaw Award from the South Dakota Broadcasters Association (SDBA).

The Tom Brokaw Award is presented each year in a cooperative effort between the SDBA and the Media & Journalism Department of the University of South Dakota (USD). The award is unique to USD and is one of its highest honors. It is commemorated by an award to the recipient each year and by adding their name to a plaque on permanent display in the Al Neuharth Media Center at USD. The Tom Brokaw Award recognizes excellence in broadcasting, especially in the areas of electronic journalism (on or off-air involvements) and public affairs.

“I found out I was receiving the Tom Brokaw Award when DRG Media Group General Manager **Diane Deis** called an impromptu staff meeting on a Tuesday morning and shared the news,” Heemstra said. “I was most definitely surprised. Pleasantly surprised, of course.”



The award was presented at the SDBA East River Training Seminars in Sioux Falls July 27, 2021.

“My parents, **Dale** and **Eileen Heemstra**, attended the luncheon where I received the award. My program director while I worked in Watertown, **Todd Anderson**, who has become a friend and mentor, was also able to attend. I was truly honored to have each of them there.”

“I don’t know how many people were involved with my nomination, but I do know radio news broadcaster and friend **J.P. Skelly** (KORN Radio; Mitchell, South Dakota) and former NAFB President and great friend **Susan Littlefield** (KRVN/Rural Radio Network; Nebraska) teamed up to put my name in for consideration,” Heemstra said. “I had no idea they were ‘plotting’ together; however, thinking back at some of the seemingly random questions I answered, I should have known they were up to something.”



“Heemstra has covered everything from state and local events to a presidential visit to the Dakota Ethanol plant near Wentworth,” Skelly said in his nomination. “She’s a versatile and reliable journalist, taking advantage of opportunities to learn and grow. It’s been a joy watching Heemstra grow as a broadcast journalist and a person of integrity.”

“Jody Heemstra has the talent of telling a story, sharing an idea, and educating you all in one newscast,” Littlefield said in her nomination. “She understands the crucial role her stories and newscasts play in sharing the story of agriculture.”

“I don’t do radio news or farm news because it’s easy. More often than not, it’s difficult,” Heemstra said. “When I started writing news for my broadcasts, I didn’t have to think much

about grammar, spelling, or punctuation. As long as I wrote the story so I could correctly pronounce things, that’s all that mattered. Now, with the addition of websites, phone apps, and social media, not only do I have to be ever cognizant of word selection and voice inflection, but also of spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

“Over the past year and a half, I think the racial discrimination problems in the United States, the global COVID-19 pandemic, the extreme mistrust of mainstream media, and the divisive political climate prove words matter. Word selection matters. What we (local news broadcast journalists) say and how we say it matters. What we are writing now, will be some of what future generations find when researching history. This is our time. What we do matters,” Heemstra concluded.

SAMUELSON, ARMSTRONG CONTINUE WEEKLY TVCASTS — “We are in the 16th season for the television show that Orion and I started: **This Week In AgriBusiness**,” Max Armstrong said. “While Orion wrapped up his daily involvement on WGN Radio in Chicago at the end of 2020, he continues to do his weekly ‘Samuelson Says’ commentaries on TV.

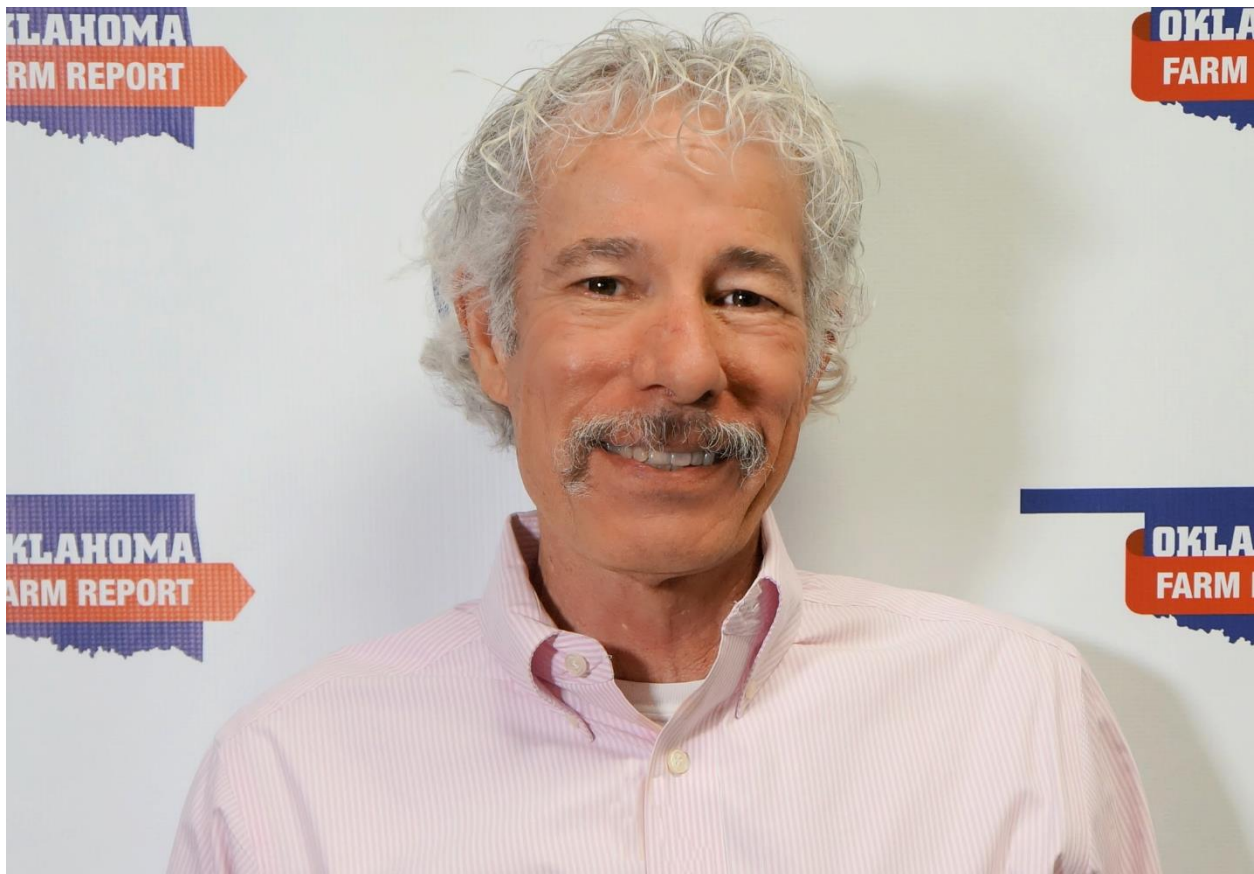


“The last radio broadcast that Orion and I did together on WGN was the morning of January 2, 2021. That show ended an era of long-form farm radio on Chicago radio that covered more than 90 years. Veteran newsman **Steve Alexander** continues with short daily market reports on WGN,” Armstrong added.

“But very soon there may be a treat coming in the form of new Orion Audio Archives,” Armstrong announced. “While there is no audiobook version of Orion’s popular book, *You Can’t Dream Big Enough*, there are plans for Orion to share audio memories with us, to be posted on various websites. Stay tuned, as they say.”

KNIPP REFLECTS ON HIS CAREER — Newly named as an honorary member by NAFB, **Sam Knipp** retired July 2, 2021, from his final agricultural communications position.

“The summer of 1975 was special for me in many ways as I made my first television appearance, became engaged to my wife, and was introduced to the National Association of Farm Broadcasters,” Knipp recalls. “That spring I was selected as the first intern for WIBW-TV-AM-FM (Topeka, Kansas) farm department by **Rich Hull**. Among my many coworkers that summer was **Kendal Frazier**. I was so impressed by Kendal that I later asked him to be the best man at my wedding. Kendal went on to bigger and better things, eventually retiring as the top guy at the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association. That summer I started down the path of a long and winding career telling the story of agriculture.”



Raised as a true “son of the soil” on a western Kansas farm and ranch, Knipp attended Kansas State University (KSU), where he graduated with a bachelor of science in ag journalism, minoring in ag economics. As a side note, the late **Dr. Barry Flinchbaugh** was one of his favorite professors.

After interning at WIBW and graduating from KSU, Knipp worked at KWNS AM-FM (Pratt, Kansas) and KFEQ AM-FM (St. Joseph, Missouri), where he was mentored by **Gene Millard**. He eventually returned to WIBW.

The call to fully implement his college degree and expand his desire to more completely tell the farm story attracted him back to Manhattan, Kansas, where he was hired as editor of the Kansas Farm Bureau publication. That job later expanded to include director of broadcasting as Farm Bureau had a modern radio studio and a state-of-art TV studio.

The spring of 1996 brought Knipp another great opportunity as private farmers in Ukraine needed help. This was after the breakup of the Soviet Union, and the Ukrainian government decided to grant land to every citizen. Overnight, doctors, store clerks, former government workers, and taxi drivers became instant farmers. Lacking an extension service to help the newly minted farmers, they formed a private association similar to the Farm Bureau. They noticed the radio programs Knipp was producing and distributing to radio stations and asked if he would help as Ukraine was wired for sound.

“Readers of George Orwell’s *1984* will understand this connection as most buildings in Ukraine and the entire Soviet Union were connected with speakers, enabling the Communist government to communicate with their citizens,” Knipp explained.

Kansas Farm Bureau “loaned” Knipp to the Citizen’s Network for Foreign Affairs (CNFA), a program funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

“My office was in Kiev, the capital of Ukraine, but I spent most of my time traveling and working in southern Ukraine, where I was based in the city of Kherson,” Knipp said. “There was an occasion where I had the chance to attend the world-famous ballet in the Kiev Opera. Sitting there, watching this unique form of dance, I thought, ‘I have come a long way from that western Kansas farm.’”

“After several months of working with Ukrainian farmers during the day and teaching journalism students at night, it was time to go home. Waiting for me was another opportunity. Oklahoma Farm Bureau needed someone to direct their communications efforts. This was an opportunity to take everything I had learned during the past 20 years and bring it all together in one concerted effort,” Knipp said.

“During my tenure in Oklahoma, I had the unique opportunity to travel to Cuba when Oklahoma wheat producers sold wheat directly to the country. A few years later, I participated in a program through Oklahoma State University (OSU) where a group of journalists traveled to Mali, West Africa, to work with farmers and help Malian journalists report on ag production in this huge country, which includes the Sahara Desert. We later brought some of those journalists to Oklahoma to ‘shadow’ our efforts in the southern High Plains. This was a fantastic experience. Working with OSU, I was impressed with the institution’s academics and was accepted into their graduate school, where I earned a master in science in agricultural communications.”

After 19 years of producing daily and weekly radio programs as well as videos and helping with the marketing and branding of the Oklahoma Farm Bureau insurance company, Knipp temporarily retired.

“I use the term ‘temporarily’ because it was only for one month,” he explained.

“The President of American Farmers & Ranchers (AFR), otherwise known as Oklahoma Farmers Union, asked if I would take over their communications efforts. Yes, it was an adjustment in policy direction, but keeping with the non-biased tenet of journalism, the basics remained unchanged – tell the farmer’s story. I thoroughly enjoyed my years with AFR, seeing the agriculture world through a different prism,” Knipp said.

Now it was time for Knipp to semi-retire.

“Following in the footsteps of my close friend, the late **Mike Dain**, I worked as a farm broadcaster for iHeartRadio’s family of ag networks, which included the First Oklahoma Ag Network. After corporate downsizing, I was hired by former NAFB President **Ron Hays** to work part-time, editing the Oklahoma Farm Report daily newsletter and occasionally report news and interview farmers. That’s where I punched the clock for the last time July 2, 2021.

“Through it all, there have remained several constants: my wife, **Leah**, membership in NAFB, and the strong desire to tell the story of our great farmers and ranchers. It is indeed a great honor to be accepted as an honorary member of the NAFB,” Knipp concluded.



HAT NETWORK HITS THE ROAD AGAIN — On-location coverage has been the hallmark of Hoosier Ag Today (HAT) for the past 15 years. In 2020, however, that all came to an end with the pandemic and subsequent restrictions and quarantines.

With Indiana dropping restrictions on travel and

events, HAT is once again on the road. The largest farm network in Indiana will do this in style with a new custom-logoed vehicle. The 2021 Chevrolet Colorado truck made its debut at the Purdue Farm Management tour in July.

With **Eric Pfeiffer** at the wheel, the HAT mobile news machine visited several farms in southwest Indiana. One of the first people to get her picture taken with the truck was **Indiana Lieutenant Governor & Secretary of Agriculture Suzanne Crouch**. The vehicle will be on the road many times over the next few months with scheduled visits to the Indiana State Fair, the Farm Progress Show, Becknology Days, the Farm Science Review, and many other field days and news events across the state. The truck will cap off 2021 by being on display at the Indiana Farm Equipment and Technology Expo in December.

Currently, corporate sponsorship of the truck is available. This would include a logo on the highly visible vehicle as well as on-air and on-line sponsorship credit. For details, contact Kim Stockment at phone 765/588-1520.

HAT was founded in 2006 for the specific purpose of serving the informational needs of the Hoosier agricultural community. It 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 farm community. HAT also is part owner of the Indiana Farm Equipment and Technology Expo, held each December in Westfield, Indiana. HAT is represented nationally by J. L. Farmakis, Inc.

EMERITUS MEMBER LOVES TRACTORS — Roddy Peeples was elected NAFB President in 1982. He was chosen Farm Broadcaster of the Year in 1992, and he was inducted into NAFB's Hall of Fame in 2001. He has been an NAFB member for more than 50 years; but, there is something you may not know about Peeples.

HE LOVES TRACTORS.

"I grew up on a farm/ranch (Bluff Valley Farm) in the little town of Tehuacana, Texas, five miles west of Mexia, population 408," Peeples said. "We had about 2,000 acres, of which half was in cultivation of cotton, oats, grain sorghum, vetch, Austrian winter peas, sweet clover, and some spelt with the other half in mesquite pasture with Angus cattle. In the early days, there were also sheep and hogs.

"As I grew up, I was fascinated by everything mechanical — especially the tractors. We finally ended up with five tractors — all Farmalls: three Model Hs, one model B, and one Model M. That latter one was the big one, at least in those days, and I was all over it, including getting to drive it home brand new from the IH dealership in Coolidge, Texas, just west of our farm. It was equipped with a bulldozer, and Dad set me to using that to fill in rain-washouts in our terraces. But that tractor was on rubber tires, of course, which didn't provide very much traction, so unless the dirt was very soft, I couldn't push much of it because of the shortage of traction. Much of the time I was reduced to not much more than scraping the weeds off the top of the ground," Peeples added.

"So, throughout my life, I've always wanted to operate a 'real' crawler-type (hopefully a Caterpillar) bulldozer, one with some traction. With the establishment just northwest of Garland, Texas, of EXTREME SANDBOX (it also has a location in Minnesota) last year, the opportunity presented itself. My wife, **Bettimae**, gave me a Father's Day gift certificate for a one-and-a-half-hour 'experience' on a 'real' bulldozer. That included a 20-minute introductory/safety video and tips and guidance from a trained operator, who then stood by, watched, and pretty much turned me loose with that tractor and bulldozer.

"So, I got to do what I'd always wanted to do: dig a nice wide ditch, about 2 feet deep and 100 or so feet long, then crawl over the big pile of dirt I'd pushed to one end, do a 180, and push it all back in the ditch and smooth it out. All by myself. What fun. A grown old man's toy. I enjoyed myself so much I may even give myself another one of those treats at EXTREME SANDBOX, maybe next time with one of its backhoes, or a front-end loader.



“Yep, it was not a Caterpillar, but I have to say, the Komatsu folks built a pretty fine machine, as easy — maybe even easier — to drive as our sedan.

“I heartily recommend this outing to any farm broadcaster, young or old, for some fun and a good story,” Peeples said.

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*.

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