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by Larry A. Quinn

FARM BROADCASTING AS A FAMILY BUSINESS...Business and families can be a toxic mix especially for husband and wife partners who find it nearly impossible to separate business from their personal lives, but **Susan Allen**, co-owner with husband, **Kelly**, of the Ag Information Network points out, “Farmers and ranchers have been successful family business owners for generations.” She considers their company, **Ag Information Network**, much like a working cattle ranch with each family member contributing in areas they are gifted. “We don’t work for each other, we work ‘with’ each other and the most valuable asset we have is complete trust. You can’t buy or hire that.” She adds, “Whether it’s side-by-side gathering and doctoring of the 400 yearlings in the steep, rugged, wolf-infested, Blue Mountains outside of Pendleton, OR, or making a tough employee decision, there is such freedom knowing that our goal is the same—to be in this for the long term and to create value for the family for future generations.”



Kelly Allen, Susan Allen and grandson Jett (the future generation) in the roping arena.

Prior to purchasing the network, Kelly Allen’s early career years included working for Fortune 500 companies with a focus on product/brand management, building marketing plans and managing brands for consumer goods products and later for high tech product lines. After moving back to the Northwest, he did consulting, start-ups and turn-

arounds. This eventually led him back to his agricultural roots and the purchase of a farm radio network, which he has managed for the past 20 years. The *Ag Information Network* has been a part of NAFB ever since Kelly purchased the company. In 2000, Kelly served as the Marketing and Promotions Manager on the NAFB Board of Directors. Until their move to a ranch in Walla Walla in 2012, Susan produced the daily *Food Forethought* radio program and the *Open Range Report* while also helping with affiliate relations. With the advent of social media, Susan is focused more on company outreach efforts through newsletters and FaceBook. Also, she does creative work writing commercials and developing ad campaigns for clients.



Tommy Allen and Susan Allen hold a brainstorming session during “saddle time.”

Growing up in wheat ranching, Kelly watched college friends return to the farm and noted those with outside business experience had more to contribute, thus he felt strongly about outside experience for his two sons. **Tommy Allen** interned at one of Portland’s premier PR agencies,

and then worked for crop chemical company Wilber Ellis and most recently sold wheat combines and large equipment for a major John Deere distributorship. In September, he joined the Ag Information Network as Vice President of Marketing. “The timing was right for Tommy to return,” Kelly said. “His past five years working with farm and ranch decision-makers has already proved a great asset with ad agencies, not to mention our own reporters who have used his many connections for stories.” Tommy’s ranching experience of running 400 head of yearlings and his years of calf and team roping, all combine to make him the ideal person to represent the network, Kelly added. Families inherently know each other’s strengths and weaknesses. Susan believes this provides a climate that allows freedom to share ideas and think outside the box. Tommy who was raised to love hunting and fishing had the idea to develop a daily outdoor show. *Sportsman Spotlight* is now one of the network’s most popular programs, and Tommy’s brother, **Austin**, an avid big-game hunter, is a regular guest. Having been raised in a family business, Susan is sensitive to the fact that working and traveling together can stress a family relationship. It’s often spouses and siblings who feel disconnected so she and Kelly work to include the whole family whenever possible. Tommy’s brother, **Austin**, who is one of the Northwest’s top John Deere large equipment salesmen, has a seat on the company board, is pictured on their **aginfo.net** website, and helps with marketing campaigns as well as being on call as a farming information resource. Tommy’s wife, **Desi**, does the majority of company photography and layout, and Kelly and Susan’s four grandchildren appear regularly in ads and Facebook postings. If you visit *Sportsman Spotlight* at **aginfo.net** you will see their two daughters-in-law in the duck blind, and their sister-in-law with a record ram. “Family has become a huge asset to our business. We have a host of clients on the East Coast and Midwest



who are fascinated with our western way of life here in Walla Walla’s beautiful wine country and follow us though social media. Our children and grandchildren are our best ambassadors. We continually post pictures of them ranching, roping, riding, hunting and fishing.”

The Allens’ friendly family bull that the kids dubbed *Snowball* is featured on their business card along with the Wallace Stegner quote that Kelly, Tommy and Susan believe, sell and live every single day. “*The West, not merely a place*

but a place of Mind."

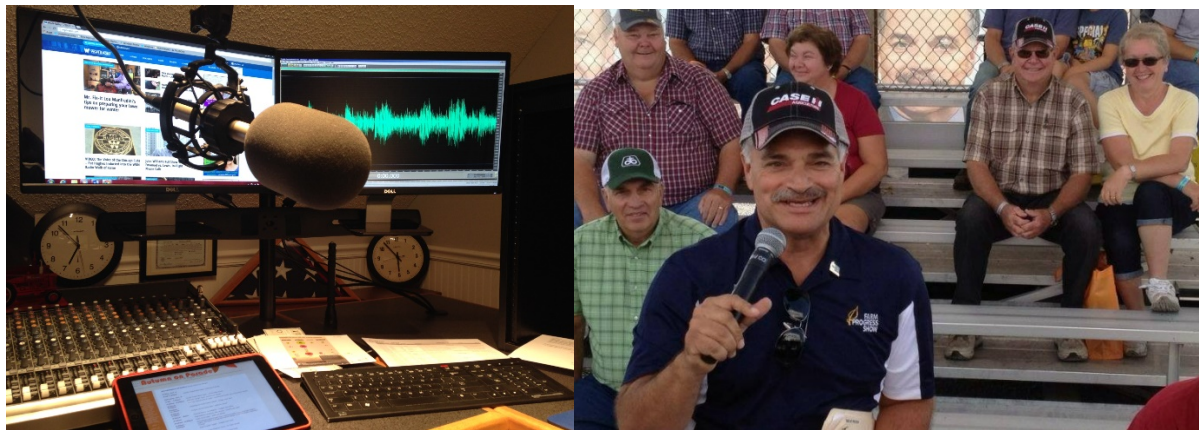
54 YEARS ON THE AIR AT WGN...is the latest benchmark for **Orion Samuelson**, reports his longtime colleague, **Max Armstrong**. "As I continue with him on the Saturday Morning Show broadcast (the hour-long weekly show on WGN Radio), I have been heard on WGN every week for nearly 37 years," Max reports. "Every few weeks, when Orion is in Arizona, I originate that entire hour from my home studio south of Raleigh, where Linda and I bought a horse farm this year." The show that Max and Orion own and produce, *This Week In AgriBusiness*, has been on the air for nine years. The show is carried by RFD-TV and by 90 local television stations. Also, the show is posted each week at www.farmprogressamerica.com.

Max flies back from North Carolina each week to work with **Orion** and their crew of **Phil Reed**, **Angelo Lazzara**, **Ryan Ruh** and **Marilyn Kay**. Their field reporters include **Janell Aust** originating from her farm in Kansas and **Kristin Decker** who reports on food and consumer concerns, such as foodie attitudes, mommy bloggers and consumer attitudes about food.

Samuelson in the TV studio.



Max Armstrong and Orion Samuelson in the TV studio.



Max Armstrong's home studio in North Carolina, and Max at this year's Farm Progress Show.

Through his personal social media reach (Facebook and Twitter) Max is connecting with more than 16,500 followers. Max said, "It allows me to actively promote our stories, travels and other activities to the producers and consumers wired through social media."



NEW POSITION... Haylie Shipp (Northern Ag Network, Miles City, MT) has accepted a full-time position with her hometown radio station, KLTZ/KLAN (Glasgow, MT) while remaining a part of Northern Ag Network and on their regional airwaves in Montana, Wyoming, North and South Dakota weekly. She will host a daily "tradio" program, managing a number of the station's sales accounts, and doing some voice-tracking. "Outside of that, they've given me the flexibility to start any and all ag programs I want on the stations," she said. "As an affiliate of Northern Ag Network, the stations will

continue to carry those programs, but I'll now have the opportunity to make this station even more of a financial and agricultural powerhouse. What's more, the station has given me the power to 'own' the ag programming that I do for them," she added. "This means that I'll have the opportunity to market those programs to other radio stations or networks that may want to 'amp up' their agricultural coverage." Haylie said, "Some ideas that I have include a 'consumer question' program where we focus more on talking to the consumer about where their food comes from (i.e. what exactly is a GMO, why do we have farm subsidies, why and when are antibiotics administered, etc)." She continued, "I'd love to do a 'look back' show to reminisce with some of the old time ranchers/farmers about where they came from and instill in our listeners the rich heritage that agriculture has." She adds, "I've always loved to write, so I'm also going to explore making these stories into print articles for freelance web/print journalism." All of this new opportunity will be done just 20 miles from her family's ranch. "We're currently at the first rung of the transition planning ladder and are now working towards moving the multi-generation ranch from my dad to my brother and me." Haylie grew up on the family cattle ranch near the Canadian border, north of Glasgow, MT. She graduated from Glasgow High School in 2003 and from Montana State University in Billings in 2008 with a major in mass communications and a minor in biology. She started working with Northern Ag Network as an intern in 2006 and received NAFB's **Glen Kummerow** scholarship. Also, she's received the Horizon Award and is serving as a new member on the NAFB Foundation Board. She's helped Northern Ag Network deliver radio/television/web ag news to a four-state region for the past eight years. She also launched the network's social media, interacting with listeners, readers, and followers on a daily basis.

INTERN... KICD/KLLT Radio hired **Ben Maurer** for a 10-week internship this past summer. "Ben assisted us in the news, weather and farm departments. He traveled with our farm broadcasters, **Dan Skelton** and **Troy Leininger**, to some of the county fairs this summer, and he conducted interviews with 4-H'ers showing at the fair," reports **Kevin Tlam**, Operations Manager of KICD. Ben is in his senior year at South O'Brien High School and plans to attend Iowa



Lakes Community College.

SOUTH AFRICA AGRICULTURAL VISIT... Ken Root was part of a small delegation that traveled to South Africa, Mozambique and Zambia in October to look at investing in farm land. Underwritten by People's Company, a farm real estate firm based in Des Moines, IA, Ken was accompanied by a videographer and an investment analyst. Trip video will be used at the January 23 Land Investment Expo in Des Moines. Ken's group was shown several farms by **Koos DeKlerk**, general manager of Emvest Investments, and **Susan Payne**, Executive Chairman of Emvest Investments. Koos is from Zimbabwe and was part of the largest commercial farm in the country until they were dis-appropriated of their land and thrown out of the country in 2004. Four brothers joined hundreds of displaced Zim farmers who now run farms and ranches all over southern Africa. Susan Payne is a Canadian who now leads an investment fund that owns farms in Africa.



"We were there in the dry season, but we saw harvest of wheat in Zambia that was yielding 135 bushels per acre. It was irrigated and was a white variety bred in Zimbabwe." The white wheat was very good quality with about a five-month growing season. Ken reports that they saw the fields where 'maize' (or corn) was grown with yields of 115 bushels

on dry land due to a good water table underneath. Land of southern Africa is like the southwestern United States with latitude that approximates San Diego, Ken explained. Bananas are a tropical crop that is cultivated on a commercial scale of about 100 acres. Since there are many workers on farms, a crop like bananas is hand-harvested and processed on farms, he added. There is a good market for the crop in the local area and within driving distance. Tomatoes are also grown intensively but flooding the market often makes the price drop. There is still unrest in South Africa as the government is only 20 years old, and white farmers fear that they will lose their land as happened in Zimbabwe. Most think there will be some reduction in acreage owned by white farmers, but the government will not make wholesale changes. Mozambique is the least developed area as it was a Portuguese colony and was severely impacted by AIDS. "The land was dry but irrigation was available in the region we toured. The people work cheap but 20% of the labor bill is for security of the property. Irrigation pumps and other infrastructure are guarded 24 hours a day," Ken said. "Zambia has tourism at Victoria Falls, but the region also has beautiful farms that show promise. The country operates under British-type law so land can be bought and sold by non-

residents. Irrigation out of the Zambezi River was producing good crops of wheat and sugar



cane.”

Koos DeKlerk and **Susan Payne** were the tour leaders. **Garhard Dreyer** is a South African farmer who has grains, cattle and peanut processing as his main businesses. Also, he owns a game farm. Cattle shown are from Mozambique.



“I found that they are wild about Cricket in Zambia. This young lady worked at the River Club Hotel but was a professional cricket scorer. She gave me a few pointers, but did not strike me with the bat,” Ken said.

LOCAL MOMS TOUR...As **Carrie Muehling** celebrates 10 years as Agribusiness Director at WJBC (Bloomington, IL), this month, she reports on a unique Moms Tour. "This fall it has been



fun to ride along with area farmers as they bring in a record harvest of corn and soybeans. One of those opportunities came with McLean County farmers, **Gerald and Tyler Thompson** (father/son), as they hosted a group of local moms who are part of the Illinois Farm Families

program." Illinois Farm Families began this program a few years ago with Chicago-area field moms, and while that original program continues, others have popped up all over the state. Every woman in this local group is employed by GROWMARK or Country Financial, but they do not have farm backgrounds. They were able to ride in the combine and tractor hauling the grain cart with the Thompsons, and then that afternoon toured a local dairy where they bottle their own milk. "It's always fun to get out and experience the harvest, but even more interesting with a group like this. As you can imagine, they had lots of questions about how food is grown in Illinois and why farmers do what they do. Illinois Farm Families is supported by Illinois Farm Bureau and commodity groups in Illinois," Carrie explained.

During the Moms Tour, Carrie Muehling interviews farmer Tyler Thompson.



CONGRATULATIONS...**Rose Marie Lawrence** and her husband, **Everett**, celebrated their 52nd wedding anniversary in late October. Rose Marie retired from NAFB two years ago, but she still comes back to help with the Annual NAFB Convention. You can congratulate her in person at this year's convention. She was hired by Ken Root in 2003.

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