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by Larry A. Quinn

ON ITS 30TH ANNIVERSARY, WRDN HOSTS REUNION OF FORMER ON-AIR PERSONALITIES – On November 28, NAFB President **Brian Winnekins**, owner of WRDN Radio (Durand, WI) hosted a reunion of past staff members. Fifteen staff members dating back as far as 1972 joined **Brian** and **Martha Gingras** on air to reminisce about their time working at WRDN. Just like now, agriculture was an important part of the broadcast day at WRDN and many of the staff members remember having to fill in to do the *Farm Report*. For many of the former staff members, working at WRDN was a stepping stone to larger radio markets or new careers in television.



Brian Winnekins, left, owner of WRDN-AM (Durand, WI) brought back former on-air personalities to celebrate the station and the community. **Martha Gingras**, right, worked at the station in the 1980s and returned last summer as an on-air personality. (Leader-Telegram Staff Photo by Pamela Powers)



The reunion was organized by Martha Gingras and was held during the Durand Improvement Group's *Holidazzle Day* that has events to encourage shopping in Downtown Durand during the holidays. "Because WRDN's studios are located in Downtown Durand, it was decided that the *Holidazzle Day* would be a perfect fit to help promote the station and the downtown businesses," Brian said. Listeners were invited to stop by the studios to meet with former staff and then shop. "Listeners and business owners commented on how much they enjoyed listening to the stories of the past staff members on air and having the chance to catch up with them," he added. It was so successful, Brian and Martha are planning another reunion next June during the *Durand Fun Fest* celebration. Brian said, "The reunion was another example of the support that the Durand community continues to show to the station. Since putting the station back on the air in 2012, I have been so humbled by the continued support that listeners and business owners show each and every day for the station." Many from the Durand area have written the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in support of changes to the AM Broadcast Band. Also, he said listeners have encouraged businesses to advertise with WRDN and have supported those businesses. "Owning the station has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my radio career." Brian credits the support of the Durand community to the station's support of the area. "From farm news and markets throughout the day, to local news and high school sports, WRDN is an example of how a standalone AM station in a small town can succeed."



RAHJES ELECTED TO KANSAS LEGISLATURE – A special election to fill an unexpired term was held for a seat in the Kansas House of Representatives on December 10 and **Ken Rahjes** (AgView.net) won the election. On January 11, he will become one of 125 members who will represent the constituents of the 110th District. Ken will continue to do three daily ag business reports to the affiliate radio stations in Kansas and Nebraska and will soon to be expanding to other states. He will also do daily updates on *AgView.net* and social media. “It was a quick decision as the standing representative took a job which required extensive travel and which would not allow them to remain a legislator,” Ken said. He inquired about the position and with encouragement from locals, moved back to the farm in Kansas, became a citizen and in less than a week became an elected official. “We are a citizen legislature, so it is not a year around job. I am planning on continuing some duties

with AgView.net, but have moved other responsibilities to our joint venture partner during the session.” Ken said. “It will be a challenge, but the AgView.net focus will be on big picture agriculture issues on a regional and national scope.” He added, “The NAFB News Service is a key to getting a quick review of what is going on around the country. I am looking forward to continuing improvements.” Ken has been spending many hours on the phone, meeting constituents and reading background papers in preparation for the session. He is looking for this opportunity to be “in the arena.” Broadcasters spend many hours talking about policy and politics, and a few have held positions in state houses and nationally including former **U.S. Senator Conrad Burns, Montana State Senator Taylor Brown** and former **Wisconsin State Representative Phil Garthwaite**.

FIELDS OF WHITE IN WEST TEXAS – NAFB President Elect **Tony St. James** (KFLP/KDDD, Floydada, TX) said, “Fields of white are common across West Texas, especially in the fall, as cotton bolls open to reveal the *Fabric of Our Lives*. Unfortunately for some producers on the Texas High Plains (the largest growing region in the United States), late-planted cotton gave way to an ice storm in late November and a blizzard in late December turning the crop into a sea of red.” Tony explains, “Pressured by Chinese policy and reduced demand for cotton worldwide, prices have fallen below the cost of production leaving many producers upside down in 2015. Despite decent yields the cotton industry is hurting.” The pain doesn't stop at the farm gate either, Tony adds, Cotton Incorporated, (which is funded by cotton growers in the United States through per-bale assessments on producers and importers levied by the Cotton Board) is working with



\$4 million less than last year. “In addition, reduced acreage in the Mid-South and Delta regions could lead to gin closures, thus eliminating more of the industry infrastructure. Add to this the fact that cotton producers are no longer covered by the 2014 Farm Bill (as cotton is no longer a program crop).” So what is the cotton industry doing? Tony answers, “They are fighting. The industry, along with more than 100 Congressional members, is asking **USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack** to include cotton as an oilseed for farm program payments. This effort has gained support from even soybean growers.” Tony adds that industry leaders and farmers are testifying before Congress on the need to address currency manipulation by other countries. The industry is also funding research that would make cottonseed edible (by removing gossypol) giving producers more opportunities to see value in their fiber crop. Why does this matter to anyone outside of cotton country? Tony reports that **Wade Cowan**, Chairman of the American Soybean Association, says that if producers quit growing cotton, they’ll switch to corn or soybeans, which in turn adds more acres and more price pressure on those crops. Tony provides this fact and opinion, “Since 75% of all paper currency in the U.S. is made from domestic cotton, without this industry China really would own all of us.”

WINTER WEATHER IMPACT ON TEXAS AGRICULTURE — Tony Purcell (Texas State Networks, Dallas, TX) said the blizzard in the Texas Panhandle had a major effect. “Movement of cotton and cattle to market came to a standstill. Fences were knocked down and a lot of cattle were loose and unaccounted for. At one point, about 20 head were tying up traffic on the main loop in Lubbock,” Tony said. There was not much in the way of death loss reported, but that may change as ranchers are able to get into the pastures,” he added. “The Dallas area basically experienced all four seasons in a four-day period. On December 25, it was 73 degrees and sunny. On December 26, it was 81 degrees with a massive tornado outbreak. On December 27, it was 52 degrees with torrential rain and widespread flooding, and on December 28, it was 31 degrees with snow. There is not much agriculture in the areas hit by the tornados, so the impact was minimal,” Tony said. Looking back on 2015, Texans held several national leadership positions, Tony reported. “U.S. Congressman **Mike Conaway** from West Texas assumed chairmanship of the House Ag Committee. U.S. Congressman **Kevin Brady** from South Texas assumed chairmanship of the House Ways and Means Committee. **Bob McCann** of Victoria completed his term as NCBA president. Texas soybean grower **Wade Cowan** served as American Soybean Association president.”

A NEW RECORD — The Grand Champion Steer at the State Fair of Texas sold for a record high \$130,000. Once again, Tony was reporting live from Cattle Barn #1.



OKLAHOMA, LAND OF WEATHER EXTREMES – Ron Hayes (Radio

Oklahoma Network, Oklahoma City, OK) reports, “Oklahoma has always been a land of weather extremes, and the end of 2015 proved that to be true. The winter storm that some weather watchers were calling Goliath brought a variety of weather into Oklahoma—from snow drifts several feet tall to flood waters that broke records that were set in 1950.” In Central and Western Oklahoma, the ice and snow caused power outages for more than 150,000 homes (many served by Rural Electric Coops). In Eastern Oklahoma, rainfall measured 6 to 12 inches in two days. “The Illinois River that is shared with the state of Arkansas had waters 20 feet



above flood stage at several points. Huge amounts of water were released by dams in Eastern Oklahoma, and those water flows caused downstream flooding from those lakes. Cattle ranchers were scrambling to check on their cattle and get them to higher ground.” The good news is that end-of-year precipitation in November and December washed away the last of a multi-year drought. Ron said, “Drought had been in portions of Oklahoma for the last several years, but as 2016 begins, no drought or abnormally dry areas are seen anywhere in Oklahoma.”



Broken Bow Lake Dam in southeastern Oklahoma where flood water was released Dec. 28-29.

ON THE ROAD DURING THE HOLIDAYS – Mike Dain (First Oklahoma Ag, Voice of Southwest Agriculture and Yancey Ag Network, Oklahoma City, OK) traveled to Fort Knox, KY, where his son-in-law is Command Sergeant Major of Army Cadet Command (ROTC). On his return, he reports that it rained all the way from Kentucky to Tennessee then across Arkansas and into Oklahoma. “Goliath (storm) dropped immense amounts of rain in Arkansas and in the eastern half of Oklahoma. Flooding was big concern because of 6-12 inches of rain while blizzard conditions, an



ice storm, and winter storm conditions covered western Oklahoma and down into Texas. Oklahoma’s statewide average for total precipitation is almost 54 inches, a new yearly record.” Mike reports big losses in the heart of Texas dairy industry which is home to more than a third of the state’s dairy cows. “Assessments are ongoing to measure losses. Due to blizzard conditions west of Lubbock to Muleshoe and north to Friona, lots of milk was dumped. Some estimates of death losses for mature cows, heifers and calves are upwards of 49,000 head, but those are just early guesses. Feedlot beef cattle losses are fairly small.” Mike added, “Oklahoma rural areas lost power poles causing outages, but the good news is that crop conditions in most areas of wheat and winter canola country are looking good. Pastures and rangelands are faring pretty well.” Mike concludes, “The two-week cattle auction downtime for the holidays found active buying activity as we kicked off the new year. Oklahoma National Stockyards on January 4 had feeder cattle and calves trending 10 to 20 cwt higher.”

LORRIE BOYER RECEIVES COMMUNICATIONS AWARD – Ag News Director **Lorrie Boyer** (KSIR Radio, Fort Morgan, CO) was awarded the 2015 Communications Excellence Award by the Colorado Association of Conservation Districts (CACD). The award was presented for her work in helping to educate people about what the CACD does and how they work with landowners and agriculture operators to advance soil health and enhance natural habitat. Also, she helped CACD with promoting meetings, events and letting people know about resources that they have available. She covered their legislative priorities during the legislative session by conducting interviews to create awareness for both CACD members and the public in general. Lorrie grew up on a show and breeding horse operation in Colorado. She showed performance horses, competed in rodeo and served as the Boulder County Fair Royalty and Queen for three years. After earning her degree in Technical Journalism, with an emphasis in agriculture, she went on to work in ag media. Starting in print media, she soon landed in radio at KLMR in southeast Colorado. After a few years, she developed and created an Ag Department at KWAY (Lamar, CO)



where she spent several years. Then, she created the *Colorado Ag News Network* syndicated show with 19 stations picking her daily ag reports. Next, she assumed the Ag News Director position at KSIR, the only Ag station in Colorado where she works today. She sold/merged her network with BARN Media. Besides her farm broadcasting duties, she is a Certified 4-H Horse Show Judge and currently serves on the Colorado Farm Show Marketing Committee as the official blogger. She is active in her church, assists with the local Tae Kwon Do youth club and is an avid Crossfitter. She resides in Brush, CO, with her 12-year old and 16-year old sons and husband. Lorrie served as 2015 NAFB South Region Vice President.

YEAR IN REVIEW – Each year since joining Brownfield Ag News (Jefferson City, MO), **Tom Steever** has produced an hour-long *Year in Review* program that the network offers to affiliates. In mid-November, all Brownfield broadcasters gather on a conference call to talk about what stories should be included and who should produce the segment on each particular story. “Much of the audio used in the show is what was gathered at the time the story was current, while some is provided through interviews with those reflecting on the year just passed,” Tom said. Among top stories of 2015 was the planting, growing and harvest season, which is a perennial inclusion in the show. “This year we included brief features from each of the states in which we broadcast. Conditions ranged from ideal, with rainfall and temperatures that could not have been better, to areas where planting was impossible because of too much rain. Missouri, for instance, had about a million-and-a-half acres that were not planted this season.”



Tom Steever on a December trip with soybean growers to the Panama Canal.

Tom continues, “The Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations finally bore fruit in early October, but now it’s up to the lawmaking bodies of each of a dozen participating nations to ratify the trade agreement. To that end, the White House called and invited me to interview President Obama about the TPP. I replayed part of that interview during which, among other things, the President told me that farmers may be able to help with passage by coaxing congressional representatives to approve the deal.”

Also, Brownfield reported on the downturn in the farm economy leading to farmers’ belt tightening. The change is resulting in mergers or talk of mergers among large agribusiness firms, such as Dow, DuPont, Monsanto and Syngenta. The *Year in Review* program included stories of avian influenza and the resulting loss of millions of poultry. “We covered what has been commonly known as the Waters of the U.S. rulemaking by the EPA to the consternation of farmers and the groups that represent them. Another controversial issue is whether or not to label foods containing genetically modified organisms, and whether or not to mandate the labeling of country of origin of meat and other foods.” In the program, Brownfield included reaction to the announcement of the EPA’s renewable fuel standard blending volumes. “There were comments from lawmakers regarding threats to federal crop insurance and there was reaction to the Veterinary Feed Directive that limits the use of antibiotics in food animals.” Every Brownfield reporter had a hand in producing the *Year in Review*,” Tom said. “I close the program with comments from Brownfield market reporters, **John Perkins** and **Jerry Passer**, about what has pushed commodity and livestock prices through the year. The shows from each year are archived on our website.”

Tom concludes, “There’s always the possibility of a late breaking story unfolding after we’ve gone to press, so to speak. This year it was the unusual and tragic flooding in Missouri and Illinois. The week of Christmas brought with it torrents of rain in a wide swath across the Heartland swelling tributaries that feed into the Mississippi River. That waterway, along with the Missouri River, the Meramec River and others over-topped banks and inundated roads and bridges, destroying property and taking the lives of more than two dozen people. At the same time, lives were lost in tornadoes that ripped through Texas.” [Year In Review Link](#)

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