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by Larry A. Quinn



SABRINA HILL BECOMES MRS. CLAUS – AgNet West farm news director **Sabrina Hill** was born just a few hours from the North Pole. North Pole, Alaska, that is. While she may be purely Californian now, every Christmas she channels some of her snowy beginnings, dons red velvet and white fur, and turns into Mrs. Claus. For Hill, it’s more than a fun Christmas tradition, it’s an opportunity to give a little comfort when people need it most. “Emotions are amplified during the holidays,” she explained. “There are a lot of people, a lot of families, struggling with major issues every day, and they can seem even bigger during the holidays. This is something I can do to bring a moment of happiness to people.” She started about six years ago, with a single visit to a friend’s child who was very sick and hospitalized. She sewed a Mrs. Claus dress, grabbed a



basket of candy canes, and headed to the Children's Hospital. "It really warmed my heart how happy everyone was to see Mrs. Claus. I'm so glad I took a ton of candy canes and stickers, because the nurses kept asking me to visit 'one more patient.' I can't explain what it's like to walk into a room and see a little child, who's very sick or in a lot of pain, just light up and forget about everything for a moment," she said. Calling on her previous experience and training in grief and hospice situations, Hill now mainly visits children who are facing life-threatening illnesses. However, she also works with other groups, and sometimes pulls in her radio station affiliates to help. "Every year, I focus on one major volunteer or fundraising effort. A couple years ago, I teamed up with our local affiliate to do a toy drive. It was as simple as calling them up on the phone and saying 'I have a crazy idea and you can help.' I recorded some promos, they used the station as a toy drop-off center, and our listeners donated enough toys to restock the children's hospital play room. The woman I worked with at the station went with me to deliver the toys and to stay and do crafts with the kids," Hill recalled. "For the last few years, I've enlisted the help of some farm broadcasters from around the nation, and we make sure every person at the Fresno (CA) veteran's hospital has a Christmas card. I enlist the help of a Santa, and we do a sing-a-long with the veterans, and then go room to room delivering cards. I always sit down with the person, read the card to them, and then let them tell me about their Christmas memories." Her work is not all hospital visits. Hill participates in Christmas parades, tree lightings, food and toy drives for families in need, and other community events. Santa is always the star of the show, but Hill says being Mrs. Claus has its own benefits.



“Santa is so busy! Everyone wants his attention, and he has to see and know everything – and I don’t mean in the mythical sense. Those kids ask a lot of questions!” Hill continued, “But, when you’re Mrs. Claus, you get to really listen to people. You get to hold them when they cry and help them feel better, even if it’s just for that moment. And I don’t mean just the kids. I usually find myself doing the same with the parents.” She says everyone has a little bit of the Clauses in them. “I always say that Santa exists to be a reminder of the greatest love and the greatest gift, and an example of how we humans should love and honor one another,” Hill said. “It’s not about a wish list or reindeer, but kindness and compassion. We all have some of that to share.”



BARRY NELSON RETIRES FROM JOHN DEERE – “After almost 37 years with John Deere, I decided to take retirement and move to the next chapter in my life,” said **Barry Nelson**. “I consider myself very blessed and very fortunate to have had a great career with a great company. I also have had the tremendous opportunity to make great friends outside of Deere, in the industry, the media, and with farmers and ranchers throughout the U.S. and Canada.” For those who don’t know his background, Barry started his career with John Deere on February 1, 1980. “There are many in the NAFB who remember the difficult times in the ‘80s. I was a field/marketing representative in south central Illinois and worked with

dealers, farmers, and Deere employees through low commodity prices, drought, and tough economic conditions.” He explained, “This was a great training ground, and I was lucky to be part



of a great team that helped John Deere to grow and be more successful when the economy changed. I was a field representative/territory manager for 20 years before my next opportunity came along.” About his background, Barry said, “I was not your typical marketing rep from Deere. Although my uncle had a farm in Oneida, IL, I did not grow up on a farm. Upon graduation from college, I had an English major, with an education degree and wanted to be a basketball coach. I was a starting guard in high school and college and loved basketball!” Because of his writing and presentation skills, Barry was offered a job at Deere because they were looking for good communications people to work with dealers to promote products and services. “I was in the right place at the right time to start my career with Deere. Twenty years later, when John Deere was looking for a new public relations manager, my English/Education degree helped as did my 20 years of experience working with farmers, ranchers, dealers, and industry partners. Since I had an English major, my new supervisors felt I could probably write a news release.” He continued, “Once I became the new public relations manager for John Deere Ag in the U.S. and Canada, I knew that I had found my calling in the company. I had that job for the next 17 years.” Barry said, “I have always appreciated the great work of farm broadcasters throughout the U.S. When I was in the field working with John Deere dealers, we had many broadcasters help with Open Houses, John Deere Days, farm shows, and other special events. Our farmer customers depended on these broadcasters for news about the markets, the weather, and all issues concerning agriculture. They were a trusted source that farmers could depend on to get

important information to help their farm operations.” Barry is an avid, amateur magician, and his magic hobby came to the rescue at an NAFB convention. “I remember that one of my early experiences at Trade Talk and the NAFB Convention was to participate in award ceremonies. When **Mike Adams** was NAFB president (1999) and was about to make a presentation, his PowerPoint projector failed to operate. **Mike Perrine** knew that I did some magic tricks and asked if I would entertain the broadcasters until Mike could get another projector. I happened to have a deck of cards and a rope trick and did a short performance of magic. Throughout the years at Trade Talk, I always had a deck of cards, and many broadcasters not only stopped by to do interviews, but also to see a card trick. My magic hobby has stood me well throughout the years.” Barry added, “I want to thank all farm broadcasters and leaders of NAFB for their friendship, professionalism, and commitment to be the voice of agriculture. This is even more important today when farmers and ranchers have less of a voice and need help to communicate to the broader urban audience the importance of agriculture and the ability to feed the growing world population.” Barry is former Chairman of the Agricultural Council of America and has been actively involved with the National Agri-Marketing Association, American Agricultural Editors Association, and Public Relations Society of America. Barry concludes, “I will miss representing John Deere at *Trade Talk* and working with all the media at special events, farm shows, and media events. I have been very fortunate, indeed, to have all the friends in our industry, and I hope to stay involved to help promote agriculture and the important work of U.S. farmers and ranchers.”



SAMUELSON NAMED GRAND MARSHAL OF 2016 PUMPKIN FESTIVAL – The 55th Annual Sycamore Pumpkin Festival was held October 26-30, in downtown Sycamore, IL (DeKalb County).

What started as an idea by **Wally Thurow** in 1956 to offer something creative for local students has grown from a neighborhood display on his front yard into their biggest citywide event. The festival had more than 1,000 entries in the decorated pumpkin competition this year. **Orion Samuelson** and his wife, **Gloria**, rode in the local parade as Grand Marshal on the final day of the festival. On New Year's Day 2017, Orion will be alongside the Rose Parade route to co-host with **Pam Minick** RFD-TV's live coverage of the parade on January 1. Orion is heard six days a week on WGN Radio in Chicago, where he has served as Agribusiness Director since 1960. He presents seven stock market/agricultural reports daily on the station and is heard daily on radio stations across the country with his syndicated *National Farm Report* and *Samuelson Sez* commentary programs. In addition, **Orion** and **Max Armstrong** host the one-hour *Saturday Morning Show* on WGN Radio and are seen weekly on RFD-TV as co-hosts of *This Week in AgriBusiness*. Orion's



lifelong commitment to agriculture has been recognized by organizations in all segments of agribusiness. In 1998, the American Farm Bureau Federation honored Senator **Robert Dole** and Orion with the AFBF Distinguished Service Award, its highest honor. In 1997, Illinois Governor **Jim Edgar** renamed the State Fair Junior Livestock Building the *Orion Samuelson Junior Livestock Building* as a tribute to Orion's decades of service to the agricultural youth of Illinois and the nation. In 2001 the University of Illinois conferred Orion with the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters. In 2003, Orion received the highest award in the radio industry when he became the first agribusiness broadcaster to be inducted into the National Radio Broadcasters Hall of Fame. Hall of Famer **Paul Harvey** presented the award to Orion on the national radio broadcast hosted by **Larry King**. Orion is also in the Illinois Broadcasters Hall of Fame, the Illinois 4-H Hall of Fame, the National 4-H

Hall of Fame, the Scandinavian-American Hall of Fame and the National Association of Farm Broadcasters Hall of Fame. Orion has traveled with his television crew to 46 countries to cover agriculture; four of his trips were official agricultural trade missions with the Secretary of Agriculture. Orion is active outside broadcasting. He is a member of the Farm Foundation Bennett Round Table. In past years, he has served as Chairman of the Board of the Illinois Agricultural Leadership Foundation, on the Board of the Agriculture Future of America, a member of the Board of Farm Safety 4 Just Kids, a Board member of the Foods Resource Bank, a member of the Board of Trustees of the National 4-H Council, and a Trustee of the Cornerstone Foundation of Lutheran Social Services in Illinois. November 1, 2012, saw the successful launch of Orion's autobiography, *You Can't Dream Big Enough*. On June 27, 2014, Orion was inducted into the WGN Radio Walk of Fame, which can be seen outside the studios of WGN Radio at the Tribune Tower on Michigan Avenue. In January 2016, Orion was honored with the National Lifetime Achievement Award by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

AMERICAN COUNTRYSIDE CELEBRATES 20 YEARS –

Andrew McCrea (Farm Journal Media, Maysville, MO) is celebrating the 20th anniversary of his program, *American Countryside*, this year. What started as a once-a-week program became a daily syndicated show in 2000. He estimates there have been approximately 4,500 broadcast features in that time. Every interview is done on-location. “We have done interviews from all 50 states and six continents,” Andrew said. “I began *American Countryside* on October 5, 1996, on KFEQ Radio (St. Joseph, MO). **Tom Brand**, a friend I had met while we were at the University of Missouri, helped me edit the programs as he was then KFEQ Farm Director.” He explained, “For the first three years, I wrote and produced just one feature each week. Early in 2000, the Brownfield Network offered me the opportunity to move to a Monday through Friday format. In 2013, I had the opportunity to join *Farm Journal Broadcasting* to not only continue the



daily *American Countryside* features, but also begin producing them for television and print.” How does he find interviews for his program? Andrew answers, “I continue to speak to many groups across the nation, and I use those speaking engagements to get me places to do the interviews. Also, I actively operate our farm and ranch in northwest Missouri while still writing and producing *American Countryside*.” Andrew concludes, “KFEQ has carried the program for 20 years, and many other stations have been with us for well over a decade. I’ve enjoyed the chance

to meet so many people and share their stories with our listeners and viewers.”



Andrew McCrea conducts an interview with a farmer/co-op manager in a rural area of Ghana. This radio work was done for the *Farm Journal* foundation. Also, the interviews were a part of his *American Countryside* program. He just returned from Ghana in late November.

LARRY LEE'S PATH TO HIS BROADCASTING CAREER –

Larry Lee (Wisconsin Reporter/Anchor, Brownfield Ag News) said, “My career in broadcasting has been a series of unexpected events. Sometimes, things happen in life where you know God is driving, and we’re just along for the ride. That sums up my radio career.” He was approached by a high school classmate to join him at Brown Institute in Minneapolis after graduation in 1980. “I turned him down, but I did go take the tour and flunked their “voice test.” That convinced Larry that he had made the right decision to attend Western Wisconsin Technical Institute (now Western Technical College) in La Crosse, WI, to pursue an associate degree in audiovisual communications. “In 1984, I was back in northwest Wisconsin visiting my parents when my high school friend called from his second radio job at WAQE (Rice Lake, WI). He was News Director there, and he really wanted me to apply for a part-time announcer and news stringer position.” When he arrived, Larry was greeted by the receptionist who handed him a note and a 4-inch reel-to-reel tape. The note said, “Record these and I’ll call you later.” The note had a news story, a commercial script, and a weather forecast. When I asked the receptionist, “Where shall I do this?” she answered, “You can use the newsroom.” When Larry walked into the newsroom, he found two old Ampex reel-to-reel recorders, a couple of cart decks, a cassette player, and an old, unlabeled Gates console. “I asked the receptionist for some Post-It notes and spent the next 45 minutes playing every source and labeling the switches and knobs on that old Gates console. It took me that long to find where the microphone was wired.” After completing the recording, he drove the half-hour back to his parents’ home, and his mom met him at the door saying, “You start tomorrow.” Larry believes that the unlabeled Gates console was part of his hiring test. When his friend left WAQE, Larry became their News Director. After leaving WAQE, he visited WXCE (Amery, WI) to help with a wiring problem. “Morning man and co-manager **Cary Dean Eastvold** came into the newsroom, where I was crawling around under the console and said, ‘So you did news in Rice Lake?’” I replied, “Yes,” and he said, “So, do you want to do it here?” Larry became their News Director until 1992, and came back as the Program Director from 1994 to 1996. In 1996, he was approached by **Mark Skibba** at WYTE (Stevens Point, WI) about their news opening. After initially declining the offer, Larry loaded up an old Ford Tempo with as many belongings as possible and headed to central Wisconsin on a weekend and accepted the position. A couple of years later, Larry followed Mark Skibba to Midwest Communications stations: WDEZ, WIFC, WSAU, WRIG, and WOFM. He left there in 2001 to help with a family wheelchair transportation business. He did part-time announcing for WBCV for a couple of years during that time. A position Larry had held before at WSAU was open again. “I was fortunate enough to be re-hired by a new Operations Manager who had never worked with me before, and I stayed there almost four years. The latest unexpected turn of events happened in July



2016. **Cyndi Young** at Brownfield Ag News asked if I could come to meet with the team to discuss their open Wisconsin reporter-anchor position. I had done traditional news all those years so I was both surprised and excited to be invited to join a top-notch agricultural news team.” Larry concludes, “Now, every day is something new. I tell people I’ve gone from covering cops and courts to crops and cows. It’s much different, very refreshing, and I’m learning new things.”



Larry Lee interviews Wisconsin Lieutenant Governor Rebecca Kleefisch

UPDATE ON HURRICANE MATTHEW EFFECTS – Rhonda Garrison (Southern Farm Network, Raleigh, NC) talked with the North Carolina Department of Agriculture’s Emergency Preparedness team and offers an update on effects of Hurricane Matthew on North Carolina farmers and ranchers. The cotton crop was reduced by 30 percent, about the same amount as last year after Tropical Storm Joaquin, which lingered and produced 12 straight days of rain. “The difference between this year and last is that Hurricane Matthew moved right on out, and the weather has been clear and dry since, so there was no sprouting in the bolls, and lint in open bolls that was wet had the opportunity to dry in the sun in the fields and regain some of its color,” Rhonda explained. Of poultry losses including turkeys, broilers and layers, the total, which is holding steady, is 1.8 million birds lost. While this is a large number, given that North Carolina has as many as 800 million birds on the ground at any given time, the percentage is very small. Many birds were saved by marketing early, and many houses that flooded were empty. An estimated 2,800 to 3,000 hogs were lost. The known 2,800 were on one farm and drowned. The North Carolina Pork Council included another 200 to account for individual farms. It’s reported that only 11 hog lagoons overflowed due to flood water, and none breached. This contrasts with Hurricane Floyd in 1999, where many hog lagoons breached, and the contents flowed into nearby rivers and streams. After Floyd, many hog farms in the 100-year flood plain were decommissioned and moved to higher ground. This, plus better management practices developed in the years since, are credited for this minimal release of waste water into nearby streams and rivers.



Photos courtesy of North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Rhonda reports that the Director of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture's Emergency Preparedness says that a week's notice, and quick action by the Governor in declaring a state of emergency and all that implies, including increased driving hours for Commercial Drivers License holders, and lifting of weight restrictions on moving livestock and other ag products, was an integral part in minimizing the results to the ag industry from Hurricane Matthew. The Director added that this was the biggest emergency mobilization of her career, and by far the most successful.

WE WANT YOUR NEWS – Send us your stories and photos for future newsletter issues. Contact me at larryaquinn@outlook.com or call me 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***.