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by Larry A. Quinn



**2016 Blizzard** – Snow storm Jonas made national news for its inconvenience to travelers. In fact, NAFB Vice President **Tom Cassidy** (Ag Radio Network, Barneveld, NY) had to spend an extra day in Platte City, MO, after attending his first NAFB Board meeting. Tom reports, “The storm covered just shy of one-third the U.S. population in 26 states from Maine to Louisiana. Jonas dumped the most snow on the Mid-Atlantic, starting Friday, January 22, leaving behind 20 to 40 inches in areas not accustomed to receiving that much snow in a season, let alone two days.” He added, “Major transportation was back in service by Tuesday, but many rural areas were still snowed in on Thursday. Farmers in Maryland, West Virginia and Pennsylvania were challenged the most.” There was plenty of warning for the snow so folks were as prepared as they could be. “But you can’t move the snow until it has fallen, and there were a few tragic stories of barn

collapses, but the biggest trouble came in the form of spilled milk as tank trucks were unable to get to farm lanes. Many county roads were delayed with snow removal, and farmers and their neighbors used heavy equipment to get rid of the snow. Dairy farms were mostly back to shipping milk by Wednesday. Sale barns saw shallow deliveries of steers, and prices were high as a result all week. Packers had light runs due to worker absence early in the week.” He continued, “Now they have trouble getting their local contracts delivered and have been sourcing cattle from the Eastern Corn Belt, trucking them from as far away as Indiana. Warmer weather and more melting gives the expectation that things will be back to normal by early February.” **In other news**, Tom said, “This is the 40th year of existence for Ag Radio Network. We are very proud of what **Holly’s** parents created (**Ed Slusarczyk**, 2002 NAFB Hall of Fame and 1985 Farm Broadcaster of the Year), the business we have built, and the future we are creating.” **At right**, 24-inch snowfall in Northern Virginia outside the editor’s front door.





## AUSTIN RECEIVES WISCONSIN AGRICULTURE AWARD – Mike Austin (WTAQ-AM/FM & WDEZ, Green Bay, WI), left, was presented

the *Distinguished Service to Wisconsin Agriculture Award* by **Jim Holte** President of Wisconsin Farm Bureau (WFBF) during the organization's 96<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting December 6. The award is given for outstanding contributions to Wisconsin's agricultural industry. "Mike has been covering agricultural news and events for more than 30 years both on radio and TV in the Green Bay area. He is the 'voice of agriculture'," said WFBF Board Member **Rosie Lisowe** of Chilton. "His agriculture reports and stories are heard

throughout the Green Bay area, and his advocacy for the agriculture industry reaches multiple generations." A Wisconsin native, Austin's first job in radio was in Cedar Falls, IA, doing news and farm reporting. He came back to Wisconsin and started a farm broadcasting career in Oshkosh at WYTL (now WOSH). In 1980, he was hired by Midwest Communications, Inc., along with WBAY-TV to do agricultural news, features and markets. In 1991, Austin left television and worked for Midwest Communications doing agriculture reports for the Green Bay, Wausau and Sheboygan markets. In 2004, Austin was hired to do ag features for WFRV-TV in Green Bay while continuing radio reporting. Austin does agricultural reports and markets for radio stations WTAQ AM and FM and WNCY in Green Bay, WSAU and WDEZ in Wausau and WHBL in Sheboygan. He also does a daily ag feature at noon, Monday through Friday, on WFRV Channel 5 in Green Bay along with seasonal half-hour specials and also is the co-host of *Mike, Matt and the Morning News* on WTAQ-AM/FM. Besides his broadcast responsibilities, he keeps busy serving as either an emcee or speaker for 60 events a year. During the summer months, Mike also can be found serving as an emcee at dairy breakfasts and county fairs. For his commitment to the broadcast industry and his community, he was the recipient of the Associated Press Carol Brewer Award and the Town of Bellevue Community Service Award. Austin is an active member of his church, a member of the Knights of Columbus, a volunteer for several youth organizations and community events. Also, he served as a Boy Scout leader, baseball coach and youth league umpire. Austin and his wife, Connie, are the parents of three children and six grandchildren. "A true friend of agriculture, Mike has inspired many throughout the agriculture community and in the broadcasting industry," added Lisowe. In response, Mike said, "It is always very gratifying to be recognized for one's work. You also feel a little awkward because like my fellow broadcasters all I really do is tell the stories of agriculture and it is those stories and the people that they are about that really deserve the accolades. I am one of those lucky people who is excited about what I get to do and the people I get to meet every day. And it's been that way for nearly 40 years." Mike has been a member of NAFB for 36 years.



**GREGORY DESCRIBES HER PATH TO A RADIO CAREER** – As most broadcasters, **Melissa Gregory** (KFEQ, St. Joseph, MO) followed a unique path to her communications career. She explained, “A couple of years after high school, I was working for an airline when I got a call from my grandmother who had a friend who worked for a small radio station in Bethany, MO. They had just lost their afternoon broadcaster and needed someone, so I decided to put in an application even though I had no experience. Lo and behold within a couple weeks, I was interviewed and hired.” While there, Melissa did a small amount of farm broadcasting, including getting the area’s cash bids and doing the closing markets. A year later, another coincidence would happen. The husband of a former teacher of hers learned of an opening with the radio station in St.

Joseph, and once again she was asked if she would be interested. A few weeks later, she was working the overnight shift at KFEQ. “There I got to see how **Tom Brand** knew everyone in the farming community and how much they respect him.” After seven years, she moved to Los Angeles, CA, to work in the movie industry for a while, but she discovered the movie life wasn’t for her. “So back home I came, and after several years again, by chance, I was contacted by a former coworker at KFEQ who asked, “Do you need a part-time job, because we need the help?” So Melissa found herself again in radio, where after a few months then Farm Director **Michael Clements** was about to go on vacation, and the station needed someone to cover who could do the markets. “So I trained for three days, and kept filling in for him periodically for a year. When Michael decided to accept a job with NAFB, Melissa became KFEQ Farm Director. “Now, I sit, in the Farm Director’s chair, honestly not sure how I got here, but glad I’m here,” Melissa said. Melissa grew up on a farm, but her family rented the land out for both row crops and cattle. Her grandparents, aunt and uncle did farm, and her cousin farms and raises cattle, and his son raises goats and is an active member with his sister in FFA. In her free time, Melissa said, “I can either be found at Chiefs or Royals ball games.” Her colleagues at work tease her about her hobby of sewing because she made several dresses for the baseball playoffs and the World Series. Another hobby is participating in several Sci-Fi conventions a year. She makes costumes she can wear while attending. **At right**, is the dress she made for her favorite Kansas City Royals as they played in and won the World Series. Her first degree was in theater where she worked in a costume shop for 4 years, but her second degree was in economics. “I’ll admit I didn’t think I’d end up using it very much, until I started working as the Farm Director. It comes in handy reporting on market trends,” she said.





#### **LOOKING BACK ON DECEMBER STORM –**

Cattle losses from Goliath, the 2015 winter storm, could total more than 50,000 head across New Mexico and Texas Panhandle and South Plains, according to final estimates, reports **Jerry Lackey** (Agriculture Editor Emeritus for the *San Angelo Standard-Times* and *Abilene Reporter-News* and farm broadcaster emeritus for *Voice of Southwest Agriculture Radio Network*, San Angelo, TX. Jerry writes a regular newspaper column called *Windmill Country*.) “The blizzard arrived after Christmas and lingered for weeks with snow drifts as high as 14 feet in parts of eastern New Mexico and northwest Texas. This winter blizzard is being branded as the worst and deadliest U.S. storm system of 2015. Cattle that drifted from ranch pastures either bunched up at a windbreak and

suffocated or walked over fences covered by frozen ice and snow and marched southward during the blizzard,” Jerry said. Although producers around Clovis, NM, spent a lot of time preparing for the storm by cleaning pens and adding new straw and building windbreaks to protect animals, they were overwhelmed when the blizzard hit, reports **Erica Irlbeck** (Allied Industry Member, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX). “They kept fresh feed in front of the cows as long as the weather would allow, constantly putting out feed as it would get covered in snow,” she said. Jerry added that more than 2,500 head may have frozen to death in Panhandle feedyards. An estimated 30,000 head of dairy cattle were lost. An estimated 15,000 mature dairy cows died in the storm’s primary impact area – from Lubbock west to Muleshoe and north to Friona, which is home to half the state’s top-10 milk producing counties and produces 40 percent of the state’s milk. The storm made it impossible for tanker trucks to reach dairy farms. Hundreds of loads of milk ready for processing were wasted. Some cows normally milked twice a day went almost two days without being milked. The bitter cold may have frozen the ears and tails of cattle and other animals, so partial loss may occur over the next few weeks. Jerry explains, “This is another gap in the goal of the cattle industry to rebuild herds following the big inventory drop from the 2011 drought. What is being called a whirlwind of dramatic extremes for the cattle industry over the last two years – tight supplies in 2014 and record market prices and cattle numbers still small but showing a slight turnaround in 2015 – the new year starts out with cattle inventory back to the lowest since 1993.” Jerry concludes, “That old adage about ‘If it wasn’t for bad luck, we would have no luck at all’ is certainly coming back in play.”



## **BOATING TO WORK DURING DECEMBER FLOODING**

– WGFA (Watseka, IL) General Manager **Stacey Smith** found boat transportation to be the most convenient way to get to work at the station during December flooding. Stacey said, “It's not uncommon to flood here. And unfortunately, the floods are getting more frequent and in some cases severe.” The history of Watseka is that it was founded by Native Americans and settled primarily due to the trapping industry with both the Iroquois River and Sugar Creek meeting in town. “We are also very low in elevation. Similar to a bowl. And we are in the center of it. Our county government is currently working on getting a Federal declaration for Iroquois County. We had many homes and businesses completely flooded.” She added, “The December flood of 2015, was the third our little

community experienced this year alone. The big flood was in 2008 and that was absolutely devastating.” She continued, “WGFA is located under our towers just north of town, with the banks of the river and creek settled behind us. So naturally, when we get a ton of rain, we tend to flood. The road goes under, and we make alternate plans. If it's really muddy, an ATV doesn't work to go around the field to the north of us. Nine times out of 10, we travel via boat. Which is always ‘nicer’ in the summer—although there's nothing too nice about a flood.” She concludes, “The past few floods, we have been fortunate to have the Watseka Fire Department take us in via boat toward the upper side of the road where we can drive the station van through the minimal water that covers that portion or take the neighbor's canoe and paddle on toward work. Warm clothes and a good sense of humor are definitely required for winter floods in Illinois—and a very generous fire department!” About the station history, Stacey said, “My Dad put the stations on the air in 1961, and he and my mother still own them (55 years of locally owned operation in the World's Greatest Farming Area). We are very fortunate.” **Photo at right was taken on a trip during December flooding heading away from WGFA.**





**CALIFORNIA'S NUMBER ONE CONCERN** — “Water is the number one concern in California,” reports **Don York** (KMJ, Fresno, CA). “Even with recent El Nino generated storms, there is much worry in the San Joaquin Valley about how much water will be available for farmers in 2016. For now, most farmers have to make use of groundwater pumping to irrigate their crops if they want to stay in business. New deep wells are very expensive to drill and could take more than a year of

waiting before drilled because of long waiting lists.” Looking ahead, Don said, “This year could bring some relief in the form of surface water deliveries if more snow melts off into the rivers down to the reservoirs.” Don covers a wide range of other stories for a live weekday hour-long farm report on KMJ radio. “I broadcast to about a third of the state, thanks to our powerful AM signal. The *KMJ Farm Report* is basically a business show that is designed to inform listeners about anything involving water and the drought, new government regulations, new technology, export opportunities, consumer buying trends, along with all sorts of other issues that might have an impact on farmers and ranchers.” He adds, “I also consider myself a source of upcoming events, including UC Extension Field Days and private industry gathering. More than just the dates, I try to bring interviews to help growers and ranchers know more about those events.” Coming from an Air Force family, Don spent most of his early years moving around the country from the East Coast to Northern California. He studied broadcast journalism and theatre arts at Sacramento State University. Don began his broadcast career in Sacramento as an intern at a newstalk radio station. He was a reporter in New Mexico at two television stations where he won several journalism awards and covered his first farm and ranch stories, which included immigration and federal grazing lease issues. He moved to Fresno, CA, in 1995, to help launch *Valley Ag News* at KMPH-TV, a FOX affiliate, and was able to anchor, report and produce. Don was honored by the Fresno County Farm Bureau for journalism in 1996. Starting in 1998, he worked as news reporter and producer at a local CBS affiliate where he continued to report on agriculture stories. Starting in 2001, Don worked as a commercial producer for the next 11 years. In 2012, Don was back on the air reporting California farm news on a statewide radio network. Then in 2013, Don was hired by KMJ radio in Fresno to serve as the station’s Ag News Director and to host a daily hour-long farm report.

**WHEN IS RETIRING NOT RETIRING?** – After 36 years with Kansas and Oklahoma Farm Bureaus, **Sam Knipp**

retired September 29, 2015. “After a few days, I hungered for continuing advocating for agriculture. American Farmers & Ranchers offered me the opportunity to feed that urge. AFR has a 110-year history in Oklahoma as a general farm organization and insurance company servicing rural Oklahoma. Today, AFR has over 100,000 family members and is licensed to provide insurance in 24 states.” As director of communications and public relations for AFR, Sam is excited to have the chance to continue telling the farm story using a variety of tools,



including radio programs. “I have already started producing podcasts and in early February will roll out a new radio program service called *Accent on Agriculture*. His ag avocation work started after graduating from Kansas State University with a BS degree in agricultural journalism. “I worked at radio stations in Kansas and Missouri, including KFEQ (St. Joseph, MO) and WIBW (Topeka, KS).” The next phase of his career included Farm Bureau and earning a master’s degree in agricultural communications from Oklahoma State University. He also helped teach a class at OSU in animal agriculture advocacy and policy, plus helping numerous agriculture leaders and public officials understand media relations. “It adds up to a body of work that is not yet finished. Can we ever say ag advocacy is finished? Probably not. The world needs to be fed while at the same time understand where their food and fiber comes from.” In summary, he said, “I retired from Farm Bureau, but then went back to work advocating for agriculture at American Farmers & Ranchers.” He is proud of his humble beginnings on a western Kansas farm and ranch where he learned the true meaning of hard work.

**NEW AG NETWORK— Monte James** is host of a new start-up radio network called *Your Ag Network*. He grew up on a ranch on the northern borders of the sprawling Sandhills of Nebraska. His family raised cattle and farmed the Niobrara River Valley in Keya Paha County. His radio career started at a small station in O’Neill, NE, doing everything from hosting the *Polka Show* to local news and markets. Monte’s “tour of duty” included stops at KSCJ (Sioux City, IA), where he served as morning show host and farm director. Then, he went on to WHO (Des Moines, IA) as part of the Marconi Award winning air-staff, as well as serving a lengthy stint at WNAX (Yankton, SD). During his time behind the mic and in the fields, Monte said he had the opportunity “to work under the direction of farm broadcasting greats like **Lee Kline, Del Fisher, and Col. Jon Phillips** – just to name a few.” In 2004, he launched the groundbreaking *Territorial Rodeo*



*Update* heard weekly on stations from the Rockies to the Great Plains with a large and loyal following on the Internet. Also, he served as a Territory Manager for Sioux Steel Company from 2005 to 2015, building territories and selling livestock equipment across the Midwest. In addition to announcing rodeos and traveling, Monte enjoys working and hunting on the family ranch with his son Parker and nephews Shaylor and Shayce. He said, "I believe in country values and strive to promote rural communities and agriculture in America while providing fun and informative reports on the brand new start-up *Your Ag Network*."



## HALE RECOGNIZED FOR SERVICE TO NEBRASKA AGRICULTURE —

**Howard Hale** (KSIR, Minatare, NE) and **Emily Pile** are two western Nebraska residents who were recognized by The University of Nebraska Panhandle Research and Extension Center for their decades of service to agriculture and Extension. The *Service to Panhandle Agriculture Award* was presented to **Howard Hale** and *The Service to Panhandle Extension Award* was presented to **Elaine Pile** of Gering, NE. Howard embarked on a career in broadcasting three decades ago and still broadcasts ag news to the Panhandle as well as radio audiences from the Texas

Panhandle to Montana. Two decades of announcing at fair livestock shows also have made him a familiar voice for local 4-H families. Over the past 15 years, Emily has been a tireless volunteer, leader and advocate for Extension at the local, state and national levels, on top of a 36-year career in banking in western Nebraska. Both are natives of the Panhandle who were raised around agriculture and have long careers that have kept them in contact with local ag sectors, as well as 4-H and Extension. "Howard has always been willing to promote Extension meetings, field days, workshops and other events," according to **Jim Schild**, longtime Extension educator and associate director of the Panhandle Center. "Extension personnel had an open invitation to come into the studio and record informational and promotional pieces." He called Howard a true reporter who attended and covered countless events. "He has always been friendly and positive about what we're doing here at the Center." Howard was born in Scottsbluff, NE, and raised on a farm and sheep- and cattle-feeding operation, graduating from Scottsbluff High School. He received an associate degree from Scottsbluff College (now WNCC) and attended the University of Colorado in Boulder until joining the Army Reserve. After active duty in the Reserve, he returned to farming, feeding cattle and raising sheep. Hale went into broadcasting in 1985,



becoming Farm Director at KOLT. He later worked as a farm broadcaster for Tracy Broadcasting and at KNEB. In 1994, he went out on his own with Hale Broadcasting. He currently produces and airs three feature programs: *The Harvest USA Report*, *The Cattleman's Corner* and *The Horseman's Corner*. Fifteen stations carry a least some of the programs, from the Texas Panhandle to northern North Dakota and over into central Montana. *The Harvest USA Report* is carried locally on KNEB. From May 2014 through April 2015 Howard filled in as the farm director at KNEB as a replacement for **Leslie Smith** until the current director, **Jeanna Boland**, started. Two years ago, Howard was inducted into the U.S. Custom Harvesters Hall of fame. He has been a member of NAFB for 30 years.

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