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by Larry A. Quinn



BROADCASTING SKILLS HELP GILKEY AS MAYOR – Mayor KayDee Gilkey (Ag Information Network of the West, Fairfield, WA) puts down her gavel as mayor to pick up her mike as a farm broadcaster. She is shown in her broadcaster role doing an interview with **Ken Cook**, President and Co-Founder of the Environmental Working Group. KayDee’s job as mayor is part-time, but she also serves as city administrator of her town (Fairfield, WA). “I implement town policies and processes; am responsible for hiring and managing of four town employees; preside over city council meetings; am responsible for overseeing a \$1.2 million budget; represent the town at county and regional meetings; work with and direct volunteers; address citizens’ questions and concerns and work to resolve issues,” she explains. Where did she learn the skills to be mayor? Having grown up in both 4-H and FFA, leadership and service to her community have always been an important part of her life. “My husband, **Todd**, and I moved to Fairfield, a small farm

community in the Palouse region of Washington, in 2003. Two years later, my neighbor encouraged me to run for City Council.” She did, was elected and spent the next six years on Fairfield’s City Council. “It was a good way to meet my neighbors and other community members. From the beginning, I was impressed with how this small town had such a big heart for its community members. Fairfield has a population of about 600 people and is known as the town that celebrates *Flag Day*. It also holds the honor of being the only town in the country to have a *Flag Day* celebration and parade every year since 1905.” KayDee began her role as a farm broadcaster in December 2011 with *Ag Information Network of the West*. “The opportunity to return to radio was exciting as I’d done radio production for two years while at Washington State University and had really enjoyed it. My new position was working from home, which allowed me



much more flexibility and time as I didn’t have a 40-minute commute twice a day.” How did she become Mayor? “In 2012, the Mayor of Fairfield had served three-terms and had decided to not run again. He encouraged me to run for his position, so she did and began her term in January of the next year.” She believes her farm broadcasting skills have assisted her as mayor. “Communication skills are critical regardless of your role as a leader, and writing nearly 1,000 words a day for three daily programs has really sharpened my writing skills. Since my radio programs are only 90 seconds long, I’ve become more efficient in listening and finding the main issue or topic and boiling it down,” she explained. “As a farm broadcaster, I’ve always had a passion for agriculture, but now with my role as mayor, stories about rural communities also are important to me. Most anyone who lives in a small town can appreciate knowing many in your community and watching how your community rallies behind those in need with so much support and love.” She concludes, “I’m always amazed to witness the outpouring of time, treasure and talent when someone in the community needs help.”



RAHJES WEARS TWO HATS – When **Ken Rahjes** is not wearing his broadcasting hat (agview.net, Agra, KS) he is working as a member of the Kansas House of Representatives. To the question of what is on the pulse of farmers, he said, “This could be described as ‘the winter of our discontent’ as it has lacked moisture in the form of snow or even rain. The warm temperatures have some farmers itching to start with field work. In fact, in mid-February we saw some anhydrous ammonia being applied. It looks like this will be a year when the wheat will use up many lives to make it to harvest.” He adds, “The farmers we talk to are watching the commodity markets to see any positive signs, but there have not been many. There seems to be a sense of optimism for the future, just not the immediate future. Many

feel if they can make it through this cropping year, they may be okay.” Ken continues, “I have been visiting with bankers and other lenders, and they are being very cautious and encouraging farmers to stay the course or back off a little. Trade is the great unknown in our country. Many in rural America voted for **President Trump**, but they have concerns about what the future looks like for agricultural trade. People in our area are excited about **Scott Pruitt** at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and what that means for agriculture. They are hoping Waters of the United States (WOTUS) and other regulations are limited or eliminated.” Describing the other “hat” he wears as a legislator, he said, “As a member of the Kansas House of Representatives, the first quarter of the year is spent in Topeka discussing passing bills. I still maintain my daily schedule of reporting agri-business information on the AgView.net Radio Network for stations in Kansas and Nebraska and update the AgView.net website and associated social media sites (Facebook and Twitter). He admits to having to be ‘pretty good’ at time management to get it all covered, but though he does not get to as many meetings as before, he remains in contact with agricultural leaders. “Being a farm broadcaster, I believe, makes me a better legislator as I have to remain aware of what is going on around the world, in state and local with agriculture and business interests. So, I don't get too focused on what is directly in front of me, but I keep a broad approach to any subject. It also means long hours, but just like anyone involved in farm broadcasting or farming and ranching – you work until the job is done.”

KATIE WILSON: I NEVER DREAMED OF GOING INTO RADIO –

“My career as a farm broadcaster began in August 2015,” said Katie Wilson (WSMI, Litchfield, IL).” She was working as a County Farm Bureau Manager in northern Illinois and “the job was in the wrong location and not a perfect match.” In her second year of the working world, she began searching for a new job. She was born and raised in Litchfield, IL, on a small grain and livestock farm. “We did things the ‘old-fashioned’ way. Cows ran on pasture. I had a few horses and a donkey just for fun. Our neighbor farmed our land. The farm remains the same today. Growing up around livestock and on the farm, I've always had a love for animals and a passion for agriculture.” She was



involved in FFA all four years of high school serving as Chapter Reporter and President her junior and senior years. After graduation, she attended Illinois State University. “I started college as an

animal science major and quickly learned that the math and science classes weren't for me. I changed my major to agricultural communications and leadership. Interestingly, I never dreamed of going into radio. The thought never even crossed my mind, but here I am. I am blessed to have a job that I love in the town where I grew up." When she started with WSMI in August 2015, the only radio experience she had



was being interviewed by **Rita Frazer** and recording a couple of public service announcements in college. "What was I getting myself into? I have always been an independent person with a strong work ethic, so the job was a good fit. I jumped in head first with little to no training, and it was basically sink or swim. Luckily, I didn't drown! The experiences I've had, and the things I've learned in only a year and a half are amazing!" She added, "At WSMI, we pride ourselves on providing local news, local farm news, and local high school sports. We are family owned – Talley Broadcasting Corporation – and for that I am thankful. I am responsible for producing two, eight-minute farm shows per day (morning and noon hour), in which I try to incorporate a local interview or some sort of local farm news daily." She explains, "My interviews include local farmers, FFA students, agronomists, insurance agents and ag business people. I also manage a few of our advertising accounts. The spring and summer months are the busiest times of year for the station. I help with remote broadcasts and spend a lot of time at county fairs and local festivals. Also, I try to make the rounds to some local farms. Other events that I travel to throughout the year include the National FFA Convention, Farm Progress Show, and the Illinois State Fair." She emphasizes, "I think my favorite part about radio is the people I get to meet, both locally and afar. The only reason I even applied for my position was because I liked people, and I was told numerous times that 'anyone can learn the radio side of things.'" She observed, "I never imagined being able to put on a press pass and basically ask to speak to whoever I wanted. That's pretty cool, and scary! The most 'famous' person I've interviewed to date is **Chris Soules** (The Bachelor) at the 2015 National FFA Convention." Katie would like to thank all her fellow NAFB members. "You're another reason I like my job so much. I have yet to meet many of you, but if I ever need help, I know that there will always be someone willing to lend a hand. Anyone I've talked to at NAFB Convention has been nothing short of welcoming and kind, and that says a lot about our organization. I have a lot to learn, but I'm enjoying the process and strive to keep improving. Thanks for showing this rookie the ropes, and I look forward to many more broadcasting adventures," she concludes.

JAMES VALUES NAFB MENTORS – Monte James (Your Ag Network, Inc., Yankton, SD) grew up on a ranch on the northern borders of the sprawling Sandhills of Nebraska. His family raised cattle



and farmed on the scenic 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. He went on to WHO (Des Moines, IA) as part of the Marconi Award-winning air staff, as well as a lengthy stint at WNAX (Yankton, SD).

Monte James is congratulated by one of his NAFB mentors, Susan Littlefield.

“During my time behind the mic and in the fields, I had the opportunity to work under the direction of farm broadcasting greats like **Lee Kline**, **Keith Kirkpatrick** and **Col. Jon Phillips**.” In 2004, Monte launched the groundbreaking *Territorial Rodeo Update* heard weekly on stations from the Rockies to the Great Plains with a large and loyal following abroad 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. He then joined forces with **Doyle** and **Carolyn Becker**, owners of Riverfront Broadcasting, to launch *Your Ag Network* featuring market reports and ag news designed primarily for hot-country and hometown stations. “I shadowed acclaimed farm broadcasters **Lorrie Boyer** and **Susan Littlefield** to create a unique content and delivery style,” Monte said. Since its inception in February 2016, *Your Ag Network* has expanded to more than 25 hometown stations blanketing America’s top cattle and corn counties. Monte emphasizes, “*Your Ag Network* is proud to be an active member of the NAFB!”



JARAND RETIRES TO NEW ORLEANS – Unplugging his microphone for full-time retirement, **Alan Jarand** is moving from Illinois to New Orleans to be near family and to engage in fixing up their newly acquired home in the Historic District. He is surrounded by his RFD Radio Network (Bloomington, IL) colleagues, who wish him well. At left of **Alan** is **Rita Frazer** and on second row (left to right) **Michael Orso**, **Cebrina Hardy**, **Jim Taylor**, **Mary Kobbeman**, and **John Hawkins**.

Mary said, “I just produced my last RFD show for **Alan Jarand**, which he hosted for 37 years. He hired me five years ago as producer for the Radio Network. Since then, I have been lucky to call him boss, and friend. No one is more easy going, genuine or has a better voice. I will miss you and hope you have a long happy retirement.”

Alan responded, “After 37 years with Illinois Farm Bureau’s RFD Radio Network, I retired from full-time work in the spring of 2015, but continued on a part-time basis, hosting our mid-morning talk show *RFD Today*. But with my daughter finishing college and planning to start her career in New Orleans, where our son and grandchildren are already established, the call of warm weather could no longer be avoided. So, in mid-February we bought a house in NOLA, packed up all our stuff into a moving pod and are heading south from Illinois. At this point, I was closing in on 39 years at RFD radio. As I told everyone at the end, it was the quickest 39 years of my life.”

HEAVY RAIN AND SNOW DAMAGING CALIFORNIA CROPS – Patrick Cavanaugh (California Ag Today, Clovis, CA) reports that massive atmospheric rivers, one after another over the last few months, have been racking up rain totals throughout the state. “The San Joaquin 5-Station Precipitation Index surpassed the Top 12 Wettest Season rankings in the state’s climate history by 0.02 of an inch. Furthermore, snow accumulation is 170 percent of normal (as of February 24).” Describing how growers are affected, Patrick said, “While farmers are buoyed by the moisture, some have seen crop damage, including flooded and destroyed wheat fields in northern California and hundreds of mature almond trees in the San Joaquin Valley overturned from heavy winds and saturated soils. These trees will have to be replanted with nursery stock.” Patrick added, “A pistachio grower who farms 900 acres southwest of Fresno reported he is worried his trees will not survive the three feet of standing water in his orchard. The San Luis Reservoir, which supplies water to farmers and cities in Central California, is 96 percent full – a level that has not been achieved in the last six years.”

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***.