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by Larry A. Quinn

**OKLAHOMA FIRE BURNED 300,000 ACRES AND KILLED 3,000 CATTLE**

– **Ron Hays** (Radio Oklahoma Network/KGGF Radio, Oklahoma City, OK) explains conditions that led to this disaster. “Late winter and early spring is always a dangerous time for wildfire in Oklahoma, and after good rainfall last year in northwestern Oklahoma, we had a lot of standing grass that was dry and ready to burn, so it was not a surprise when we got word of these fires in southwest Kansas, northwest Oklahoma and over the line in the northeastern corner of the Texas Panhandle.” But, he added, “The perfect storm that made these fires so dangerous, deadly and costly was the combination of strong winds – first from the south and then from the north, low humidity readings, and the large amount of grass.” The fire that was called



*Starbuck* began in Oklahoma in Beaver County and spread into Kansas and eventually dipped back into Oklahoma in Harper County. Ron described, “It moved crazy-fast – so fast people simply could not get their cattle and horses out of the way.” The fire was burning “hard and fast” the night of March 6. By March 9, most of the damage was done. “It was horrific. More than 500,000 acres in Kansas, more than 300,000 acres in Oklahoma and about that much more in the



corner of the Texas Panhandle.” The official count remains about 3,000 cattle killed in Oklahoma, 4,000 sows and a lot of baby pigs at the Smithfield Farm (shown above) that sits on the Oklahoma-Kansas state line just south of Ashland, KS. Also, more than 1,100 miles of fence, waterers, corrals, outbuildings and a few houses were destroyed. Oklahoma State University estimates more than \$16 million in losses. Ron said, “That is a lowball figure, and I would guess double that because the figure does not really account for the loss of income for the several hundred ranchers impacted.” He concludes, “The relief effort has been amazing. Local heroes have emerged to lead the relief efforts in the area, but the need is great, and it will be there for a while. Rain arrived the last weekend of March and that will speed up the regrowth, but recovery will be slower.”



Within two weeks of the fire devastation, the re-greening of the landscapes was underway.



Fire damage to the Barby Ranch in Beaver County.

**PRETENDING TO BE A RADIO HOST BECAME A REALITY – Dillon Davis** (The AgWatch Network, Jonesboro, AR) was born in a small town in northeast Arkansas. In his youth, he spent a lot of his time pretending to be a radio host or anchorman while helping his grandfather tend to their farm.

After high school graduation, Dillon attended Arkansas State University where he majored in broadcast journalism. “With college becoming more expensive, I decided to step into the working world to get a feel for how radio is run. Thanks to the success of my first internship, I secured a part-time position with a local radio station,” he said. Working hard in his position, Dillon was promoted to the farm broadcasting side of the radio station, *The AgWatch Network*. Never forgetting his humble beginnings helping his grandfather work in the fields, Dillon jumped at the chance to be a farm broadcaster. Shortly after his promotion, Dillon earned the title as Interim News Director because their current director became ill. “Shifting all my efforts to AgWatch, I took the lead and helped AgWatch maintain its position as the Mid-South's premiere ag network,” he added. With the return of AgWatch's News Director, Dillon accepted another promotion at the station as show host. “Hosting the afternoon music program,



*The Rock Block*, I learned more about how radio works, especially as an on-air personality.” Eventually, *The AgWatch Network* reached out to him to take the reins once again. This time Dillon accepted the full-time position as news director. “Thanks to AgWatch, I have participated in many farm-related conventions and have interacted with listeners from our five-state, 65 affiliate network area.” Dillon said, “As I approach the seventh year of my radio career, with help from my peers and mentors in the radio industry, I have been able to mold my journalistic integrity into something that never disappoints our listeners.” He concluded, “Agriculture is a huge part of the American way of life. From sowing the seeds, to hauling the products, to purchasing them at the store, American agriculture reaches every corner of the nation. And at every corner is someone that deserves current, accurate, information. **Dillon Davis**, with *The AgWatch Network*, is just the force to do that.”



### **MOLINO EARNS BROADCASTERS' LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD – Don**

**Molino** (*Voice of Louisiana Agriculture Radio Network*, Baton Rouge, LA) received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Louisiana Association of Broadcasters on March 21. How did Don get started in radio? “The owner of a radio station in Paris, TX, was a family friend, and his kids were some of my best friends. Just proves once again...it's not WHAT you know, it's WHO you know,” Don said. “I started as a 17-year old deejay at KFTV (Paris, TX) in 1964, then I moved to KGVJ (Greenville, TX) while I was in college. My next station was WFAA radio (Dallas, TX) working in the newsroom where I moved up to morning drive news anchor on that 50,000-watt station.” Don even did weekend TV sports on WFAA-TV (Dallas, TX) where he filled in one time for **Verne Lundquist** who just retired from CBS

Sports as play-by-play announcer. “I was drafted in 1969 and spent my tour of duty at the Southern Command Network in the Panama Canal Zone doing radio and TV news for one year, eight months and eight days (but who counted?).” Don returned to WFAA radio after he got out of the army. Then, he moved to the KRLD radio newsroom, also in Dallas. “In 1973, I was hired as news director (and later farm director) at the Mississippi Radio News Network (Jackson, MS). When that network went out of business, I was hired by the Mississippi Agricultural and News Network as news director.” That network was purchased by the Louisiana Network, and Don was transferred to Baton Rouge late in 1980 as operations Manager. “Then, **John Winfield**

at the (now named) Mississippi Network nudged me back into farm broadcasting, and I'm working on my 30th year as a voting member of NAFB. Best job I've had since 1969!"



**IT'S A SMALL WORLD** – In the late 1980s, **Ken Root** (Iowa Agribusiness Radio Network, Dyersville, IA) left farm broadcasting to be the Executive Director of the National AgriChemical Retailers Association (NARA) as an offshoot of American Cyanamid Company. “My board of directors was made up of 35 fertilizer and agricultural chemical dealers from across the country. One director was from Georgia. He had aspirations to run for president, but was a cautious person. He asked me to call his boss who owned Houston Fertilizer and Grain in Bonaire, GA. I did so and spoke to **Dr. Sonny Purdue, DVM** (current presidential nominee for Secretary of Agriculture) and owner of the business,” Ken said. “Sonny was very supportive of his employee becoming an officer of NARA and wished us well. Through the years, I heard that Sonny had decided to run for the Georgia legislature and later that he had switched to being a Republican and was going to run for governor. He did so and held the job for two terms.” Ken continued, “When I first met **Jane Ertl**, now my wife, she informed me that her family had bought a business in

Georgia. She was part of a group of new Georgia business owners who were invited to the Masters Golf Tournament and dinner with the governor. I told her to drop my name and that of the organization I had managed. She did not believe I had any connection with Governor Purdue but he remembered me and talked to her at length about it.” Ken concluded, “Small world!”

1986 NAFB President **Ken Root** receives gavel from 1985 NAFB President **Johnnie Hood**.





**FARM BROADCASTER AND STATION OWNER** – About two years ago, **Todd Whelan** (left, shown with wife, **Nancy**)

bought KDHN Radio Station in Dimmitt, TX. Todd is proud to report that his station is now an NAFB member station. Todd is a veteran farm broadcaster with 34 years' experience in Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, Michigan, and Iowa. Their local live ag show has daily interviews with ag leaders who have knowledge and experience in the Texas Panhandle and South Plains ag industry. Their local agricultural show airs from 6:30 to 8:00 a.m. Monday through Friday. The station will begin airing Texas Rangers baseball games in April and will continue coverage for the entire season. Todd reports that conditions are very dry in his area with lots of wildfires in the Texas Panhandle. He encourages colleagues to check out their new radio website, [www.kdhnradio.com](http://www.kdhnradio.com). Todd attended the

National Cattlemen's Beef Association meeting in Nashville in February and Commodity Classic in San Antonio in March.



At Commodity Classic, Todd is shown interviewing **Wesley Spurlock**, a Stratford, TX, farmer who serves as president of the Corn Board of the National Corn Growers Association. Spurlock farms 9,600 acres of irrigated corn, cotton, wheat and grain sorghum in the upper Texas Panhandle, where he also runs a harvesting and spray company.



**RADIO BROADCASTS FROM HIS FRONT PORCH** – Rick Haines (KMON, Great Falls, MT) reports that spring has finally come to the Salmon River Valley after what even the old timers called a harsh winter. “As you see from the picture, things are greening up, and I currently have two mating pair of geese, two otters, thousands of birds including the Western Meadow Larks and Robins, Hungarian Partridge and elk, deer and bear to join me as I do radio from my front porch!” Rick adds, “Business is interesting since in addition to my regular duties as owner of the *Independent Ag Network*, I am still doing two shows a day for **Evan Slack** and am the Ag Director for KMON Radio (Great Falls, MT). Seems I have trouble saying no, but I love the business and 21 shows a day gets to be a rhythm after a few months (ha).” He observed, “My one-hour weekend program has been well received and is scattered from northern Nevada to 100 miles short of Calgary, Alberta, Canada. We are all waiting for the markets to lift, the final snow to melt, and the sense of a new production year has begun.” Rick served as NAFB President in 2000.

**HALVORSON MARKS 20-YEAR ANNIVERSARY**

– **Rusty Halvorson** recently marked 20 years at the *American Ag Network* (Fargo, ND). His broadcasting career is rooted in family tradition. As a young boy, Rusty sat beside his father, **Lee**, in the sports broadcast booth and watched as his dad announced countless radio play-by-play broadcasts across North Dakota. (At right, **Lee** and **Rusty Halvorson**) "It was always exciting when dad brought me along to a baseball or basketball game. I enjoyed so many aspects of it – traveling, watching dad set up his broadcast. That's a pretty big deal to a



little kid, especially when it's your dad." Rusty added with a laugh, "He never turned up my mic, though." **Lee Halvorson** recently retired from radio, after being inducted into the North Dakota Associated Press Sportscasters and Sportswriters Association Hall of Fame in 2003. Rusty started his radio days as a teenager at 660 KEYZ AM (Williston, ND). He worked as a part-time announcer at the station until moving to Fargo to complete his general agriculture degree at North Dakota State University with a minor in mass communications. Just before graduation, Rusty called on long-time family friend **Lyle Romine** of the *American Ag Network* in Fargo for advice to begin a career in farm broadcasting. That conversation was the spark for Rusty's career. "Dad encouraged me to give Lyle a call and ask him a few questions about farm broadcasting, and where to get a start after I graduated from NDSU. Lyle invited me to the network studio for a visit, and after we caught up on the old days, we talked about what I wanted for the future. That conversation led to a couple of phone calls, and not long after Lyle



(At left, **Rusty Halvorson** and the late **Lyle Romine**)

offered me a chance to join the network if I agreed to stick around for at least two years and learn 'to do the job right.' I said I could agree to that, and Lyle took me under his wing and taught me the ropes. Over the years, he became my broadcast mentor and eventually one of my closest friends." After Lyle's untimely passing in 2010, Rusty was named Farm Director, and his travels since have taken him many places across the country.



Rusty's most recent happy memory was racing down NASCAR drivers, left, **Justin Allgaier** and **Dale Earnhardt, Jr.** on the Trade Show floor at the 2017 Commodity Classic in San Antonio for a quick interview and photo. Looking back over the past 20 years at the *American Ag Network*, Rusty said his numerous interviews and personal interactions with people at farm shows have been the most rewarding part of his job. As for the future, Rusty said he looks forward to many more travels with memorable moments. "The two years I promised to Lyle and the network turned into two decades in the blink of an eye, but I've seen a lot along the way."

**WE WANT YOUR NEWS** – Send us your stories and photos for future newsletter issues. Contact me at [larryquinn@outlook.com](mailto:larryquinn@outlook.com) or call me at **703-819-6532**. *Airing on the Side of Agriculture* is included in the blog section of [NAFB.com](http://NAFB.com). For an archive copy of any past issues, go to **Membership** and click on **Airing on the Side of Agriculture**.