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by Larry A. Quinn



102nd BIRTHDAY...was celebrated December 15 by retired Oklahoma farm broadcaster **Russell Pierson** (WKY, Oklahoma City, OK), the most senior member of NAFB. Born December 15, 1911, Russell was saluted by 400 of his friends two years ago at a gala event on his centennial birthday. He lives at a senior center in north Oklahoma City, and his daughter Patricia, and his grandchildren, take care of him. Perhaps his early attention to fitness has contributed to his longevity. Russell won the Tulsa Marathon in 1929 and continued running until he was in his 60's. He witnessed the first dust storms come across southwest Oklahoma after he graduated from Oklahoma A&M University (now Oklahoma State) with a degree in agronomy. He was first employed as an assistant soil conservation specialist as the Extension Service made its first attempt to institute conservation tillage to keep the dust from blowing. He married his wife, Bernice, while there and then moved to Pauls Valley where he was a county agent. He took a job at

Stillwater in crop improvement and then went into the seed business with Nichols Seed. It was there when he started doing live TV commercials, which created the pathway that led to his becoming WKY Farm Director in 1959. He retired in 1980 and again in 1985. **Ken Root** (Iowa Agribusiness Radio Network, Lovilia, IA), who worked with Russell at WKY, said Russell "drove his truck until he was 98. He voluntarily quit driving



and slowly gave up most of his activities." (Ken is 24 and Russell is 62 in 1974 photo at left.) I have my own cherished memories of Russell. When I was the state agriculture winner and a member of the 1963 Oklahoma 4-H delegation to the National 4-H Congress in Chicago, Russell accompanied us on the round-trip train trip and conducted radio and TV interviews that were carried on WKY, which had a statewide audience. We congratulate Russell on his long-term "airing on the side of agriculture" and 4-H.

LOOKING BACK AT 2013...Farmers and ranchers in the Rocky Mountain West had a great year, reports **Russell Nemetz** (Northern Ag Network, Billings, MT). Timely rains that fell across much of Montana, Wyoming and the Western Dakotas in late spring were "just what the doctor ordered" for both ranchers and farmers. "Farmers were able

to harvest some of their best winter and spring wheat crops ever, and ranchers watched their calves and lambs fatten up on lush green pastures. Prices for commodities and livestock have allowed many to pay down debt and even look at expanding their operations to make room for the next generation of food and fiber producers."

Russell offered his thoughts about "airing on the side of agriculture." He said, "Being a farmer and rancher is so much more than just raising livestock or growing crops today. That's why as radio and television farm broadcasters, my team and I take every opportunity we can to remind those in agriculture and rural America they also have to become better advocates for their own industries in order to preserve their rich heritage and way of life. Long gone are the days of sitting on the fence and thinking or letting others do the talking. We unfortunately live in a society that is getting further and further removed from rural America, and we can no longer pass up opportunities to tell our great story." Russell concludes, "Our farmers and ranchers take great pride in raising food and fiber for consumers here at home and around the world. They also pride themselves for taking care of God's precious land and the wildlife that live on it. It's a new year and a time for all of us to be appreciative that we live in a country where our farmers and ranchers provide a safe, affordable and abundant food and fiber supply that we get to enjoy all year long!"



As an award winning NAFB farm broadcaster, he takes great pride in being one of agriculture's biggest advocates. Raised along the Milk River Valley near Chinook, MT, production agriculture has always been part of his life. It's there he and his family continue to ranch and run a livestock hauling business. Russell earned his bachelor's degree in Communications from Montana State University-Billings. As the Ag Director of the Northern Ag Network, he coordinates his broadcaster team. His radio broadcasts are heard across

Montana, Wyoming, North and South Dakota, and his television broadcasts are seen statewide on CBS affiliates in Montana and NBC affiliates in Wyoming. Also, he makes regular appearances on national television broadcasts, like Cattleman to Cattleman and This Week in Agribusiness on RFD-TV.



OHIO FARM BROADCASTER IS HONORED...as one of six individuals recognized December 6 by the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation (OFBF) for their lifelong contributions to agriculture. **Gary Jackson** was a recipient of The Agricultural Communicator Award. A long-time farm broadcaster, Gary served in the farm departments at WRFD, WIMA, and the Agri Broadcasting Network (ABN), and he delivered daily livestock market broadcasts when he was information director for Producers Livestock Association. Currently, he appears on the television program, In Ohio Country Today. He's contributed to many farm group committees and has been honored by farm organizations, Ohio State University Extension, USDA and NAFB. Nominations for this award are made by county Farm Bureaus and the individual members. The award was presented during the annual meeting of the OFBF in Columbus.

MERGER ANNOUNCED...by AgNet Media, Inc. on December 17, assumes complete ownership of AgNet West Radio Network. AgNet Media, Inc. includes a group of farm media properties solely owned and operated by **Gary Cooper** and **Robin Loftin**. Both Robin and Gary were instrumental in launching AgNet West Radio Network in California in 2012, and Gary has been the network's General Manager since its inception. All AgNet West broadcasts, under the direction and guidance of Farm News Director **Sabrina Hill**, will continue to originate from Fresno County, which is known as the nation's number one agriculture-producing county. Gary said, "Hill has a distinguished career in radio and television news reporting in central California. She has been with AgNet West since 2012 and was named its news director early in 2013." Other entities included in AgNet Media, Inc. are Southeast AgNet Radio Network (with localized programming in Florida, Georgia and Alabama), Citrus Industry magazine, Pest Pro magazine, and Citrus Expo (a major industry event). Also, AgNet Media, Inc. includes a small farm books sales and publishing company and a recently acquired contract to publish a turf industry publication. Gary said, "AgNet West Radio Network affiliate stations have combined signals that reach more than 95 percent of the state's agriculture-producing regions. All affiliates have aired all four daily network programs since the network went on-air in 2012."

Raised in a south Florida vegetable farm family, **Gary Cooper** graduated with a degree in broadcast journalism from the University of Florida in 1978. His college years included two years at Lake City Community College followed by some time at Florida State University, where he attended school abroad at FSU's foreign study campus in Firenze, Italy. His 35-year career has been exclusive to agricultural communications, farm broadcasting and agri-marketing. Instrumental in establishing localized farm radio networks in leading specialty crops regions of the deep southeast and California, he has been recognized by numerous industry and professional groups locally, regionally and nationally. Gary's career has spanned involvement in legislative lobbying, radio network and publications ownership and management, agricultural public relations and promotions. He has served multiple times on Boards of Directors for the National Agri-Marketing Association (NAMA) and the National Association of Farm Broadcasting (NAFB), and has held numerous leadership positions in other industry groups and related professional organizations, particularly in his home state of Florida.

An active and award-winning 4-H'er early on, **Robin Loftin** was born and raised through early childhood in Oxnard, CA, before her family moved to southeastern Oklahoma farm country in the early 1970s. She joined Gary and Southeast AgNet in 1989, after a successful early career in agricultural public relations. Robin has been critical to the development and growth of the Southeast AgNet media group, and its more recent consolidation into AgNet Media, Inc., with particular strengths in network

sales/marketing management, internal systems development and oversight. Robin has co-owned Southeast AgNet with her husband, Gary, since the 1990s, and both were instrumental in the establishment and successful launch of AgNet West Radio Network.



Alan Jarand, center, director and 35-year anchor of the Illinois-based RFD Radio Network® gives Illinois farmers Steve Hosselton left, and David Meiss a tutorial on the new audio board as a crowd gathers outside the network's new studio in Bloomington, Illinois, for its dedication on November 22.

NEW, STATE-OF-THE-ART AUDIO STUDIO...was recently unveiled at the Illinois-based RFD Radio Network at its headquarters in Bloomington, IL. More than 100 guests, including farmers, affiliates, advertisers, Illinois Farm Bureau (IFB) staff and affiliated company guests, had the first look during an open house that included a countdown, on-air sign lighting and first official broadcast from the new studio. In addition to new audio technology, the new studio includes viewing windows and a listening area located inside the IFB headquarters building in the heart of Illinois. Launched as a service to farmers and other Illinoisans in 1967, the network produces its half-hour "RFD Illinois" and one-hour "RFD Today" programs, along with market updates, ag news, custom ag weather reports, commodity market analysis reports, commentaries and consumer features for more than 80 Illinois radio station-partners. In all, the network produces more than 20 individual programs each weekday, ranging in length from one minute to one hour. The network has the largest in-state news gathering team and is the highest-rated radio network in Illinois covering agriculture and rural issues. From the newly constructed main studio, the RFD Radio Network feeds audio by fiber optic line to satellite uplink facilities that its affiliates receive through receivers provided by the network. In addition to feeding the uplink, the network also distributes audio on the FarmWeekNow.com website, and the FarmWeekNow.com smartphone app. Also, the network streams "RFD Illinois" and "RFD Today" live online and posts podcasts of both in the RFD Radio Network section of the site. J.L. Farmakis, Inc., serves as the RFD Radio Network's national ad sales representative. Alan Jarand serves as the network's radio director and anchor, and Rita Frazer is co-anchor and industry relations representative.



125th ROSE BOWL PARADE...was broadcast live January 1 by RFD-TV with co-hosts **Orion Samuelson** and **Pam Minick**, and announcer **Max Armstrong**. Founder of RFD-TV and Rural Media Group **Patrick Gottsch** also appeared in the broadcast to describe the RFD-TV float entry (see drawing above). During the broadcast, Orion remarked, "I have been to four Rose Bowl parades, but I haven't seen one yet." He explained that his hosting duties require him to have his back to the parade so he only gets to see the parade on a TV monitor. Orion and Pam were "airing on the side of agriculture" as they took several opportunities to emphasize the importance of agriculture during their radio and TV coverage of the Rose Bowl Parade.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU...so we can share your stories of service to listeners. Contact me at larryaquinn@verizon.net or call me at 703-819-6532.

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