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by Larry A. Quinn

CALIFORNIA BROADCASTER HEADS TO NORTH DAKOTA – “I love an adventure.” That’s the first thing **Sabrina Hill** says when asked why she has chosen to leave California, and a network she helped build, for the Northern Plains. Hill was Farm News Director for *AgNet West* from 2012 until December 31, when love of adventure and love otherwise led her to North Dakota. “The five years I spent working for and with **Gary Cooper** and **Robin Loftin** were amazing. I can’t put into words what they and the network have meant to me,” she said. “During that time, I went through a lot of personal things and life changes, and this is where they’ve led me.” As of January 1, Hill is the newest addition to *The American Ag Radio Network*. She’ll be leading the network’s new charge into the digital universe as digital director and farm broadcaster. “We’re beyond excited for what Sabrina brings to the table for the *American Ag Network*,” said network General Manager **Lance Knudson**. “She’s known and respected in the industry and has experience and knowledge that are hard to find.” Fargo, ND, is a long way from Fresno, CA, but Hill said they’re not that different. “I’m joking. They’re completely different,” she conceded. “I’ve never really thought of change as scary. For me, it’s a chance to grow and experience new things. I’ve always been more afraid of being stagnant and not living to the fullest.” She joins a well-established on-air team at the American Ag Network led by Farm and Ranch Director **Rusty Halvorson**, who has been with the network for nearly 22 of its more than 30 years on air. **Breck Von Bank** is the network’s national sales manager. Hill will remain an active member of NAFB and plans to once again be on the *Washington Watch* planning committee. She most recently served as the 2016-2017 West Region Vice President, was on the



2017 *Washington Watch* committee, the 2016 news service committee and was a member of the inaugural NAFB Leadership Class in 2015. Also, she is listed in the NAFB Directory of Speakers and plans to continue speaking at conventions and meetings on topics such as building an online audience and working with the media. She won't be leaving her Mrs. Claus suit in California. It appears that she will continue her community service and become the official Mrs. Claus for the city of Fargo. Her new email address is sabrinahill@americanagnetwork.com.



QUINN PRESENTED TOP AGENCY AWARD – On December 14, **Christine Quinn** (Allied Industry member, McLean, VA) was presented the Farm Credit Administration *Chairman's Award*, the top employee award given by her agency. Congratulating her is FCA Board Chairman **Dallas Tonsager**, left, and Board Member **Jeffery Hall**. Her husband, **Larry**, was notified the day before and was invited to attend the ceremony, but he is not accustomed to keeping secrets from his 47-year partner. He managed to slip into the room where the ceremony was held without being seen by Christine. Larry said, "I am not sure I have seen her so surprised except when she received this same honor 21 years ago." When she was called to the front to receive her honor, she then saw Larry in the audience and said, "Larry, what are you doing here?" He answered, "To salute you!" This award is a capstone to her career with the Farm Credit Administration where she has served for 43 years. She plans to retire March 31, 2018, from her position as Assistant Director for Congressional and Public Affairs.



Lynn Ketelsen (Linder Farm Network) with Senator Amy Kloubechar and Minnesota Farmers Union President Gary Wertish

AG OUTLOOK SERIES – Linder Farm Network will once again be holding its annual Ag Outlook Series of meetings in January. The meetings will focus on management and marketing strategies for the coming year and will feature some of the top experts in the country. Registration will be at 8:00 a.m., and the forums start promptly at 9:00 a.m. The programs wrap up by 2:30 p.m. Cost is \$35 per person. **Lynn Ketelsen** (Linder Farm Network, Owatonna, MN) said, “We have gone from five locations to seven now because of the demand.” Locations include Alexandria, MN, (January 8), Wilmar, MN, (January 9), Marshall, MN, (January 10), Mankato, MN, (January 11), Owatonna, MN, (January 12), Fairmont, MN, (January 30), and Red Wing, MN, (February 1). Lynn explained, “We talk price outlook, world issues and state issues, not to mention weather outlook. We typically draw more than 1,500 farmers to these events, but with two more locations, we may reach 2,000.” He added, “We will be covering a lot of other events this January including the Minnesota Ag Expo with live broadcasts, Minnesota Pork Expo and local meetings.” Lynn concludes, “It’s a great chance to see many farmers. We will be announcing soon the addition of another farm broadcaster to our team. The network continues to grow with the addition of six new affiliates, and we feel very blessed.”



SIMPSON STILL LIKES TO WRITE – Wey Simpson (Emeritus member, Spokane Valley, WA) says, “I don't broadcast anymore.” After all, the day after Christmas, he just turned 91½. “I still like to write and do a lot, but mostly for my personal wishes. I have a massive narrative of my family history that I work on when I have time.” Wey reports with a heavy heart that his wife, **Jean**, died November 18, 2017. “I was determined to

deliver a eulogy because she was such a special person. It was hard, and I admit my voice broke a few times, but I've heard many compliments for how moving and meaningful it was.” He continued, “Now that Jean has left us, I'll probably have time this winter to work on that family history. Also, I have written my own story, up to a point. I need to pick up where I ended about 10 years ago and bring it up to date.” He added, “Jean and I became active in a church nearby in 2002, and I have done a lot for the church.” Also, Wey started a book based on things he wrote of a faith nature. “Since I was Lay Leader for several years and a certified Lay Speaker, I've done a number of sermons. Most of them had 'off beat' titles but were still based on what we Christians are supposed to believe.” He has borrowed from those, plus he does a lot of journaling and occasionally there is something worth using. Wey concludes, “So, yes, I'm writing, but not for any compensation, just for the satisfaction of doing it.” Wey was inducted into NAFB's *Hall of Fame* in 2013.

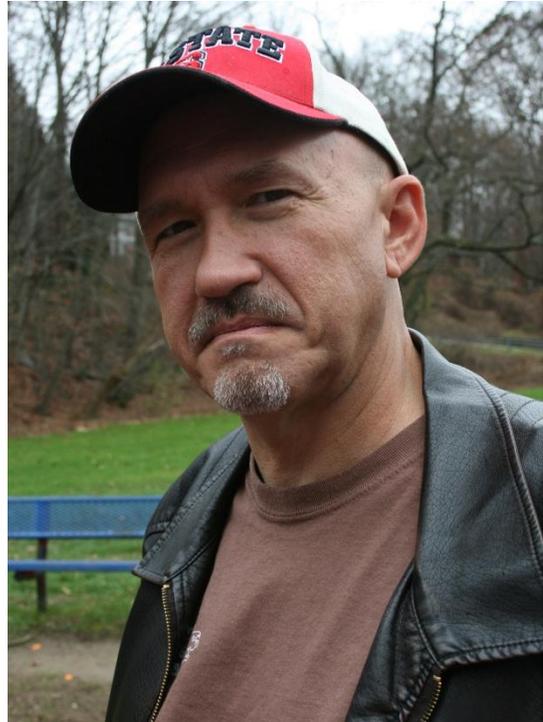




FROM BROADCASTER TO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR — On December 1, **Rhonda Garrison** (*Southern Farm Network*, Raleigh, NC) concluded a near 20-year career in ag radio, 15 of those years behind the microphone and more than 10 of those years with *Southern Farm Network*. Rhonda got her start in ag broadcasting with KGNC-AM (Amarillo, TX). She began first in ag advertising sales transitioning into broadcasting full-time in the spring of 2003. In the summer of 2007, Rhonda took the leap and moved to the East Coast to take over farm broadcasting for *Southern Farm Network*, eventually building SFNToday.com, a companion website to the 20-station network covering North and South Carolina. After a whole weekend off, on December 4, Rhonda began her new role as Executive Director of the Corn Growers Association of North Carolina, a 40-year-old Checkoff organization serving the state's corn producers. Corn Growers of NC had been run by the same person since its inception in the fall of 1977. The organization was started with a \$50 bill out of a farmer's pocket in Elizabethtown, NC. As only the second Executive Director, Rhonda has been entrusted to set up the first office for the organization, and to re-vamp research and communications for the group. Southern Farm Network and SFNToday.com has been left in the capable hands of **Mike Davis**. Mike filled in for Rhonda off and on for more than eight years, and Rhonda has complete faith that he'll carry on the tradition of keeping farmers in the Carolinas informed of the latest issues in the southeast, Washington D.C. and around the world. Look for Rhonda at Washington Watch and introduce yourself to Mike. Rhonda will continue her membership in NAFB as an Allied Industry member.

RETURNING TO HIS FIRST LOVE: REPORTING AND RADIO

— After a five-year stint teaching college, **Mike Davis**, the new News Director for the *Southern Farm Network* (Raleigh, NC), is excited to be a part of this staple for rural and small-town families. “For 43 years, SFN has been the go-to place for information about agriculture news, crop markets, agritourism and informative reports and interviews with the agricultural newsmakers in the Carolinas,” Mike said. He grew up in Knightdale, NC, back in the days when it was a “wide place in the road” outside of Raleigh, so his heart has always belonged to rural families. “Even though I am not a farmer, I feel a connection with rural America dating back to my roots,” Mike said. “All my family are from small towns and farming communities in eastern North Carolina, and I have an appreciation for the work ethic they demonstrated to me. It’s an unpretentious and honest way of life, and I love that.” From his roots in rural North Carolina,



Davis ventured to NC State University, where his father, **Walter Davis**, worked in crop science for 40 years, including instrumental research on Raleigh St. Augustine grass. From there, the younger Davis finished his undergraduate degree in communication (mass media) at Toccoa Falls College in Georgia and received his master’s degree in business communication from Louisiana Baptist University. It wasn’t long after he returned home that his talent was recognized, and he moved his young family to the remote island of Guam to serve as a director for international Christian broadcaster Trans World Radio. The gentle and kind Guamanian people made the Davises feel right at home. The Chamorro people of the western Pacific paradise had much the same spirit as the good, solid people of North Carolina. The tropical climate and landscape also made Guam feel like a North Carolina summer to the Davis family, enhanced by a similar agricultural balance in the economy (Guam is 33% agricultural and North Carolina is 27%). Another nod to his father comes in the form of a passion for old cars, especially Studebakers. Davis owns a 1964 Champ pickup truck that began its life on a strawberry farm in Oregon. Affectionately naming the truck “Stuey,” Davis says, “It reminds me of my dad. I was driving down a country road and passed a farm that had the truck for sale. When I saw it, I thought ‘That’s my Dad, right there!’ I knew that the truck had to be mine, so it followed me home.” Stuey is the same model as the one the senior Davis drove to the vast family garden in the 1970s. Davis is an avid supporter of the Farm-to-Fork movement and has been actively promoting this grassroots effort for years. He volunteers to emcee many events surrounding the movement and his upbeat, inclusive style invites everyone to have a good time while enjoying “Got to Be NC” grown foods. Mike says, “Don’t look for any huge difference right away with SFN, but over time, you will notice a movement toward more family and consumer-oriented programming. We want to expand our reach by providing news, features and information that is vital to the people in small-town and rural North and South Carolina. That will include consumer news, entertainment, education issues, and national and international issues pertaining to agriculture and more.”



LISTENING TO NIGHTTIME DJs ATTRACTED MARTIN TO RADIO – Carey Martin (Louisiana Farm Bureau Radio Network), right, said his interest in radio started in high school when he would listen to the DJs count down the top-10 hits each night on the radio. “Since I was a farm boy growing up on a beef cattle and dairy farm, it made sense that I would pursue a career in farm broadcasting. During college, I was fortunate to work internships with **Doug Thomas** at the Southern States Network, **Don Molino** at the Louisiana Agri-News Network and **Mike Danna** at the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation. Through my membership in the Alpha Gamma Rho fraternity, I met **Taylor Brown**, and he encouraged me to attend the NAFB convention during my senior year.” Carey continued, “At that convention, I landed my first farm broadcasting job at KVOO AM/FM (Tulsa, OK). After two years in Tulsa, **Ron Hays** at the Oklahoma Agrinet had an opening and Oklahoma City became my next home. One of the highlights of my career came while I was at the Oklahoma Agrinet.” The NAFB launched a new award designed to recognize new, up-and-coming farm broadcasters who showed promise to contribute to the industry. “At the 1995 NAFB convention, I was honored to be named the first recipient of the NAFB Horizon Award. I’m pretty sure that Ron Hays deserves the credit for me getting that award,” he said. “My next career stop was a short one-year stint at WOW AM/FM (Omaha, NE). It was short because a rare opportunity to move back to Louisiana came up, and we headed back to Baton Rouge to join the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation.” His first job responsibility was to launch the Louisiana Farm Bureau Radio Network. “We didn’t have a satellite uplink, so I did it the old-fashioned way and fed programming over the phone to my first five stations. There had been a lot of audio streaming on the internet using RealAudio. But the quality was very low, and there were constant buffering problems, so RealAudio



wasn't a reliable option." He added, "Being an '80s music nut, I found that you could download music files from certain websites. They had solved the file size problem by using a compression algorithm called MP3. I had found my way around a satellite uplink, and started e-mailing all of my farm programs as MP3 files to all of my stations. I had started the very first internet-based farm radio network on planet Earth," he claims. "I have no way to prove this, but I'm convinced that it's true, and it's something I'm very proud of to this day." In 2003, he left the farm broadcasting business, but he still worked for the Louisiana Farm Bureau as a field representative. Two years ago, he moved back into radio and digital media. "For the past two years, **Don Molino** and I have split the daily broadcasting duties on what is now known as *The Voice of Louisiana Agriculture Radio Network*. We're a multi-media operation now. I run the VoiceofLouisianaAgriculture.com website and the @VoiceofLaAg Facebook page and Twitter account. Don and I produce a daily e-newsletter titled *The Daily Voice*. We continue to produce the weekly television show *This Week in Louisiana Agriculture*, now in its 37th year on the air in Louisiana."

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*.