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by Larry A. Quinn



FARM BROADCASTER MAKES POLAR BEAR PLUNGE -- “This is my second time participating in the infamous Polar Bear Plunge at the Meadville General Store on the banks of the Niobrara National Scenic River,” reports **Monte James** (Your Ag Network, Inc., Yankton, South Dakota). “I grew up on a ranch about 10 miles down-river, so I try to make it back to this insane event when time allows. Every year, the local fire department cracks a pathway in the fast moving and stunningly beautiful Niobrara River to allow battle-hardened partiers and urban thrill seekers to gain membership in the Polar Bear Club. This year’s dip took place January 26, and we were fortunate to have a break in the

-20 below temperatures we had fore and aft. It was a balmy 12 degrees with a windchill of about 15 below. My previous excursion about 15 years ago was -17 below flat temp so this year seemed like the tropics. My friend **Jennifer Nelson** (in orange shirt) is not a fan of water or the cold, but liquid courage pulled her through to seize the day and take her first dip to become a club member. Unfortunately, I belly flopped into about two feet of water and smacked my



nose on the river-bottom but was able to 'cowboy up' enough to make it back to the giant bonfire the firemen had roaring for us dippers. We then made our way over to the *Little Red Barn*, a renovated homestead shack (and the only other building in Meadville) for hot toddies and snacks, courtesy of the local barrister **Rodney Palmer**, who is responsible for renovating and preserving this little slice of Americana known as Meadville. Polar Bear Plunge is an annual event, and I hope to see you there next year, where I will be back in the cheering section, unless it's 50 degrees. The Meadville Store is an old post office that was closed in the 1940s and re-opened in the mid- '90s. It's famous for its absolute preservation of antiquity, featuring the same old pot-bellied stove and hardwood floors that graced the place from the 1920s forward. They serve food on an outdoor grill, but it is famous for pulling tubing and canoeing customers from Omaha, Lincoln, and Sioux Falls in the summer and local ranchers, lumberjacks, and grizzled cowpunchers looking to whet their whistles and warm their pipes during the brutal Nebraska winters."

Monte's radio career has taken him from small stations in northern Nebraska and southern South Dakota to KAYL (Storm Lake, Iowa), KGFX (Pierre, South Dakota), KCSJ (Sioux City, Iowa), WHO (Des Moines, Iowa), WNAX (Yankton, South Dakota), and now to the 40-plus stations of *Your Ag Network* (www.youragnetwork.com). "I also do a weekly rodeo show that's in its fifteenth year called the *Territorial Rodeo Update/Top 5 Countdown*, which is on close to 60 stations in nine states. We are looking for affiliates especially in rodeo and ranching areas. You can hear past shows at www.rodeotru.com," Monte adds. "This is my fourth year as an NAFB member, and I'm extremely fond of the association and the amazing friends that I have met. Personal thanks to **Lorrie Boyer** and **Susan Littlefield** for taking me under their wings and transforming me from a rodeo announcer and salesman to a farm broadcaster. I am deeply in their debt."



RHIANNON BRANCH JOINS BROWNFIELD AG NETWORK

-- "We are excited to have **Rhiannon Branch** join Brownfield as an anchor/reporter," says **Cyndi Young**, Director of Brownfield and Ag Operations. Rhiannon will be based in south central Illinois. "Her developing skill set as a farm broadcaster coupled with a passion for agriculture make her the perfect fit for our team." Rhiannon adds, "Two years ago, I had never considered broadcasting as a career. I took an internship with the Illinois Farm Bureau and RFD Radio because of my interest in their printed publication, but it is obvious that **Rita Frazer** and **DeLoss Jahnke** had different plans for me. After being notified about receiving the *Orion Samuelson Scholarship* and being invited to my first NAFB convention, Rita and DeLoss took me under their wings and set me loose at *Trade Talk*. It was chaotic, but it was the most fun I had ever had behind a microphone. I made up my mind that day that

farm broadcasting was my 'dream job' after college. After my scholarship acceptance speech, a woman I had never met came up to me with a business card and told me to call her sometime. A week later, a phone call to Cyndi Young snowballed into an internship and now a full-time position with some of the best in the business. It is obvious that I would not be in this position without the opportunities provided through NAFB and the guidance of the incredible broadcasters involved in the association. Knowing that agriculture is a huge industry, I was always open to taking a position in whatever location I was directed, but Illinois has been and always will be home. I am excited to be on the ground in my home state, serving the industry that helped shaped me into the person I am today."

Rhiannon grew up in luka, Illinois, and was an active member on the local, state and national levels in both 4-H and FFA. Beef cattle, poultry, public speaking, and communications were a few of her activities. She graduated with an associate of arts degree from Kaskaskia College in 2017, where she was a member of a national champion dairy judging team and the Post-Secondary Agriculture Students organization. She then went on to Murray State University (MSU), where she was a member of the Alpha Upsilon chapter of Sigma Alpha Professional Agriculture Sorority and earned a BS in agri-science technology with an emphasis in communications and public relations. She completed her education at MSU studying abroad in Ireland. Her background and passion for agriculture coupled with her talent for public speaking led her to complete an internship with RFD Radio in 2017. Her love for farm broadcasting was discovered through

working at RFD Radio, traveling to county fairs, and interviewing ag students, farmers, and ag professionals. In the fall of 2017, Rhiannon was awarded the *Orion Samuelson Scholarship* from NAFB. She then secured and completed an internship with Brownfield Ag News in the summer of 2018, where her passion for informing the agricultural community grew even more. Rhiannon and her fiancé, **Ian**, reside in southern Illinois where they enjoy camping, volunteering as 4-H leaders, attending country music concerts, and spoiling their Blue Heeler puppy, Freedom. She is excited to represent Brownfield as a fresh, informative voice to Midwestern farmers. Brownfield Ag News creates and delivers original content across multiple media platforms. Brownfield includes the largest and one of the oldest agricultural news radio networks in the country. More than 500 affiliate radio stations in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin are in a contractual partnership to carry agricultural programming created by Brownfield's team of 12 full-time farm broadcasters.



MERICK IS NEW NAFB MEMBER --

Greg Merick grew up in the small northwest Oklahoma town of Seiling. Greg's parents and grandparents owned a farm with a small cattle operation, so Greg spent many hours working cattle, hauling hay, building fence, and living the normal farm life. After high school and a few jobs trying to figure out what he wanted as a career, he decided to do what he had always thought about doing, and that was to get into broadcasting. He went to American Broadcasting School in Oklahoma City, where he graduated in early 2002. That fall, he began his first broadcasting job in the small Alaska village of Galena as the sports

director, news director, and operations manager. After a couple months there, he came back to Oklahoma City and went to work for *iHeart Media's* KTOK/WKY radio. After working at KTOK/WKY and a short stint doing traffic reports, he became the operations manager/sports director for *iHeart Media* networks in Oklahoma City. Two years later, he added affiliate relations manager to his title; and a short time after that, he started voicing agriculture reports for the *iHeart Media* ag properties. Also, he served as the play-by-play voice of the Oklahoma City University Stars men's and women's basketball teams for six years and has called 200 high school and small college football and basketball games. Currently, he takes care of the operations, affiliate



relations, network sportscast, and sports proprieties; and he voices many of the ag reports for *iHeart Media* networks in Oklahoma City, including the Voice of Southwest Agriculture radio network, First Oklahoma Ag, Yancey Ag network, and Oklahoma News Network. Greg also created and hosts the popular program *Outdoor Showcase* that is heard on radio stations in four states and features hunting, fishing, and outdoor news. Greg is married, and he and his wife **Aimee** have a 16-year-old son, **Zachary**. Greg is heavily involved in Boy Scouts and the football booster club for his son's team. Greg's hobbies include spending time with his family and friends, watching and attending

sporting events, golfing, traveling, and spending as much time as possible in a deer blind or chasing turkeys around the field. Greg is proud to be a new member of NAFB.

HIGGINS MOVES TO OHIO FARM BUREAU -- **Ty Higgins**, formerly a farm broadcaster for the Ohio Ag Net, has made a move to the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation as its Director of Media Relations. "When the chance of working with such a trusted and well-respected organization like Ohio Farm Bureau comes, you take it," Higgins says. "I am so glad I did. I have been involved in agriculture my entire life on both of my grandparents' farms. Those farms no longer exist, but my love for farming and the deep desire to be a part of agriculture remains."

One of the factors that made this transition a little easier for Higgins is who is helping him learn the ropes of his new role: former farm broadcaster and NAFB Past President **Joe Cornely**. "Joe hired me as an intern at WRFD when I was 17 years old," Higgins adds. "Here we are, 24 years later, and I am getting him coffee again." All joking aside, Higgins admits the fact Cornely will be around for the rest of 2019, before retiring, is a luxury not many people have when making a career change. "To be able to learn from him through an entire year will be a



tremendous asset as I get my feet underneath me,” Higgins says. “Joe has had a remarkable career covering Ohio agriculture in many different ways; and if I can do half as well as he has, I will be doing alright.” Higgins can be reached at his new email address, THiggins@ofbf.org, or by phone at 614/246-8231.

WSMI AGRICULTURE DIRECTOR -- Gabriel Osborn was born and raised in Coffeen, Illinois, only 15 miles from the station where he works today as agriculture director for WSMI AM & FM (Litchfield/Hillsboro, Illinois). Growing up in a small town of 650 people, farming was right outside



the city limits. Both sides of his family come from farming backgrounds. Through his father’s side of the family, he is one generation removed from a six-generation, centennial family farm that was started sometime in the late 1850s/early 1860s. The farm unfortunately became a victim of the farm crisis of the 1980s. His maternal grandfather also was born and raised on a farm. “In the springtime, my grandma used to pick me up from school and take me out to whatever field my grandpa was working that day. I would ride along with him all evening. This is where my love for agriculture started. At that time, I also fell in love with baseball, and I had thought it would be neat to call baseball on the radio like Jack and Mike on KMOX, but I never thought that it was a practical idea. As I entered Hillsboro High School, I became involved in FFA and immediately fell in love with it,”

Osborn explains.

Osborn then expanded his FFA projects and had four as a senior, two of which involved being hired as a farmhand for a family farm that neighbored some of the land his ancestors had owned for more than 100 years. “This is where my love and knowledge for agriculture grew,” Osborn admits. He earned many FFA awards, including Star Green Hand, Star Chapter Farmer, and, ultimately, his State and American FFA degrees. Also, he was chapter secretary as a sophomore and junior then chapter president as a senior. Additionally, he served as sectional treasurer as a

junior and sectional reporter as senior for Section 19 in Illinois. As chapter president, he was in the top 20 in the state after his tenure; and as a sectional reporter, he earned the award as a Top 5 section reporter. At the time of his FFA career, NAFB President-Elect **Rita Frazer** was the agriculture director at WSMI radio. “I had done many interviews with her then and in her early days with RFD Radio (Bloomington, Illinois). Also, being a section reporter, that’s where my interest in reporting sparked, but I never thought of having a future there,” Osborn says.

He then attended college at Lake Land Community College in Mattoon, Illinois, and majored in agribusiness and supply. The major covered all the bases of production agriculture, and he took specialized classes in crop production. With his major, he had two internships, which gave him the hands-on knowledge that he never really had from the lack of growing up on a farm. “I graduated from Lake Land with an associate in applied science in 2016,” Osborn explains. “After college, I did not have any offers from a local agribusiness service, so I moved back home and took a job at the local auto parts store for about a year. Then, I moved on to the local co-op in Litchfield for a season, working part-time in the soybean treatment facility. As that position came to its end, I went back out on the job market, and the WSMI Agriculture Director position was open. I threw my hat in the ring in early October 2018 and started as the ag director on November 20, 2018. So things have really come full circle, from being interviewed by Rita Frazer, working with and interviewing farmers who have kids or grandkids with whom I attended high school, to now being back around on the other side of the table, so to speak. It still really hasn't sunk in, even though I've been on the job just over two months.”

Osborn also keeps busy outside the studio: “In my personal life, I am the president of the Hillsboro FFA Alumni, a volunteer fireman with the Coffeen Fire Protection District, and a member of the Montgomery County Farm Bureau Young Leaders. In my free time, I love to bowl and hold around a 200 average.”



NEWS SHARING LED DOMEL TO RADIO

-- With no experience in radio but a love to share the news, **Jessica Domel** started her radio career on AM 1580 KWED (Seguin, Texas) in 2007. Initially, Jessica was a print production intern for the radio station's newspaper, the *Seguin Daily News*, but a willingness to try radio and serve in different roles landed her a full-time job two days after her graduation from Texas Lutheran University. Her first experience on-air was memorable, to say the least. While co-hosting the station's most popular weekly program, *The Trading Post*, the bracket holding the microphone broke, crashed onto the sound board, and scattered papers everywhere. Her boss was laughing so hard in the other studio, which left

Domel to pick up the pieces and make a joke about the situation for the confused listeners. Since that day, Domel has joked that she no longer has stage fright as nothing worse can happen than breaking equipment while on-air.

Domel's foray into ag radio came a little over five years after the fateful mic bracket incident. Her uncle found an ad for a job of writing stories for Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) and encouraged her to combine her love of farming and reporting. From 2012 to 2017, she traveled the state, taking photos and telling the stories of Texas farmers and ranchers for TFB publications. When a position in the TFB Radio Network opened in 2017, Domel dove at the chance to return to radio. She now produces four daily programs and a single weekly program focused on beef production for the 69 TFB Radio Network affiliates. "I'm working in the radio department, but also I'm still a print and web writer. So, I have been busy," Domel adds. She continues to write stories for TFB publications, take photos at the family farm, and spends time with her dad, older brother, and two nieces. Her youngest niece has the gift of gab and a foam microphone. "We hope her first time on-air goes more smoothly for her than it did for her aunt," Jessica notes.

GHOST AND VAMPIRE TOUR IN NEW ORLEANS -- NAFB members covering the American Farm Bureau Federation's 100th annual convention, held January 2019 in New Orleans, were treated to a ghost and vampire tour of the French Quarter by the Big Easy's premiere vampire [Lord Chaz](#). New Orleans boasts a colorful and often-tragic history. Tour participants heard of infamous murders, suicides, and other tragedies that have inspired such famous authors as **Anne Rice**, **Poppy Z. Brite**, and **Robert Lynn Asprin**.

Carey Martin (voice of Louisiana Agriculture Radio Network) organized the two-hour tour on both Saturday and Sunday nights of the convention. The tour took broadcasters and Farm Bureau media staff through the streets of New Orleans' French Quarter to explore many unsolved murders and haunted buildings on the original streets of the Crescent City. Tour participants also learned about the origins of many vampire-related stories and legends that have made New Orleans famous in both literature and movies. The tour was led by [Lord Chaz](#), who started the very first tours of the French Quarter's dark side nearly 30 years ago. "He put on a show for the nation's ag communicators, including a blood-letting finale that can never be forgotten," Martin says. Martin adds he is happy to host another tour for farm broadcasters who may have missed out on the experience. "Any time a farm broadcaster is in New Orleans to cover a meeting, please contact me and I'll be happy to set something up," Martin adds.



NAFB members on the Saturday night tour included (L to R): **Tom Steever** (Brownfield Network), **Michael Clements** (NAFB News Service), **Taylor Clements**, **Lord Chaz**, **C.J. Martin**, and **Carey Martin** (voice of Louisiana Agriculture Radio Network).



NAFB members on the Sunday night tour included (L to R): **Clay Patton** (KRVN, Rural Radio Network), **Lord Chaz**, **Carey Martin** (voice of Louisiana Agriculture Radio Network), and **Gary Joiner** (Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network).

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*.