

May, 2017



TRHoF

# E-Waves

## NEWSLETTER



est 2010

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### OFF MIC

by TnRHOF President Doug Combs



I'm very excited, because Christmas is almost here! Well, not really, the Christmas part but I hope you understand what I mean. When I was younger, the excitement of Christmas morning would make sleeping a big challenge. Now that a few years have passed, sleeping is not a problem. My excitement this week comes from knowing how close we are to the induction of our newest members of the Tennessee Radio Hall of Fame. On Saturday evening, the video profiles of our inductees will give us additional insight into 11 outstanding people and one legendary radio station. In the course of just a couple of hours, our world will expand.



This year, we will induct our first person from public radio — and she just celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday! Our family at the Hall will also expand with three persons who crossed the career path from radio to television and all excelled in different areas of the industry on the regional, statewide and national level. Engineering is so important. If we're not on the air, who will hear us? One new member's work in engineering gained worldwide respect. Many of our members began their careers after college. This year's inductees also include an educator who touched the lives of thousands of students at one of the state's top universities. He taught using the knowledge he learned in the field.

The dedication to a career in broadcasting can take many different paths. Some people work to build an empire; others work for all broadcasters by leading our industry's national association.

Sports on the air is a major part of our heritage, and one of our inductees has more than 1,500 games under his belt. The road from working on air can lead to acting, but one of our inductees followed the opposite path.

An ad-lib by another inductee even led to a city gaining a nickname. And finally, one boy's vision for a town lives today at a station that starts the day with a Marconi-winning morning show.

It will be the 6<sup>th</sup> of May for you, but for me, the feel of Christmas morning will be in the air this weekend. Our world will grow, and the Tennessee Radio Hall of Fame family will increase in size. I hope you will be there. **If you haven't bought your ticket yet, act fast! A few seats are still unspoken for, and tickets are available until Wednesday.**

Doug



- |                               |                                |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Mac Allen</b>              | <b>Keith Landecker</b>         |
| <b>Mike Beverly</b>           | <b>Kyle Nash</b>               |
| <b>Chuck Borchard</b>         | <b>Greg Owens</b>              |
| <b>Jim Buchanan</b>           | <b>John Padgett</b>            |
| <b>Lynda Campbell</b>         | <b>Leslie Pardue</b>           |
| <b>Doug Combs</b>             | <b>George Plaster</b>          |
| <b>Tim Cunningham</b>         | <b>Russell "Rusty" Reviere</b> |
| <b>Zelicia Cutrer</b>         | <b>Jim Reynolds</b>            |
| <b>Mary Dabney</b>            | <b>Buddy Sadler</b>            |
| <b>Paul Randall Dickerson</b> | <b>Bill Smith</b>              |
| <b>Kenneth Forte</b>          | <b>Kent Stephens</b>           |
| <b>Sammy George</b>           | <b>Nancy Stewart</b>           |
| <b>Jeri George</b>            | <b>Charles Tatum</b>           |
| <b>Mike Green</b>             | <b>Allen Williams</b>          |
| <b>Nancy Knowlton</b>         | <b>Cliff Williamson</b>        |
| <b>Paul Ladd</b>              | <b>Greg Wood</b>               |

# 2017 Induction & Banquet Is This Weekend

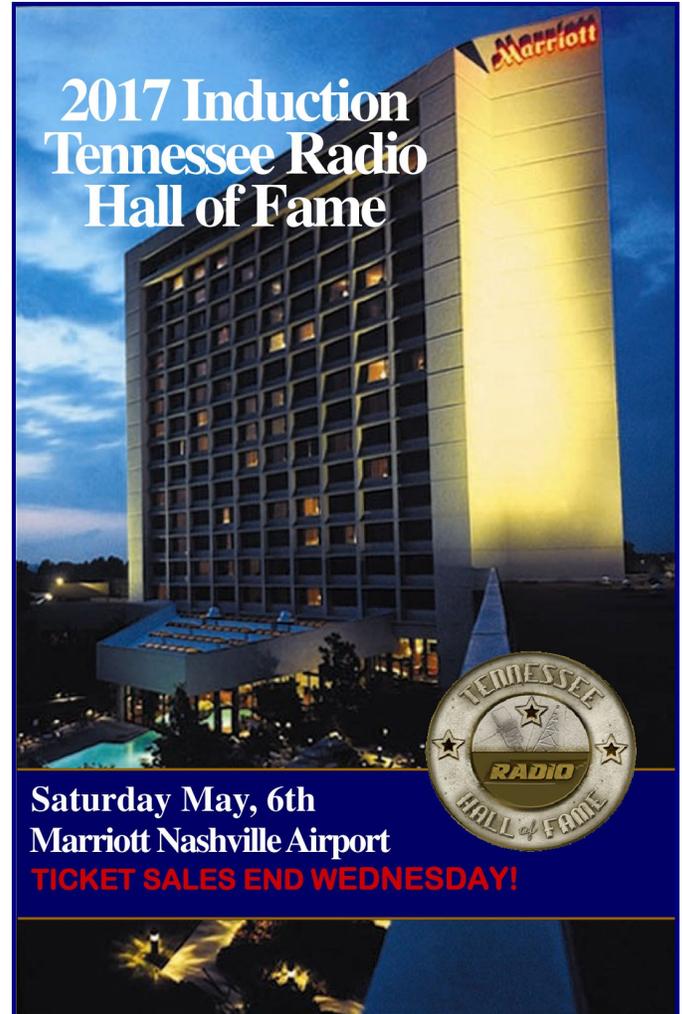


**THE COUNTDOWN IS UNDERWAY!** The sixth annual Tennessee Radio Hall of Fame Induction & Banquet is this Saturday, May 6. The Board of Directors looks forward to a chance to visit with old friends and new friends from across the state.

We're also looking forward to watching the new inductions into the Hall. Eleven very worthy individuals and one legendary radio station will be honored for their contributions to our industry.

Final edits are being made to the video profiles that will precede each induction. Another great chapter in the story of radio in Tennessee is almost ready to reveal!

As always, we want to have a sellout crowd for this great show. Ticket sales close Wednesday, May 3. We still have some great seats left, and if you haven't gotten your tickets yet, be sure to buy them NOW!



## TICKET SALES CLOSE WEDNESDAY, MAY 3!

Get your tickets one of three ways:

1. Buy them at this link:

<http://tennesseeradiohalloffame.wildapricot.org/event-2487012>

2. Email Michelle Bolden at

[michelle@gabrielmedia.net](mailto:michelle@gabrielmedia.net)

3. Call Michelle at 615.838.0043.

***We look forward to seeing you on Saturday, May 6th  
at the Marriott Nashville Airport for the 6th annual  
Induction & Banquet of the Tennessee Radio Hall of Fame!***

**Banquet-goers who  
wish to gather early  
to swap stories can  
meet in the hotel bar  
at 2:00 p.m. Saturday.**



# The Man Who Changed Chattanooga Radio



by David Carroll

**Editor's note: In this article, Chattanooga's David Carroll writes about radio giant Donald J. "Don" Newberg, who passed away a few months ago.**

As much as I'd like to write about "Don," I have always called him Mr. Newberg, and that isn't going to change now. He would probably prefer to be written about



**Don Newberg**

as "Don," but it is with great affection and respect that I write about "Mr. Newberg." He started in radio in the 1950s in Illinois as a newscaster, and retained his interest in journalism throughout his management career.

For approximately 14 years, he was at the helm of what was then "Radio Chattanooga." It was the

umbrella name for two radio stations that operated out of Pineville Road, commonly known as the Radio Ranch. In 1978, Bloomington (Illinois) Broadcasting purchased the stations from Ted Turner, who had moved on to bigger things, quickly losing interest in his Chattanooga properties.

The Bloomington group, led by Mr. Newberg as general manager, inherited a mess. Many of the stations' key people bailed out during a year of uncertainty (and a shrinking budget) while Turner and the FCC untangled his records. When the smoke finally cleared, Mr. Newberg and company set out to put Turner's old stations back on their feet.

Barely into my twenties, I was holding on for dear life. The previous management had installed me as WGOW's morning drive guy, and I wasn't exactly setting the woods on fire. The station had gone automated a few years earlier, pretty much ceding the top-40 battle to WFLI. Our automation would frequently misfire, and our pre-recorded voices would identify a Carpenters song as "Marvin Gaye." Listeners were not impressed.

The first thing Mr. Newberg did was shut down the automation. The station went "live," as it should have been all along.

The second thing he did changed my life, along with many others. The 100,000 watt FM "elevator music" station, WYNQ (wink!) had lots of listeners, but few advertisers. Mr. Newberg, and his programming manager, the brilliant Jim Wood, were plotting to rock our town, literally. Wood was working on computers when they were the size of a Buick, and he used one for music research. Both men took me to lunch one day at Wendy's in Red Bank. I still think of them every time I eat there, which is way too often.

At that lunch, they revealed their plan to me. WYNQ would soon become WSKZ. Why, I asked? After all "skuz" didn't sound like a very catchy nickname. "SKZ," I was told, stood for Stereo KZ. What was the significance of "KZ," I wondered? Nothing, it just sounds good, and would make a cool bumper sticker logo, they said. It would become a rock station, and there would be no advance publicity. In a few weeks, the elevator music fans would be awakened with the sounds of Lynyrd Skynyrd, Led Zeppelin, and Steely Dan. They wanted me to be music director, and switch my morning show from WGOW-AM to the new KZ-106.

Mr. Newberg told me it was his goal to raise the level of radio in our town. "We'll make our stations better, and the other stations will have to improve too. When they all sound better, we can all charge more for commercials, and that's good for the Chattanooga radio market."

I should note here that I left that lunch feeling a bit down. Keep in mind, I was young, and even less radio-savvy than I am today. I felt like I was being demoted, because my "young" audience didn't listen to FM in 1978. I sort of wanted to beg them to keep me on AM radio, but I was also grateful they weren't getting rid of me, which is what new owners often do. So I sighed, and accepted that I would soon be an FM guy.

Let's just say it worked out well for all parties. FM finally started catching on, and Chattanooga responded enthusiastically to KZ-106. We stole WFLI's audience within a few months, and started nipping at top-rated WDEF too.

Mr. Newberg met his goal. His two stations got better, and the competitors did too.

Through it all, he was the grown-up in the room. He wore a suit, patted us on the back, and kicked our butts when necessary.

*(continued on page 4)*

## The Man Who Changed... (continued from page 3)



Here's my favorite personal Mr. Newberg story. In the early 1980s, I spent a couple of weeks on my KZ morning show skewering one of the era's political figures. (I won't go into detail here, because this story isn't about politics, which is a powder keg these days). Some people thought it was funny, while others thought it was terrible. It certainly got attention, even on a national level, and that was my goal.

One morning, at the peak of my little brouhaha, Mr. Newberg knocked on the control room door. "How's it going, fella?" he asked.

"Seems to be going great," I replied, while wondering why I was getting a rare visit from the boss.

"I just wanted to tell you," he said, "We're getting a lot of complaints about this thing you're doing."

I gulped, turned fifty shades of red, and said, "Mr. Newberg, I'm so sorry. Listen, if you want me to, I'll stop doing it."

His comeback startled me. "No, no!" he said. "Keep it up! If they're not complaining, they're not listening," he said. "I'll deal with the complaints, you just keep doing what you're doing. You've got people talking, and that's what radio is supposed to do. Now carry on!"

I never forgot that. The big boss had my back. He wasn't trying to censor me, or discourage me from being creative, no matter how badly I might stumble now and then. When I told other radio people that story, they would say, "What? The GM got complaints, and didn't try to shut you down? Man, I wish I had a boss like that!"

That was Mr. Newberg. I was fortunate enough to work for him for five years. I only got to talk to him a couple of times in the past decade, and we also exchanged e-mails after his successor at

WGOW/WSKZ, the equally wonderful Dan Brown, sent him a copy of my first book. I told him what a hero he was to me, and he humbly thanked me before changing the subject to how fortunate he was to have worked with so many great people in Chattanooga.

My radio co-workers always referred to him as "The Big Guy." He was tall, but we weren't referring to his height. He had a big heart, big talent, and made a big impact on our lives. When you think back to that era of local radio, which included Garry and Dale, the Morning Zoo, the arrival of Jim Reynolds, the hiring of David Earl Hughes, Mike Allison, Scott Chase, the Window Wings, the Gold Card, the discovery of Rush Limbaugh, the Studio in the Sky, a team of great

news reporters (including my wife, Cindy), the sponsorship of countless concerts, Dancin' Dorothy, and so much more. It all has Mr. Newberg's fingerprints on it.

To borrow a phrase from my friend Jerry Pond, I'm sure Don Newberg missed radio during his retirement years. But not nearly as much as it missed him.



*Left: Don Newberg, in his journalism days, interviews the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King.*



# Quirks, Kinks & Oddities Abounded in TN Radio



by Paul Randall Dickerson

Nearly every radio station has proprietary quirks and oddities in its history and Tennessee seems particularly rich with them.

I was enlightened on this site by Brian Craig of WEVL in Memphis that a longtime player in the Bluff City, WHBQ, took its call sign from the slogan, "We Have Better Quartets."

Here are a few other kinks that most folks may not know.

- **WUSY-FM in Chattanooga** had a 50's style break room that looked like it came from Arnold's Drive-in of Happy Days fame.
- **WSM-AM in Nashville** left Knob Hill in 1982 to move into what was once WSIX-AM's transmitter building in front of the Opryland Hotel. The sculpted landscaping feature was earth graded up to disguise the old tower bases.
- **WFLI-AM (RIP)** had a 50-thousand-watt signal that was so sharply defined that one could stand atop Raccoon Mountain behind the tower field just outside of Chattanooga at night, look down at "Jet-Fli's" towers and yet, not be able to receive it.
- **WKGN-AM in Knoxville** operated for a number of years out of a dilapidated former grocery store on the University of Tennessee "strip." An old ceiling track that used to carry hog carcasses into the back was still up there. The program director's office was in a front showcase window.
- **WLAC-AM**, at its first downtown Nashville studio, had a pipe organ.
- **WMAK-AM in Nashville** had, for a mercifully short time, a "staff dog" – a St. Bernard named Brandy. She wasn't housebroken.

- **WBMC-AM in McMinnville** was put on the air in 1946 by *The Southern Standard* newspaper, which felt so strongly in the medium that it named its editor, "Chick" Brown, general manager.
- When Mooney Broadcasting bought **WMAK-AM in Nashville**, the company sent in Allen Dennis, who had worked there before under Lin Broadcasting, to team with Alan Nelson and do the morning show. Dennis swore the station wasn't putting out as strong a signal as it formerly did. Sure enough, when a metal detector was brought in, engineers found thieves had ripped up a good part of the copper ground system at the towers and sold it for scrap.
- When **WNOX-AM** built new studios, prior to the Whittle Springs Hotel being demolished, a huge piece of the building was dedicated to *The Tennessee Barn Dance* country music show. It had permanent seating, a separate control room, a stage with theater lighting and clean sight lines – just in case the company got a television license. It did not.
- **WSIX AM-FM in Nashville** kept its call letters intact while its TV sister went down the spectrum and changed call signs twice. The TV went from Channel Eight to Channel Two, WSIX-TV to WNGE-TV and then to WKRN-TV. The last two call sets represented ownership by General Electric and then Knight-Ridder. Later owners Young, Media General and Nextstar left well enough alone.



WHBQ's "Daddy-O" Dewey Phillips gets a nice reprise in the current CMT series "Sun Records." Actor Keir O'Donnell does a good job portraying Phillips' frantic delivery and oddball sense of humor.

## The Tennessee Radio Hall of Fame:

Working to Preserve  
Tennessee's Rich Radio History.



Don't forget — (nudge, nudge)

## REMINDERS



### What's Your Radio Story?

Do you have a radio story you'd like to share? It can be anything that is part of your radio history.

**We love radio stories. Please, tell us yours.**

Just email it to [starmagic@comcast.net](mailto:starmagic@comcast.net).

### Keeping Up With the Hall

Our newsletter is published the first of every month. Back issues may be viewed on our official website: [www.tennradiohalloffame.org](http://www.tennradiohalloffame.org)

Let Treasurer Cindy Arnold know of any change in your email address so you don't miss an issue!

### Collecting Our History

The Hall has a committee to collect and purchase Tennessee radio memorabilia, including old microphones, on-air signage, transmitter parts, promotional items and anything else related to radio stations in our state.

If you have items to donate (or purchase on Ebay, Craigslist, etc.) please contact Nick Archer via a message on the TnRHOF Facebook page.

Our Facebook page now boasts more than 1,200 members, and our YouTube Page includes air checks, inductions and other audio/video memories.



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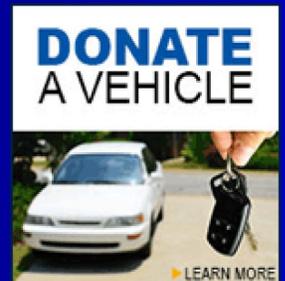
May 6, 2017

Induction Banquet & Ceremony  
Marriott Nashville Airport  
600 Marriott Drive, Nashville



More Events Coming Soon!  
To check the TRHOF event calendar anytime, go to the home page of our website:  
<http://tennradihalloffame.org>

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