

WGEM's GOLDEN JUBILEE



50 YEARS OF LOCAL TELEVISION
1953 - 2003





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1953-2003

Leo T. Henning

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I like the word *collaboration*. Not in the way the French Resistance described support for the Nazis, but in its better meaning: "to work jointly with others or together." Television, like theatre, is collaboration. The work cannot be performed solo. It requires an ensemble. This book is also collaboration; 50 years of ensemble between a few hundred people.

First, thanks to Thomas A. Oakley, the president and CEO of Quincy Newspapers, Inc. and Quincy Broadcasting Company, and Ralph M. Oakley, the vice president and COO of Quincy Newspapers, Inc. Their dedication to WGEM and its history always kept stories alive and easily accessible. Their leadership, guidance and support of the creative people at WGEM have always been steady and caring.

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PREFACE

Television first came to the Tri-State area as WGEM TV signed on September 4, 1953.

This book is not as much a history of local broadcasting in this region as much as it is a celebration of shared experiences, transmitted into area homes by WGEM TV. For most of us, these experiences make up a collective memory and some of the touchstones of our lives.

This memory would not exist without the vision of my father, T.C. Oakley, a third generation family member, who led our company and its owners into television. Oakley and Lindsay family members have continued to be committed to the newspaper and broadcasting businesses, including their pioneering venture into television in Quincy.

Today, QNI owns and operates 2 Daily and Sunday newspapers, 11 television stations, two radio stations, and a video production company.

Tribute should be given to the directors, officers and stockholders of Quincy Newspapers, Inc. for having the vision and taking a significant risk to enter the contested and uncertain business of local television.

Many observers believed television could not succeed in small markets like Quincy. It did, in fact, take many years to finally break even from losses incurred in those early days.

We have had many partners that have made WGEM-TV successful over these 50 years. Our excellent managers and loyal employees have made WGEM successful in serving its viewers. WGEM is distinguished by a long list of veteran employees, some of whom have spent their entire broadcast career with the station.

Our advertisers fund what we do on our television station. Many of them have had relationships with WGEM-TV that span decades. The advertising images they have presented have fueled the engine of our local economy.

Our network partners; the NBC Television Network has been with us since the beginning, providing a significant portion of our program schedule, the NBC News Channel is a key component of local news and special event coverage, The ABC Television Network delivered high quality entertainment shows to WGEM in the early years of the station, and hundreds of syndicators and program suppliers helped us create a mosaic of program choices.

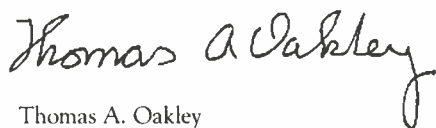
Finally, there are the generations of WGEM -TV viewers, who make the magic of free, over-the-air broadcasting work.

Television has made an enormous contribution to the development of the Tri-State region over the past 50 years. All of these partners share in the credit of the achievements highlighted in the following pages. Each has played a crucial role in enabling us to present high quality news and entertainment programs free of charge, to create an infrastructure to provide service in times of emergency, and a means to contribute to the economic development of the region.

The strength of WGEM is localism. It is our lifeblood and our franchise. It ties us to the community. And, as the multi-channel environment continues to expand, it will be localism that separates free over-the-air radio and television stations from other alternatives.

As we transition to the exciting digital era for television and radio and literally redefine ourselves in the technical sense – WGEM will always remember who we are and what we deliver. We are local; the eyes and ears of the Tri-State community. Cable and satellite TV provide a bounty of fine program choices, but they are not local.

Local charities and community non-profit organizations count on WGEM TV to carry important messages, especially during critical times. People in Quincy, Macomb, Keokuk, Hannibal, Ft. Madison and all points in between count on us to provide local news and warn them of severe weather or other emergencies. Teachers and community leaders count on us to deliver important messages on education, health and safety. Local and state governments count on us to inform citizens. Business leaders expect us to provide leadership in economic development. Localism is unique to over-the-air television, and WGEM TV will continue to enhance and nurture it for the next 50 years.



Thomas A. Oakley
President & C.E.O.
Quincy Newspapers, Inc. and
Quincy Broadcasting Company



To

Mom, Dad, Joe and Tom, for making it possible.

Sue, for making it achievable.

Matthew and Jeanne, for making it necessary.



WQDI FM sports announcer Paul McClelland (right) and *Herald-Whig* sports editor Fred Gray (left) at ringside of a 1948 Golden Gloves boxing match in Quincy.



Hampshire Street in the late 1940s. The WGEM AM studios were located in the Hotel Quincy, mid-block on the left.

BEGINNINGS

Joe Bonansinga had faith. Ever an optimist, he believed success would come at the convergence of persistence and opportunity. For him, the summer of 1953 was a single day—a frenetic, nonstop blur of activity. He was on a mission and he was determined that his team would prevail. He worked, pleaded, and cajoled. He persevered, hoped, and prayed. He trusted Providence for a favorable outcome to match his lyrical surname. Italian for “good sign.”

Joe grew up on busy Hampshire Street in downtown Quincy, Illinois. By the early 1950s, he was the general manager of a growing radio broadcasting operation located just a few steps down the street from his boyhood home. He was working for a progressive company led by a visionary man.

The radio broadcasting venture was less than five years old and was struggling to establish firm footing, yet it was already standing at the threshold of a new era—the age of television.

Along with wisdom and steady leadership from above, Joe needed the help of his boyhood chums from Hampshire Street to cross over the doorstep into the television age. He competed with other old friends. He was determined that his team would cross the finish line first. He would deliver on his promise.

The story of local TV in the Tri-State area can be traced to the development of Quincy area radio, which has its roots in the history of Quincy newspapers.

Joe Bonansinga came to broadcasting after having earlier careers in show business and sales. In late 1944, while serving as an Army company clerk at Ford McPherson, Georgia, he was asked by childhood friends—brothers Donald, Richard, and Larry Fischer—to join in a new radio venture in Quincy. Quincy Broadcasting Company (QBC) incorporated that year. In 1947, the company was granted a license for a Quincy radio station at 1440 kilocycles on the AM band.

Donald Fischer, the former network operations manager for NBC Radio in Washington and announcer for President Franklin D. Roosevelt, wanted to return to his hometown to start a radio station. The station would carry

the call sign WGEM to form an immediate association with Quincy, “The Gem City.” He first had to negotiate a call letter exchange with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in Washington. The desired call sign had already been assigned to a radio base station on a yacht owned by the swashbuckling movie star Errol Flynn.

Fischer’s return to Quincy was delayed until late 1947, so Joe Bonansinga figured prominently in the launch of the radio station. He was the first, and for a time, the only station employee. WGEM AM 1440 Radio made its debut on January 1, 1948 in a studio on the lobby floor of the Hotel Quincy at 513 Hampshire Street, one block from Joe’s boyhood home. He was referred to as the commercial manager, which meant he sold the advertising. No stranger to the Quincy media landscape, he knew the startup station would face formidable challenges.

Located less than a block away, WTAD AM Radio, which was headed by Walter Rothchild, virtually owned the Quincy area radio market in the 1940s, having signed on the air in 1925. Joe suspected Rothchild would be

listening intently during the first few days of WGEM AM’s operation so he worked feverishly before the launch date to ensure the first broadcasts were filled with commercial announcements.

“It felt like a funeral parlor.”

At 6:00 A.M. on New Year’s Day, WGEM AM’s first broadcast began with “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Announcer Moe Harvey followed with remarks about the new station. Then, at 6:20 A.M., the broadcast abruptly terminated. The Quincy area was crystallized the night before by one of the worst ice storms in its history. Telephone lines carrying the studio broadcast to the transmitter were severed. It would be three days before WGEM AM returned to the air.

“There were plants and flowers spread around my



Thomas C. Oakley

Thomas Crawford Oakley was born in Quincy in 1909. He was the son of Ray M. and Kate Burks Oakley. His father had come to Quincy from Rockford, Illinois in 1891 to work for *The Quincy Daily Herald*. Oakley attended Madison



Elementary School, Quincy Senior High School, Western Military Academy in Alton, and Beloit College.

He began his career at *The Quincy Herald-Whig* in 1929 and held a variety of management positions at the newspaper. He married

Mary S. Sullivan in November 1930.

Oakley was named secretary and treasurer of Quincy Newspapers, Inc. in 1944 and spearheaded QNI's move into broadcasting. He supervised the sign-on and operation of QNI-owned WQDI FM Radio in 1947. He became general manager of *The Herald-Whig* in 1948 and was named president of Quincy Broadcasting Company, which operated WGEM AM the same year. WQDI FM later changed its call letters to WGEM FM.

After the radio consolidation, Oakley soon obtained a television broadcasting license for QNI. He directed the development of WGEM TV, the area's first television station, and later participated in the development of cable television in the area. He became vice president of Quincy Cablevision in 1965. He remained president of Quincy Broadcasting Company until his death in 1969.

An outstanding civic leader and worker for Quincy area progress, Oakley was president of the St. Mary Hospital governing board, chairman of the Mental Health Authority, president of the Quincy Jaycees, and director of the Quincy Area Chamber of Commerce. He was a central figure in the transition from the Community Chest to the United Way fund drives. He was also active in Junior Achievement, the Quincy Transportation League, and Quincy Country Club.

His three sons held key positions with *The Quincy Herald-Whig* and WGEM. Thomas A. Oakley serves as president and CEO of Quincy Newspapers, Inc. and president of Quincy Broadcasting Company. Peter A. (Tony) Oakley began his career at WGEM and is now the community relations director of *The Herald-Whig*, and secretary and assistant treasurer of Quincy Newspapers, Inc. David R. Oakley worked as the advertising manager at *The Herald-Whig* before moving to Quincy Broadcasting Company, where he served as the vice president and general manager from 1975–1983. He is also a member of the Quincy Broadcasting Company's board of directors.

Thomas C. Oakley's grandson, Ralph M. Oakley, was the vice president and general manager of Quincy Broadcasting Company from 1988–1995 and currently serves as vice president and COO of Quincy Newspapers, Inc.

office from well-wishers," Bonansinga later said. "It felt like a funeral parlor. What a contrast! From the euphoria of the launch to despair in 20 minutes!"

The task of bringing more diversity to Tri-State area radio was no small feat. Toward the end of World War II, there had been spirited competition for the two AM radio licenses available in Quincy.

Two rival area newspapers, *The Quincy Whig-Journal* and *The Quincy Herald*, experimented with broadcasting when they briefly and separately operated radio stations in the early 1920s. In 1926, the two newspapers merged to form Quincy Newspapers, Inc. (QNI) and began publishing *The Quincy Herald-Whig*. The merger brought about the business union of the Lindsay and Oakley families, two prominent publishing families. Heading the new corporation were A.O. Lindsay, Sr., director of sales, and Ray M. Oakley, business manager. Frank M. Lindsay of Decatur, Illinois, brother of A.O. Lindsay, was one of the directors of the new company.

The Lindsay family also had interest in *The Decatur Herald & Review*, a newspaper in Decatur, Illinois. F. Merrill Lindsay, Frank Lindsay's son, began working in the Decatur newspaper's business office in the early 1930s. Soon Merrill began doing play-by-play announcing for the newspaper's radio station WSOY AM. He became an Illinois broadcasting legend, producing the first play-by-play broadcasts of Illinois high school sports and University of Illinois athletics. He was named general manager of WSOY in 1935. Lindsay later became chairman of QNI from 1969 until 2001.

Radio was becoming a good business in Decatur for the Lindsay family. The emerging medium was a topic of discussion at QNI board meetings as Frank Lindsay reported on Merrill's progress at WSOY. However, the challenges of operating *The Quincy Herald-Whig* during the darkest days of the Great Depression delayed a permanent reentry into broadcasting by QNI. The influence of the Lindsay family and their financial and broadcast industry contacts made a move into broadcasting inevitable.

Two of Ray M. Oakley's sons—Allen M. Oakley and Thomas C. Oakley—began working at *The Quincy Herald-Whig* as teenagers. They returned to the paper full-time after college. Allen Oakley began a distinguished career in the editorial department. Thomas C. Oakley became the business manager and was later named the general manager of *The Quincy Herald-Whig* and executive vice president of QNI.



Don Fischer (the first president of Quincy Broadcasting Company), Joe Bonansinga, Carlin French (Gates Radio), and an unknown representative of ABC Radio.

In the early 1940s, Oakley was charged by the board of directors to lead the company back into broadcasting. At the time, the AM band was the dominant vehicle of transmission and reception, although FM technology was available and provided superior, static-free audio transmission. RCA, the dominant manufacturer of radio receivers, was slow to adopt FM receiver technology. The widespread use of the FM band for military purposes in World War II further delayed commercial development.

By 1944, it was certain that America would be victorious in World War II. QNI filed for a radio license in the hope that a station would be operational soon. But QNI was unsuccessful in its first bid for one of the two Quincy licenses.

The first AM license was awarded to ILMO Broadcasting Company of Quincy. The second went to the Fischer brothers and QBC. However, Tom Oakley was undaunted by the temporary setback and gambled on an FM radio license application in December 1944. In May 1946, QNI received a construction permit for WQDI, the Tri-State area's first FM radio station.

“The Voice of The Herald-Whig”

Under Oakley's leadership, WQDI FM 105.1 Radio, “The Voice of *The Herald-Whig*,” presented its first broadcast on August 1, 1947. At the time, there were fewer than 300 FM radio receivers available in the entire region. Programming included news originating from *The Quincy Herald-Whig* newsroom, local high school basketball, and St. Louis Cardinals baseball.

QNI was back in the radio business to stay, but commercial FM radio was still an idea ahead of its time. Oakley knew that in order to establish a firm foundation in commercial broadcasting during that era, QNI needed an AM frequency. He and QNI remained patient, developed WQDI FM, and observed how the Fischer brothers fared with WGEM AM the following year. In the meantime, Oakley and the QNI board of directors immediately started researching an even more ambitious objective—providing television for the area.

Meanwhile, Joe Bonansinga was plodding the streets of Quincy selling commercial time on WGEM AM. Joe started his professional career as a musician. As a teenager, he backed up



Bill Wegman signed WQDI FM on the air in August 1947 and moved to WGEM AM in January 1948.

vaudeville acts as a saxophonist in the 12-piece Ned Picerno Orchestra at Quincy's Washington Theatre. He was also a sideman in the Frank Malambri Orchestra. In the late 1920s, Malambri had the contract for the orchestra at WTAD AM Radio. In those days, most radio programs were local. The station featured a live broadcast of the Frank Malambri Orchestra on weeknights at 7:00 P.M. During one of these

broadcasts, Joe met a young announcer named Walter Rothchild.

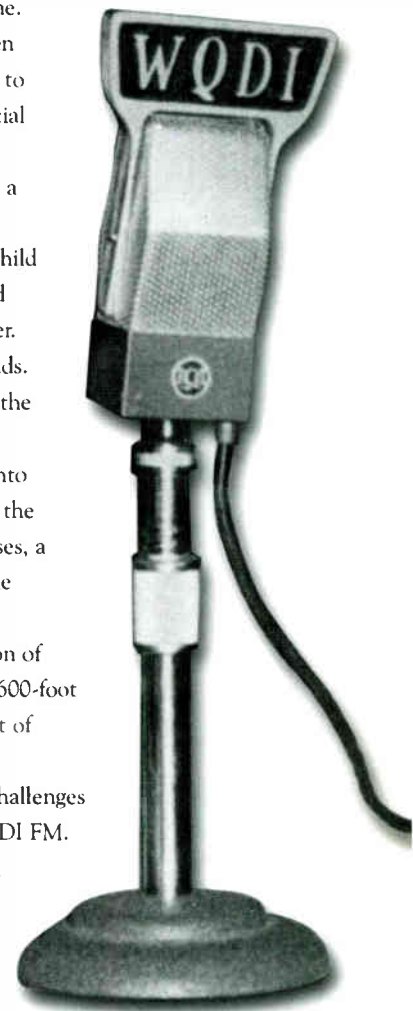
The talented Rothchild had recently moved to Quincy to manage WTAD after a stint at KMOX in St. Louis. Rothchild enjoyed socializing with the performers and musicians. On some broadcasts, he introduced requested selections as himself and then moments later reappeared as the band's singer under an assumed name. After the orchestra program, he often asked the musicians to hang around to read live radio dramas and commercial scripts.

The radio shows at WTAD were a wondrous experience for young Joe. After the evening concluded, Rothchild and the musicians frequently headed out for bowling or a late-night supper. Joe and Walter quickly became friends.

By 1948, Rothchild had become the region's most experienced broadcast executive. He guided WTAD AM into becoming the preeminent station in the region. Along the way, Lee Enterprises, a leading newspaper chain based in the Midwest, purchased the station.

Rothchild guided the construction of WTAD FM, which included a new 600-foot transmission tower located northeast of Quincy. He also mounted aggressive promotion to help throw back the challenges from startups WGEM AM and WQDI FM.

Around the time Joe Bonansinga was in the orchestra at WTAD,





Parker S. Gates, co-founder of Gates Radio Company and ILMO Broadcasting Company.

another saxophone player was on the evening dance circuit with Don Ahrens and his Tivoli Orchestra. Parker S. Gates was a prodigious young man. He had a rare gift for technical innovation to complement his

musical ability. He tinkered with radios, amplifiers, and other equipment in a small electronics shop off Hampshire Street. Gates, together with his parents, formed Gates Radio Company in 1922.

By 1936, he had perfected a transcription turntable for recording, a broadcast remote amplifier, and a newly designed AM radio transmitter. Gates Radio Company helped the war effort after Pearl Harbor, supplying transmitters and other radio equipment to the U.S. government.

Gates was also interested in owning a commercial radio station. In 1944, he formed ILMO Broadcasting Company and entered the competition for an AM license in Quincy. Gates was awarded the construction permit for WFAW AM in late 1945. However, station construction was delayed indefinitely because KMOX AM in St. Louis protested the grant, claiming the risk of potential frequency interference. ILMO Broadcasting's application went into limbo. In the end, WFAW AM never made it on the air. Gates was forced to the broadcasting sidelines during the premiere of QNI's WQDI FM and QBC's WGEM AM, and the construction of WTAD FM.

The programming at WGEM was off to a good start. The Fischer brothers were experienced, large-market broadcasters. They brought a highly professional and state-of-the-art approach to operations in WGEM's early months. However, the operation was costly and under capitalized, and commercial activity developed slowly.

By May 1948, the Fischer brothers were looking for help. QNI still wanted an AM station. Parker Gates still wanted one too. With the Fischers wanting to sell, Joe Bonansinga was worrying about his future employment at WGEM under a new owner.

Then, John T. Reardon, a local attorney, offered a solution. Reardon had known Joe Bonansinga since high school at Quincy

College Academy. He was close with the Fischer brothers and Gates. He also played golf regularly with Tom Oakley. He served as the catalyst to broker a deal.

QNI and ILMO Broadcasting purchased the controlling interest in QBC (WGEM AM) from the Fischer brothers on June 14, 1948. Within a few months, WQDI FM changed its call letters to WGEM FM. The Fischer brothers went on to other business interests. Oakley asked Joe Bonansinga to stay on as general manager of WGEM in 1949. Thus began a business association and a friendship that would last the rest of their lives. Gates permanently set aside his pursuit of WFAW AM.

QNI now had the desired foothold in radio broadcasting. Joe Bonansinga had a new boss, friend, and mentor in Tom Oakley.

In 1950, Gates sold his interest in QBC to QNI, dissolving ILMO Broadcasting to expand his radio equipment business. However, he would later come to play a pivotal role in the history of WGEM.

Gates Radio Company grew into worldwide prominence before it was sold to Harris-Intertype (later Harris Corporation) in 1957 and became one of the leading manufacturers of broadcast equipment in the world.

At the end of 1948, Joe Bonansinga and Walter Rothchild, two old-time radio friends, now stood on opposite sides of the block, as WGEM AM FM and the formidable WTAD AM FM battled furiously for the loyalty of area radio listeners. Tom Oakley and QNI were now in broadcasting for keeps. Oakley charged Bonansinga with building WGEM into a worthy market leader. As always, Joe accepted the challenge.

Almost from the day of the radio consolidation, Tom Oakley was busy working on securing a TV station for QNI.

At the conclusion of World War II, the few existing prewar TV stations were permitted to resume operations. NBC TV went on the air at 9:00 A.M. on V-E Day and covered the event for 14 continuous hours. By 1946, NBC boasted a network of four affiliated stations in New York, Philadelphia, Washington, and Schenectady (home of General Electric).

At the beginning of 1948, there were only 19 operating TV stations and 175,000 TV sets in America. By the end of that year, 47 stations were in operation and over 1 million TV sets had been sold.

PAGE TWENTY-EIGHT THE QUINCY (ILL.) HERALD-WHIG, THURSDAY

WGEM Gets TV Permit For Quincy Channel 10

The federal communications commission Wednesday granted a construction permit for Television Channel 10 in Quincy to Quincy Broadcasting company, operator of Radio Station WGEM. In which The Herald-Whig owns a majority stock interest.

The action, taken Wednesday afternoon, was formally announced by the FCC Thursday morning. Quincy Broadcasting company is

equipment. FCC granting of the Quincy channel exclusively to Quincy Broadcasting was made possible when Lee Broadcasting, operator of Radio Station WTAD here, withdrew its competing application for Channel 10 Monday. The withdrawal averted further delay that would have resulted from a contested hearing and left Quincy Broadcasting the sole applicant for the Quincy channel.

tower will be located on the Columbus road four miles north east of the center of Quincy. WGEM-TV has specified a 100 foot tower which would make antenna height above the average terrain of 676 feet. It is intended to request the FCC to amend the construction permit to provide for an additional 100 feet of tower height. It is expected that a tower height of 776 feet on average terrain WGEM-TV will

Quincy Herald-Whig article announcing that WGEM TV received its construction permit for Channel 10.

“It is altogether possible that our earnings will be reduced.”

Tom Oakley consulted regularly with Merrill Lindsay in Decatur about the development of local television. Lindsay, who was simultaneously working with investors to start a TV station in Champaign, Illinois, saw great promise in the new medium and became QNI's leading proponent of the new venture. Lee Enterprises, owner of WTAD AM FM, and Rothchild also began a quest for a TV license.

It is important to note the tremendous risk inherent in these ventures at that time. After five years, QNI was still supporting its radio broadcasting activities with revenue from *The Quincy Herald-Whig*. Television was a lot more complicated than radio. The initial and ongoing capital needs of the venture were daunting. Tom Oakley knew that even if QNI was successful in its TV bid, the company would be operating two fledgling businesses for several years. The venture would further strain the resources of the company, which had recently struggled through the Great Depression and World War II. The business move into television was no sure thing, and it would be a decade before the gamble would pay off.

Oakley wrote to his mother in California in early June, “The television business is at a standstill. Expect word from Washington each week but nothing happens. If we should get a go-ahead, we could be in business by September. It will be rough at first, so don't make any financial commitments as it is altogether possible that our earnings will be reduced...it is a definite possibility.”

The FCC suspended new television license grants in 1948. The moratorium was lifted in early 1953. QBC was granted a construction permit for WGEM TV, Channel 10, Quincy, Illinois on June 18, 1953. Lee Enterprises secured a license for KHQA TV, Channel 7, Hannibal, Missouri at the same time.

Securing the permit was difficult enough, but a new transmission tower and building also had to be built at WGEM. Transmitter and studio equipment had to be purchased and installed. Network and syndicated programming had to be secured. Everyone expected that the first TV station on the air would have a significant promotional advantage.

Lee Enterprises and Rothchild started with a big lead. The WTAD FM Radio tower was already tall enough and strong enough to handle a television antenna.

Because of WTAD's long-time association with CBS Radio, Rothchild was able to quickly secure a CBS TV network affiliation. All KHQA needed was the transmitter and studio equipment, and broadcasts could begin. In late July and early August, it did not appear that WGEM could close the gap.

Tom Oakley and Joe Bonansinga left on the first of many trips to New York in June to attempt to secure a network for WGEM TV. WGEM AM FM Radio was affiliated with ABC Radio, so an affiliation with the new ABC Television Network seemed logical. But NBC TV had much of the TV star power of the time and dominated viewing with shows like *Texaco Star Theatre* starring “Mr. Television” Milton Berle, *Your Show of Shows* with Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca, and *Your Hit Parade*.

Oakley reasoned that if WGEM could get an NBC network affiliation and then use selected programs from the ABC Television Network, they could save on syndicated programming costs and reduce some of the downside risk of the new TV venture.

F. Merrill Lindsay, Jr.

F. Merrill Lindsay, Jr. was born in 1910 in Decatur, Illinois. He was the son of Frank M. and Vivian Lindsay Simpson. Frank M. Lindsay was one of the founders of Quincy Newspapers, Inc., which was formed in 1926 with the consolidation of *The Quincy Whig-Journal* and *The Quincy Herald*.

He graduated from Kenyon College and received a master's degree in business from Harvard University. He returned to Decatur to work in the family business, Lindsay-Schaub Newspapers, which published *The Decatur Herald & Review* and owned WSOY AM Radio.

Merrill Lindsay started work at WSOY in 1935 and was the play-by-play announcer for the first broadcast of an IHSA state high school basketball tournament game. He married Margery M. Crawford in 1940. He served in the Navy in World War II, attaining the rank of lieutenant commander.

After the war, he returned to management duties at WSOY and pioneered the development of WSOY FM, which was at the time the only commercial FM radio station in Illinois, outside Chicago.

He served as chairman of Quincy Newspapers, Inc. from 1969–2001, and was a director of Broadcast Music, Inc. and the Midland Press Association. He was chairman of the Illinois Associated Press Radio Association and a director of the National Association of Broadcasters. He was the second president of the Illinois Broadcasters Association, which honored him with the Vincent T. Wasilewski Distinguished Service Award for outstanding service to broadcasting in 1994.



Joseph S. Bonansinga

Joe Bonansinga was born in Quincy in 1910 and graduated from Quincy College Academy and Quincy College. He joined the Quincy Musicians Union at the age of



16 and played the saxophone and clarinet in the Washington Theatre orchestra. Starting in 1931, he was a sales representative with John Musolino and Co., a wholesale produce distributor. He led his own orchestra from 1933–1938 and served in the U.S. Army in World War II.

He became the first

employee of WGEM AM Radio as commercial manager on October 1, 1947. He was promoted to general manager of WGEM in 1949 and reported to Thomas C. Oakley, president of Quincy Broadcasting Company.

Bonansinga developed many of the local shows that were required to fill out the program schedule in WGEM TV's early days.

His dedication to community service is the most lasting legacy of his 28-year career at WGEM. He continued to influence the station long after his retirement in 1975. He remained a director of QBC until his death in 2003.

He was a tireless promoter of his hometown and earned the name "Mr. Quincy" for his volunteer efforts. He ran for Quincy mayor in 1979 and later served as vice president for development at Quincy College. He was named a trustee of Quincy College in 1989. He was president of the Illinois Broadcasters Association, Quincy Rotary Club Quincy Sales and Marketing Executives Club, Quincy Chamber of Commerce, St. Mary Hospital, and the Quincy Housing Authority. He served as a director of the Quincy Salvation Army and spearheaded scores of local fundraising events for almost every area nonprofit organization.

He received the Quincy Jaycees' Outstanding Boss of the Year award in 1963, the Golden Deeds award from the Exchange Club, the Parker S. Gates award from the Quincy Area Chamber of Commerce, the Family Service Humanitarian of the Year award, the Distinguished Citizen award from the Boy Scouts of America, the Studs Terkel Award from the Illinois Humanities Council, and was named Quincy University Alumnus of the Century. The Illinois Broadcasters Association honored him with the Vincent T. Wasilewski award for service to broadcasting in 1996.

But NBC did not court WGEM. Oakley had to sell the network on the benefits of affiliating with WGEM TV. After pounding the pavements of Midtown Manhattan for several weeks and countless meetings, he convinced Robert Aaron, director of affiliate relations for NBC, to intercede with Sylvester "Pat" Weaver, then president of the NBC Television Network. WGEM TV became an affiliate of the NBC Television Network by mid-July and arranged a secondary affiliation with the ABC Television Network that same month.

"If we make our date of September 1, it will be something of a record."

Now that the network affiliation was secured, Oakley gave Joe new marching orders: Be on the air by September 1, 1953. Oakley acquired transmitter property on Columbus Road in Quincy, purchased a tower and transmitter, and ordered the construction of the transmitter building. Components for the new tower were delivered in early July. Construction of the tower began on July 13. Daily progress was reported with pictures in *The Quincy Herald-Whig*.

The WGEM TV tower was completed on July 28. The transmitter was moved and positioned in the new building on August 2. Transmitter and studio equipment tests were conducted throughout the month. Oakley reported progress regularly to the board, and Bonansinga stayed focused on the September deadline.

But WGEM's quest encountered a serious setback when it was learned that the TV antenna, set to perch atop the 600-foot tower and essential to transmission, would not be delivered until late October.

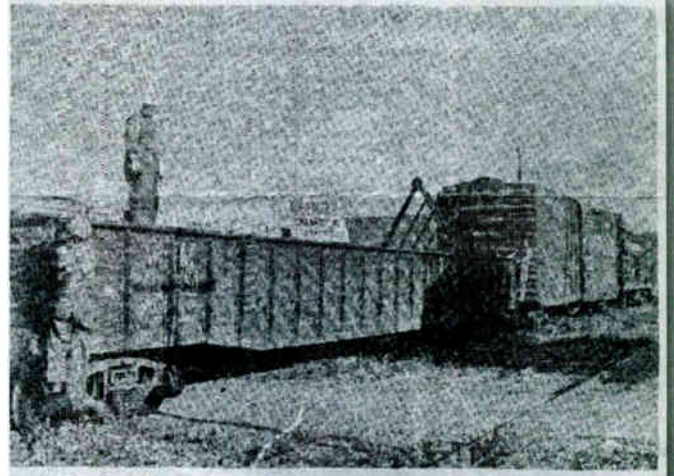
Tom Oakley was concerned and commented, "If we make our date of September 1, it will be something of a record." Joe Bonansinga took the development personally. He had known KHQA's Rothchild all of his adult life. He respected him as a worthy competitor. In the first five years of competition with WTAD, Rothchild always had the upper hand. WGEM could not lay claim as the region's first radio station. Joe could not allow someone else to secure the distinction of being the region's first television station.



He told Oakley he was determined to stick with the original timetable. He worked the telephones, calling anyone he knew to try to speed the delivery of the TV antenna, with no luck. Frustrated, he left his desk at WGEM for a walk down Hampshire Street. It was a stroll he had taken a thousand times as a boy, down the bluff to Front Street by the Mississippi River (a street now named Bonansinga Drive), where in younger days he wondered at the spectacle of steamboats and river packets.

For Joe, the Quincy riverfront was a place of meditation. There, he could look across the broad river toward the open western sky and see possibilities. On this visit, he did more than think—he prayed—trusting that WGEM would find a way.

Work on WGEM-TV Tower to Start Monday



It took a gondola car to transport the big transmitting towers of WGEM-TV to Quincy from North Wales, Pa. Tower in sections and carefully packaged is shown arriving at Walton Heights for transportation to the transmitter site.

“We’ve got to get on the air first.”

Trekking back up the bluff, he passed Gates Radio Company, which was located at 2nd and Hampshire Street. The plant was shut down for summer break. He entered the building and found his old friend, fellow musician, and business associate Parker Gates alone in his office, catching up on paperwork. Joe explained WGEM’s dilemma and asked for help. He told Gates, “Parker, we’ve got to get on the air first. You tell me something you can cook up that we can put on that tower out there to get us on.”

Gates then devised a temporary, but elegant and effective solution. He recommended the use of a dipole antenna, which would be attached at a suitable height on the new tower with the signal transmission at reduced power. The solution was what WGEM TV needed to get back on schedule.

Joe contacted Andrew Corporation of Chicago and arranged to have a dipole antenna delivered to Quincy via rail. An executive for Avery-Knodel, Inc., the sales representative for WGEM in Chicago, went to the depot to make sure that the antenna was placed on a rail car. WGEM engineers met the train at the Quincy depot in the early morning hours and spirited the antenna away under heavy cover to the transmitter site.

Transmission tests began in secrecy on August 27. Reception of the test pattern throughout Quincy was most acceptable.

However, there was some doubt about the signal strength in the outlying areas. Joe had a friend in Carthage who owned a television receiver. He telephoned him to see if he was receiving a test pattern. It was crystal clear. With transmission tests complete and reception now confirmed, Joe could see the finish line.

He then pressed the station staff to quickly complete the interconnection and testing of the studio equipment. There were problems and the original launch date passed. But work continued nonstop through the first three days of September.

WGEM
— TV
CHANNEL 10
QUINCY
ILLINOIS

WGEM TV test pattern.

“This is WGEM TV, Channel 10, Quincy, Illinois.”

WGEM's newly found advantage would not remain secret indefinitely. Joe arrived at the office at 8:30 A.M. on Friday, September 4, 1953, and telephoned Tom Oakley. He told Oakley that one way or another WGEM TV would be on the air that evening. The station staff pressed for more time, but Joe was resolute. “It was pandemonium,” he later recalled.

A studio camera was finally readied and a movie reel was standing by. At 7:00 P.M., a test pattern and tone was sent to the transmitter. By 7:30 P.M., the lights in the reconfigured WGEM Radio studio came up and local television for the Tri-States was born.

The programming that evening consisted of brief remarks from announcer Bill Wegman and some guests, then a presentation of the 1941 movie *Broadway Limited*, starring Dennis O’Keefe and Victor McLaglen, and finally a newscast with Charlie Griffith, which was delivered without a prompter, entirely from memory.

The tandem of Tom Oakley and Joe Bonansinga pushed WGEM TV across the finish line in the lead position. When the station signed off its first broadcast shortly after 9:00 P.M. that night, Joe recalled his days at WTAD Radio in the 1920s—the music, the bowling, the late-night suppers, and Walter Rothchild. Joe knew that there would be many more spirited and respectful years of competition to come. But he had carried the day against his old friend.

A small newspaper article in the Saturday, September 5, 1953 edition of *The Quincy Herald-Whig* announced that WGEM TV was on the air. The Sunday edition featured a full-page advertisement for the new TV service. WGEM won the race, but it was a photo finish. Rothchild led KHQA TV to the air just a few weeks later. The assumed promotional advantage of being first to the air never really materialized.

In the end, the TV race to the air was just the first leg of a business contest that would extend for many years between these two competent and competitive men.

By the end of October, WGEM's permanent antenna was placed on the tower and the station increased to full power. Tri-State viewers now had local television and an immediate choice. No one then could imagine the enormous impact its presence would have on the region over the next 50 years.



ON THE AIR

WGEM-TV

Began Programming

On Channel 10 Friday,

September 4, at 7:30 P. M.

ON THE AIR

Every Night 7:00 to 9:00 P. M.,

C. D. T.

NBC **CHANNEL 10** **ABC**
Quincy, Illinois

Advertisement from the Sunday, September 6, 1953 *Herald-Whig*.



National radio personality Paul Harvey pays a visit to WGE M and his personal friend, Joe Bonarowski. At the time, the entrance to WGE M TV was open in the lobby of the Hotel Quincy.



MARY HARVEY



For Your
Daily Viewing Pleasure



CHARLENE OLDS



BILL WEIMAN

WGEM-TV



BOB TAYLOR

Presents

FRED COLGAN



NBC And ABC



BOB SCOTT

Programs



SAGEBRUSH SANDY

and the WGEM-TV



BOB TURK



JOE BOWER



**STAFF
OF
STARS**



MIKE OLDS



CHARLIE GRIFFITH



CLAIR FROST



CHANNEL 10

Before WGEM TV was connected to the wired NBC network, most of the programs were local and featured well-known local talent.

A GOLDEN AGE 1953-1959

The decade of 1950–1960 set the precedent for modern-day television programming. Many of the most popular shows on television today are throwbacks to the first Golden Age. Television viewers in the twentieth century can turn on their favorite local station and watch seamless network, syndicated, and local programs. The picture quality and switching are generally consistent. The color is rich. The stereo sound is excellent. Network programs are delivered via satellite and rebroadcast by the local station.

Before satellite distribution, network shows were delivered in real time through a terrestrial microwave system operated by American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T). The first network interconnection between Chicago and New York was installed in 1950. Coast-to-coast television broadcasting began in 1951. However, the completion of microwave connections to all of the new television stations coming on line at that time would take several years.

In 1953, WGEM TV did not broadcast any network programs live. Network shows were sent to the smaller markets on film several days and sometimes weeks after the live network broadcast in New York, Chicago, or St. Louis.

“Just the facts, Ma’am.”

The first network show from NBC that was broadcast by WGEM TV was *Dragnet*, a police drama starring Jack Webb. The show was created on film and delivered by NBC to stations already on the wired network. A copy of the film was later sent to unwired NBC stations like WGEM. The *Dragnet* episode seen by Tri-State viewers was actually broadcast on the wired network a few weeks earlier. At that time, WGEM TV was only allowed to broadcast the show every other week.

Throughout the 1950s, network television shows were usually wholly sponsored by one national advertiser. Even though WGEM TV was affiliated with NBC, there was no guarantee in the station's first year that the most popular NBC programs would be cleared for broadcast in the Tri-State area. Station executives had to persuade the controlling advertiser for each network program that the Quincy, IL/Hannibal, MO/Keokuk, IA market needed to be on their clearance list. This was no easy task.



TV cop Jack Webb played Sgt. Joe Friday on *Dragnet*, the first NBC show carried on WGEM TV.

“You can trust your car to the man who wears the star.”

One of the most popular network television shows in the early years was *Texaco Star Theatre* starring Milton Berle. The show was broadcast live over the wired network on Tuesday nights. Live broadcasts were filmed directly from the screen of a television set to create a *kinescope*, the early forerunner of videotape. In 1953 and into 1954, WGEM broadcast Berle's show from kinescopes delivered to the station days after the live NBC broadcast. The time delay did not diminish interest in the show. Many Tri-State families bought their first TV set primarily to watch “Uncle Miltie” and his comedic antics.

Charlie Griffith

Charles W. Griffith was born in Louisiana, Missouri and graduated from Louisiana High School. He served in the U.S. Navy in the South Pacific in World War II and later attended Michigan State University and the University of Southern California.

He began his broadcasting career at KHMO Radio in Hannibal, Missouri before joining WGEM Radio in 1953. He delivered the first newscast on WGEM TV on September 4, 1953.



Griffith anchored news on both radio and TV through the 1950s and later became WGEM news director. He hosted *Viewpoint*, a weekly public affairs program on WGEM Radio and TV for close to

three decades. In 1977, he helped to develop another public affairs program called *Contempo*, which focused on issues in education and the arts. From 1975 until the mid-1980s, he served as co-host for series of public affairs vignettes called *Capsule Comments*, which were scheduled throughout the WGEM TV broadcast day.

He was named director of news and public affairs in 1976 and continued as a news anchor on WGEM Radio until his retirement in 1995.



"Mr. Television" Milton Berle was the hottest comedy star on television in the 1950s, starring in the *Texaco Star Theatre* every Tuesday night on NBC.

Midwest audiences had never seen anything like *Texaco Star Theatre* before. From the opening routine with singing Texaco servicemen to the closing theme "Near You," Berle worked tirelessly to entertain with an unpredictable and zany level of improvisation. His popularity earned him the title "Mr. Television" and a 30-year contract with NBC for the then staggering sum of \$200,000 a year.

For almost the first full year of WGEM TV, the broadcast day began at 4:00 P.M. in the afternoon and signed off at 10:30 P.M. Locally produced shows comprised the bulk of the schedule. Since film was expensive and videotape would not arrive until the 1960s, all local programs and commercials were telecast live. The local talent and many concepts for the shows were borrowed from WGEM Radio.

"We didn't even have a TV at home. We had to come down here to watch TV."

"We were like an acting company," said Fred Colgan, then WGEM program director. "A bunch of us would hang around the studio in the evening, either doing a program or waiting to read live commercials. We didn't even have a TV at home. We had to come down to the station to watch TV."

The centerpiece of the broadcast day during that era was a 15-minute evening newscast called *The Three-Star Edition*, which was anchored variously by Charlie Griffith, Mike Olds, Fred Colgan, Andy James, Don Brohan, and Moe Harvey. It featured world and local news, weather, and sports. Throughout the 1950s, only one 15-minute local evening newscast was broadcast nightly. There was no national newscast from NBC.



Fred Briggs reported news for WGEM Radio and TV before moving to a distinguished journalism career as NBC bureau chief in Chicago and Berlin.

“It was crazy!”

Colgan recalled that the anchors had to run their own camera for these news shows. “Charlie Griffith would do a newscast from the desk and I’d run camera. Then someone else would do a live commercial and I’d deliver a sports report while Charlie ran camera. It was crazy!”



Don Brohan worked in news at WGEM in the early days. He took a backward tumble off a podium during a live newscast in 1954.

“Don Brohan weighed about 300 pounds,” said Colgan. “We did the news on a riser about a foot off the ground. One night during the live news, he scooted his chair back too far and fell head over heels backwards. He got up, put the chair back on the riser, and continued with the news. Everybody just had hysterics.”

A 6:00 P.M. newscast was added later. Charlie Griffith and Bob Turek read the local and national news, and Colgan reported the sports news. One memorable live broadcast included a story from Mudd Butte, Montana, which Griffith

The first live on-the-scene news coverage by WGEM TV was presented only a few weeks after the station signed on the air. A fire broke out at a local car dealer around the corner from the studio. Technicians rolled a camera out the rear and live news coverage got its start.

Early local news broadcasts did not always go smoothly. “Don Brohan

pronounced as “mud butt.” Colgan began to laugh to himself off-camera. Then Griffith unaware of the humor said, “Here’s Fred Colgan with sports.” Colgan appeared on camera laughing hysterically. “I tried to read the sports and couldn’t stop laughing for two solid minutes,” said Colgan. “Then Turek, who was sitting next me, starts laughing too. I gave up and said, ‘There’s no sports news tonight,’ and tossed it to him. Eventually, he composed himself and we finished the newscast.”

The first program of the broadcast day was *Inspiration Time* with Dr. Joe Bower. It featured gospel readings, spiritual messages, and religious music. Bower invited an assortment of religious musical groups to perform on the program. It was as much a showcase for local musical talent as it was a religious show.

Inspiration Time was followed by a creative local children’s program entitled *Once Upon a Time*. Mary Harvey (who later married Fred Colgan) hosted the 30-minute feature in which she read a children’s book to children gathered in the studio. As she narrated the story, Clair Frost, WGEM’s staff artist at the time, slowly created a mural of the entire story. By the end of the program, Frost presented a finished illustration of the story. Harvey said, “We had only 15 minutes. Sometimes the stories were a little long and I read very fast, and that caused special challenges for Clair.”



Host Mary Harvey Colgan and artist Clair Frost of WGEM’s *Once Upon a Time* and their studio guests; WGEM artist Clair Frost drew murals, while Mary Harvey Colgan read children’s stories on *Once Upon a Time*.



Keyboard Kapers was a nightly feature with (left to right) Bob Turek, baritone, Viola Hutmacher Soots, soprano, and Bob Meyer, keyboard specialist.



Bill Wegman hosted the locally produced *Pepsi Amateur Hour*, a weekly talent search that was WGEM's most popular show of the 1953-54 season.



Master control of WGEM TV in 1954 was primitive by today's standards. The video switcher is in the foreground with the audio console behind. The turntables were available to play music during the frequent technical problems and program interludes.



Inspiration Time with Joe Bower was the first program on the evening broadcasts on WGEM TV and featured spiritual readings and music every weekday afternoon at 4:00 P.M.

Another evening favorite was a show called *Culver-Stockton Call Board*, a showcase for Culver-Stockton College students in music, drama, and public affairs.

Boxing and wrestling had been mainstays of local television in the early years and WGEM TV was no exception. The station staged its own primitive version of *Friday Night Fights*. Local pugilists fought it out in a makeshift ring set up on the asphalt-tiled studio floor.

The show *Keyboard Kapers* was broadcast every night at 6:30 P.M. Bob Meyer, an organist and pianist, played musical requests sent in by area viewers. He also doubled as the station's continuity director and commercial copywriter. Meyer was often joined on the show by fellow organist and guitarist Boots Mitchell. In early 1954, he was joined by vocalist Viola Hutmacher Soots and baritone Bob Turek, who doubled as a reporter and radio news anchor for WGEM.

During one memorable live *Keyboard Kapers* broadcast, Meyer was providing an organ accompaniment for a visiting piccolo player who had headlined in the early part of the century with the John Phillip Sousa Band. Toward the end of the piccolo obbligato in "Stars and Stripes Forever," Meyer thought he smelled smoke. He glanced to the side and noticed fire. A studio light had overheated and ignited the drapery. Meyer raced to finish the march, and then shot up from the bench, ripped down the curtain, and stomped out the flames to the bewilderment of the home audience. The damage was minimal and the musical program immediately resumed. "The whole works could have gone up," commented Meyer.



Culver-Stockton Call Board was a weekly 15-minute program on WGEM TV featuring music and theatre students from Culver-Stockton College in Canton, Missouri.

“Viewers voted you in or out.”

One of the biggest hits of the 1953–1954 season was *The Pepsi Amateur Hour*, which was hosted by well-known WGEM Radio personality Bill Wegman. The program was basically a local version of the present-day *American Idol*. Each Saturday night at 9:00 P.M., area singers, instrumentalists, jugglers, comedians, and dancers tried their hand at the weekly prize, which was nothing more than a chance to return the following week as the featured act.

“Viewers voted you in or out,” Colgan said. “And everybody had to perform before the live studio audience. It was a tremendous show for us.”

The show was a huge undertaking for the new station. The staff worked throughout the week to book talent, format the show, and tabulate the hundreds of postcard ballots received each week. By the end of the first season, the show took a toll on station resources. Network programming became available to fill the time slot and *The Pepsi Amateur Hour* had its last telecast in May 1954.

For the first few years of operation, all local commercials were broadcast live, using local on-camera or live voice-over talent. The announcers were on hand at the station each evening, standing by for the commercial breaks. They received a cue and then delivered a pitch for products they often had to display, use, or sometimes eat. Presenting live commercials within a 30- or 60-second window was a daunting task and frequently created mayhem.



Boxing was a staple of TV programming in the 1950s, and WGEM TV hosted its own bouts in the studio. A knockout to the concrete studio floor was carefully avoided.

Bob Turek

Bob Turek was born in Cranford, New Jersey in 1930 and was raised in central Indiana. After graduating from Indiana University, he began his broadcasting career at WCSI Radio in Columbus, Indiana.

After two years of service with the U.S. Army, Turek placed an advertisement in a broadcasting trade journal offering his services as an announcer. Joe Bonansinga was looking to expand the staff of WGEM in preparation for daytime operations. Turek and Bonansinga met to discuss the job opening in New York City. Bonansinga hired him on the spot, and he began working at the station in March 1954.

Though hired as a newsman, Turek was a versatile performer. He had studied music as a student and possessed a rich baritone voice. His skills were immediately utilized when he joined keyboardist Bob Meyer and soprano Viola Hutmacher Soots on the local music show *Keyboard Kapers*.

He was assigned to the morning and midday news beat for most of his career, delivering news programs on both WGEM Radio and TV. He quickly became well known for his coverage of police and court news as well as his perspectives on area history. In the early 1960s, he developed the program *Series 100*, which provided vignettes of interesting stories about Tri-State area history.

Turek also did his share of commercial work, presenting live commercials during network station breaks and later appearing in prefilmed and videotaped commercials. He joined Bill Wegman as co-host of *The Jerry Lewis Telethon* in 1976 and hosted the annual event even after his retirement in 1998.

He was an invaluable resource in the later years of his broadcasting career, serving as WGEM morning news editor and helping to mentor dozens of young reporters in the ways of community journalism. During the Flood of 1993, Turek and his colleagues stayed at their posts for almost 30 consecutive days, bringing news and vital emergency information to area listeners and viewers.



Fred Colgan was scheduled to present a live commercial one evening in 1954 for Atlas-Praguer Beer, a local brew made in Warsaw, Illinois. The script called for Colgan to open a bottle of beer during the pitch and pour the beer into a glass. The beer, provided by the brewery, was left to chill in the studio refrigerator before the scheduled commercial break. An intrepid employee discovered the bottle during a lunch break and downed the brew, and then covered his tracks by filling the bottle with tap water. He recapped the bottle and left it in the refrigerator.

Colgan retrieved the bottle for the commercial break and stood by for his on-air cue. As he read through the script, he opened the bottle and poured its content into a beer glass, commenting on the "full-bodied head" in every glass of Atlas-Praguer Beer. Obviously, the sponsor was not amused.

A major change in programming took place in May 1954 when AT&T completed the microwave path to Quincy. For the first time, WGEM TV viewers could enjoy NBC shows live and in their normal pattern. Tri-State viewers settled in for broadcasts of *Texaco Star Theatre*, *The Kate Smith Hour*, *Dragnet*, *This Is Your Life* with Ralph Edwards, *Your Hit Parade*, and *You Bet Your Life* starring Groucho Marx. *Caesar's Hour* with Sid Caesar was a continuation of the early 1950s hit *Your Show of Shows*. The show featured Nanette Fabray and Carl Reiner, and was written by Larry Gelbart and Woody Allen. Another show called *The Colgate Comedy Hour* showcased such stars as Bob Hope, Dean Martin, Jerry Lewis, Eddie Cantor, Martha Raye, Danny Thomas, and Talullah Bankhead.

WGEM TV also presented the first great wave of quality television drama with shows such as *Philco Television Playhouse*, *Kraft Television Theatre*, and *Goodyear TV Playhouse*. The programs were a writer's dream: literate, live, and constantly in need of new material. Producers relied on hungry young actors like Grace Kelly, Sidney Poitier, Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward, Steve McQueen, Jason Robards, and Walter Matthau. The shows provided a weekly platform for a brilliant group of playwrights, including Horton Foote (*The Trip to Bountiful*), J.P. Miller (*The Days of Wine and Roses*), Gore Vidal (*Visit to a Small Planet*), and Paddy Chayevsky (*Marty*).

"Spectacular television."

In May 1954, Thomas C. Oakley and Joe Bonansinga attended the first NBC TV Network affiliates convention. They heard a briefing by General David Sarnoff, the founder and CEO of RCA and NBC. Sarnoff told the affiliates that the network would preempt regular programming three nights each week in the fall season of 1954 for a series of "Color Spectaculars."



(Left to right) Ralph Edwards hosted the NBC show *This Is Your Life*, which showcased the lives of celebrities and perfected the concept of the "tearful" family reunion; "Say the secret word" and a duck would drop from the ceiling on *You Bet Your Life* with "the one, the only" Groucho Marx. George Fenneman served as the studio announcer; Early network TV featured quality drama. *Philco Television Playhouse* featured Lauren Bacall and Henry Fonda in a live telecast in 1955 of *The Petrified Forest*.



The first network news program carried on WGEM TV was the *Camel News Caravan* with John Cameron Swayze. He anchored news on NBC for eight years and was known for his distinctive sign-off, "Glad we could get together."

Sarnoff wanted to create demand for RCA's new color television receivers. Color television on WGEM was still a few years away. Sarnoff's "Spectaculars" were eventually renamed *The Hallmark Hall of Fame* and were a hit with area viewers even in black and white. The broadcasts included the lavishly produced and extensively hyped *Satins and Spurs* starring Betty Hutton, *Our Town* starring Frank Sinatra, Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty* starring Dame Margot Fonteyn with the Royal Ballet, *The Petrified Forest* starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, and Laurence Olivier's three-hour broadcast of Shakespeare's *Richard III*.

Another 1954 spectacular on WGEM TV was the first area television broadcast of

a World Series game. The Cleveland Indians took on the New York Giants live from the Polo Grounds in New York. The Indians had won 110 regular season games, but the Giants swept the series in four games.

In late 1954, the late evening local newscast on WGEM TV was supplemented by 15 minutes of world and national news from NBC. *Camel News Caravan* with John Cameron Swayze (later known as a spokesperson for Timex watches) "hop-scotched the headlines," meaning that he would read one-sentence summaries of the news events of the day with no accompanying film footage. Swayze had a knack for memorizing large chunks of news copy and repeating it into the camera without the benefit of a teleprompter.

With cheers, hoots, and whistles, the music of Skitch Henderson and the NBC Orchestra, and a greeting of "Hi-ho, Steverino" from Louis Nye, *The Tonight Show* charged into WGEM history in 1954. Chicago native Steve Allen brought a hip edge, a wacky sense of humor, exceptional intelligence, and accomplished musical ability to late-night television. He was the first television performer to regularly interact with his audience. *The Tonight Show* introduced great comedy, jazz, Broadway, and Hollywood acts to mainstream America. Jonathan Winters, Don Adams, Lenny Bruce, and many others made their first TV appearances on *The Tonight Show*. The show developed its own cast of players. Along with Nye, Steve Lawrence, Eydie Gorme, Don Knotts, and Tom Poston joined the fun in a zany format that Jay Leno would certainly recognize today.

At the urging of NBC TV executives, WGEM TV decided to



Chicago native Steve Allen was the first host of *The Tonight Show* in 1954. The brainchild of NBC president Pat Weaver, the show permanently changed the sleeping habits of the nation.

Bill Wegman

Smooth, charming, witty, and well read was how many WGEM listeners and viewers described Bill Wegman. He was born in Quincy in 1927, and attended St. Peter's School and Quincy Senior High School. He studied in Enid Ireland's theatre and radio class at QHS. At the age of 16, he took a part-time announcing job at WTAD AM Radio.

He joined the Army in 1945 and was dispatched to Germany as part of the Army of Occupation after World War II. He was stationed near Nuremberg during the War Crimes Tribunal. After leaving Germany, he accepted a job on a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredge on the Mississippi River.

In August 1947, Wegman was part of the sign-on announcing staff at WQDI FM, which was then managed by Thomas C. Oakley. In late December 1948, he left WQDI to join the staff of WGEM, the new AM station in Quincy. There he became the familiar voice of *The Night Watchman* program every weeknight. During his early years at WGEM, he gained considerable experience as an emcee, hosting big band dances at Quincy's Casino Starlight Terrace. The Lawrence Welk Orchestra played at the Casino in the early 1950s, and Wegman served as the announcer for a broadcast that was sent out nationwide on the ABC Radio network.

He was recalled to the Army during the Korean War and served as a basic training drill instructor at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

Wegman was the studio announcer for the first broadcast of WGEM TV on September 4, 1953. He hosted *The Pepsi Amateur Hour* in the 1953-1954 TV season and was later responsible for the "Curbstone Camera" segment of *Noon*. Throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, he was well known as an on-camera and voice-over announcer for local commercials. His career spanned the period from live over-the-air delivery to film to videotaped commercials. During the same period, he continued to work *The Early Bird Show* weekday mornings on WGEM Radio.

In 1974, Wegman hosted the first local broadcast of *The Jerry Lewis Telethon* and would remain associated with the annual fundraising event for the Muscular Dystrophy Association. He also hosted "Today in Quincy" segments each weekday and helped coordinate the short-form public affairs show *Capsule Comments*.

After working with newsman Bob Turek in a formal radio presentation for over 20 years, the pair began exchanging comments after a radio newscast in 1976. The banter developed into the *Silly and Billy Show*, which was the hit of morning radio in the area until Wegman's death in 1989.



expand its evening-only broadcast into daytime in late 1954. The decision resulted in a substantial increase in operating costs and significant financial risk. Daytime network programming from NBC and ABC and expanded local and syndicated programs had to be secured. The size of the staff almost doubled. However, continuous day and night service appeared to be inevitable and worth the additional investment.

As is the case today, a good portion of the early WGEM TV schedule consisted of syndicated shows that did not appear on any wired network. These included Western serials like *Gabby Hayes*, *Sky King*, *Hopalong Cassidy*, and the *Cisco Kid*, starring Duncan Rinaldo as Cisco and Leo Carrillo as Poncho, his sidekick. Carrillo made a promotional appearance at the WGEM TV studios. He demonstrated his skill with a six-shooter, but the percussion from the blanks in the pistol destroyed two studio lights during the live broadcast.

In the summer of 1954, WGEM TV began carrying the long-running NBC public affairs show *Meet the Press*. Since then, the program has run continuously on Sunday mornings.



Dove Garroway was the first host of *Today*. Together with sportscaster Jack Lescoulie and a chimpanzee named J. Fred Muggs, the show became America's wake-up call. Garroway signed-off each show with the word "Peace."

From the late 1940s until it was connected to the network grid in 1950, WMAQ Radio and TV in Chicago was the incubator for much of the new talent on NBC. The so-called Chicago School of television delivery was low-key and intelligent, with a complete understanding of the dynamics of the new medium. WMAQ provided NBC with performers and personalities like Fran

Allison, Mike Wallace, Dave Garroway, John Chancellor, and later John Palmer, Floyd Kalber, and Jane Pauley.

"This is Today on NBC."

In 1952, Pat Weaver, president of NBC at the time, designed a morning show. Television critics of the time called it "Weaver's Folly." NBC called it *Today*. He brought in Dave Garroway to be the host and paired him with sportscaster Jack Lescoulie and a chimpanzee named J. Fred Muggs. Garroway's



Miss Francis, aka Dr. Francis Horwich, hosted *Ding Dong School* every weekday at 9:00 A.M. She talked with children and provided simple demonstrations on how to create things.

familiar sign-off of "Peace" became a signature for the first *Today* generation.

Today was designed as an alternative to the morning newspaper. In its early years, it was literally a radio show on TV. Weaver wrote, "We cannot and should not try to build a show that will make people sit down in front of their sets and divert their attention to the screen. We want America to shave, to eat,

to dress, and to get to work on time. But we also want America to be well-informed, to be amused, to be lightened in spirit and in heart, and to be reinforced in inner resolution through knowledge."

In spite of the lofty pretensions, Weaver's analysis proved to be on the mark. *Today* was the first regular network daytime program broadcast by WGEM TV starting on January 31, 1955.

As a host, Garroway was easy going and sometimes a bit bemused. He conducted interviews, pointed to photographs on the wall, played pop music records, and gazed at onlookers through the windows of the ground floor studio on 49th Street in Manhattan. Although it was almost cancelled in 1952, the program has been the nation's favorite wake-up call, with a string of hosts that have carefully struck a balance between serious news, useful information, light entertainment, and pleasant conversation.

The network eventually gave WGEM two 5-minute local cutaways in *Today*. One segment featured "Schemming's Showing," a commercial for a popular Quincy clothing store.



"Curbstone Camera" was a daily feature on *Noon*. A camera was rolled out to the lobby of the Hotel Quincy and interviews were conducted outside on Hampshire Street.

"Today in Quincy" filled the other slot and featured interviews about upcoming area events.

Today was followed on NBC and WGEM TV throughout the rest of the 1950s by the show *Ding Dong School*. Hosted by Miss Francis, aka Dr. Francis Horwich, Ph.D., the program was a mix of education and gentle child psychology. It had a pace and delivery like the PBS classic *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*.

Later in the morning, Arlene Francis hosted one of the long string of daytime shows directed at a mass audience of stay-at-home moms. *Home* was filled with pleasant conversation and helpful hints for American homemakers.

WGEM TV took another major step forward in local programming with the debut of *Noon* in early 1955. The half-hour show hosted by Charlie Griffith, Bob Turek, and Mary Harvey Colgan presented news and weather along with an extended segment called "Curbstone Camera." Bill Wegman hosted this on-the-street interview segment each day from Hampshire Street in downtown Quincy. On one sunny summer day, the elephants from the Clyde Beatty Cole Brother's Circus performed on Hampshire Street for "Curbstone Camera."

Another 1950s local children's show was *Sagebrush Sandy*, which was sponsored by the Tri-State Dairy of Keokuk, Iowa. Sagebrush Sandy was a cowboy character developed by Walter Lemanty of Keokuk. He interacted with children in the TV studio and urged them to drink plenty of Tri-State Dairy milk in between the broadcast of cartoons and features. Sandy's live donkey regularly



After *Once Upon a Time* ended its run, Mary Harvey Colgan became a co-host on *Noon* in 1955.



(Above) Announcer Moe Harvey (brother of Mary Harvey Colgan) works from a chalkboard weather map in the early days of *Noon*, (left) Bob Turek delivered the news on WGEM for over 40 years.



Nielsen Top 25 Shows 1956-57

1. *I Love Lucy* (CBS)
2. *Ed Sullivan Show* (CBS)
3. *General Electric Theatre* (CBS)
4. *\$64,000 Question* (CBS)
5. *December Bride* (CBS)
6. *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (CBS)
7. *I've Got A Secret* (CBS)
8. *Gunsmoke* (CBS)
9. *The Perry Como Show* (NBC)
10. *The Jack Benny Show* (CBS)
11. *Dragnet* (NBC)
12. *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts* (CBS)
13. *The Millionaire* (ABC)
14. *Disneyland* (ABC)
15. *The Red Skelton Show* (CBS)
16. *The Lineup* (ABC)
17. *You Bet Your Life* (NBC)
18. *Wyatt Earp* (ABC)
19. *The Ford Show* (NBC)
20. *Adventures of Robin Hood* (Syndicated)
21. *People Are Funny* (CBS)
22. *\$64,000 Challenge* (CBS)
23. *The Phil Silvers Show* (CBS)
24. *Lassie* (CBS)
25. *Private Secretary* (CBS)



Bill Wegman interviews band leader Stan Kenton during a Noon visit.

visited the studio to the delight of the children and the consternation of the station's janitorial staff.

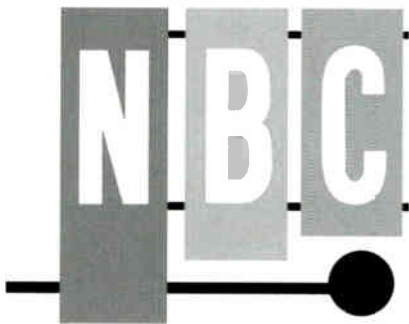
If someone said, "Say, kids, what time is it?" and you were a child between 1947 and 1960, you would likely yell back, "It's Howdy Doody time!" *Howdy Doody* was one of the first children's shows on network television. Starting in 1955, every weekday at 4:30 P.M. Tri-State area kids came in from playing and sat in front of the TV, remaining transfixed until dinner. The prospect of this moment of peace motivated many moms to urge their husbands to buy television sets.

Howdy Doody had a special attraction to children because Buffalo Bob Smith, the creator and co-star of the show, had a playful sense of humor and a childlike love of nonsense jokes. Howdy was a marionette with red hair, big ears, and 48 freckles (one for each state of the United States).

Buffalo Bob was joined in Doodyville by Clarabelle the Clown, Phineas T. Buster, Dilly Dally, and a live children's audience known as the "Peanut Gallery." Clarabelle never spoke until the end of the very last episode in 1960 when the clown's first (and last) words were "Goodbye, kids."

Another favorite of kids of all ages was the prime-time show *Kukla, Fran, and Ollie*. The show was the brainchild of the innovative Chicagoan Burr Tillstrom and starred Fran Allison and two puppet creations, Kukla and Ollie.

As the nightly network newscasts improved their presentations, the local newscasts were also expected to keep pace. WGEM News took a leap forward when



In the 1950s and into the early 1960s, the traditional "chimes" logo was used by the NBC TV Network.

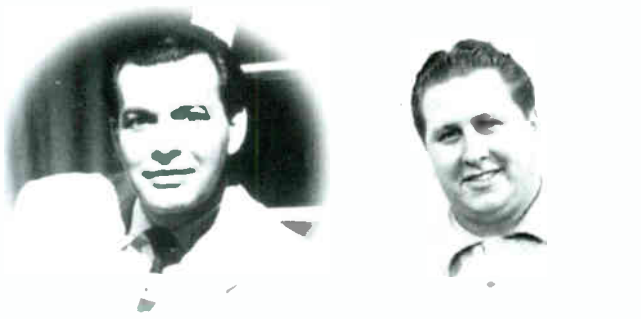
The audio signature actually has a meaning. The actual musical notes are G, E and C, which stood for the General Electric Corporation, owner of NBC at the time the chimes logo originated.

Thousands of young music students have used the famous theme as an easy way to identify the musical interval of a major sixth.

Later, NBC was owned by the Radio Corporation of America (RCA). General Electric repurchased the NBC network when it bought RCA.



(Above left to right) Buffalo Bob Smith (left) and Clarabelle the Clown (right) entertained a generation of WGEM viewers on *Howdy Doody*; Puppeteer Burr Tillstrom (with Ollie) and Fran Allison (with Kukla) moved from local TV in Chicago to a prime-time slot with *Kukla, Fran, and Ollie*.



(Left) Bob Scott was a popular WGEM TV personality in the 1950s; (right) Rick Weaver was WGEM TV's sportscaster in the early years.

a black and white video scanner was added to the control room. This device allowed the display of still photographs to accompany film stories. At first, pictures of news events were shot and commercially developed. The advent of the Polaroid camera greatly increased the speed of photography to air. Eventually, wind-up Bell & Howell film cameras were added, and silent black and white film could accompany news stories.

“That’s-a-wunnerful, a-wunnerful.”

With only two stations serving the Quincy area market—one NBC and the other CBS—WGEM TV was able to secure some programming from the ABC Television Network. The most popular ABC show on WGEM by far was *The Lawrence Welk Show*. Welk and his “Champagne Music Makers” had a long run on ABC from the mid-1950s until the early 1970s. The program then went into national syndication and was carried every Saturday night at 6:00 P.M. until it stopped production in the late 1970s.

Another popular ABC show that WGEM rebroadcast in prime time was *Disneyland*. The long-running segment “The Adventures of Davy Crockett” forced some area toy stores to stock coonskin caps for *Disneyland* fans.

A new NBC show of the 1955 season was *Wide Wide World*, the last of Pat Weaver’s concept programs for NBC. Weaver envisioned a show in which viewers could venture beyond their homes to any part of the world to make viewers “more mature, more cultured, and more urbane...to transform the average



(Left to right) The Lawrence Welk Show was part of the ABC TV line-up in the 1950s and was obtained by WGEM TV through its secondary affiliation. The show went into off-network syndication in the 1970s; *Liberace* was one of the most popular shows of the era. It was broadcast on WGEM TV on Sunday night at 9:00 P.M.; Perry Como’s easy-going musical style was a big hit in the 1950s and continued to be popular into the next decade as *The Kraft Music Hall*.

man into the uncommon man.” The 90-minute show was the model for the modern newsmagazine and ran until 1958. WGEM TV produced an extended live segment for NBC’s *Wide Wide World* from “America’s Hometown,” Hannibal, Missouri.

In March 1955, Broadway star Mary Martin looked into the camera and asked, “Do you believe in fairies?” and thousands of Tri-State area children answered with a resounding “Yes!” The broadcast by the original Broadway cast of *Peter Pan* was about not wanting to grow up and the power of imagination. Directed by Jerome Robbins, the production was presented live from NBC Studios in Brooklyn and became a landmark event in the history of broadcast television.

Variety became a staple of prime-time programming and families tuned in every Saturday night to the easy style of *The Perry Como Show* starting in 1955. Como was supported by the Ray Charles Singers and a group called the Doodletown Pipers. The weekly show ran until 1963 when it became *The Kraft Music Hall*.

NOW ON THE AIR DAILY

5 to 11 P. M.

Central Daylight Time

4 to 10 P. M.

Central Standard Time

WGEM-TV CHANNEL 10

- LIVE ENTERTAINMENT
- NEWS-LOCAL AND NATIONAL
- SPORTS
- COMEDY
- MUSICALS
- FEATURES

5:00 P. M.—“Once Upon A Time”
With Mary Harvey

Hey Kids!
A Big Western
Film Every Day.
Don't Miss It!
5:30 P. M.

6:00 P. M.—Today in Sports
Rick Weaver

6:15 P. M.—News and Weather

6:30 P. M.—Film Scrap Book

7:00 P. M.—Song Shop

7:30 P. M.—Film

8:00 P. M.—Feature Film

9:30 P. M.—Bill Wegman Show

10:00 P. M.—News-Sports-Weather

10:15 P. M.—Bill Wegman Show

WGEM-TV CHANNEL 10



(Far left) "Who's the slimiest man in the world?" asks Cyril Ritchard as Captain Hook in the 1955 broadcast, which also starred Mary Martin in the title role; In the Summer of 1956 Chet Huntley and David Brinkley presented gavel-to-gavel coverage of the Democratic and Republican National Conventions.

WGEM TV presented its first broadcast of the NFL Championship in December 1955 when the Cleveland Browns defeated the Los Angeles Rams in the title game.

In late 1955, the station management was looking for another program vehicle to reach children. Popeye cartoons became available in syndication and the *Sagebrush Sandy* formula was duplicated. Mary Harvey Colgan donned a sailor suit every weekday afternoon to serve as the host of *Popeye*. The program had studio guests, lots of fun, the cartoons, and, of course, commercials targeted at the baby-boom generation.

Another big hit that year on WGEM was the syndicated program *Liberace*. At the time, the piano player was the hottest act in show business. The show was scheduled at 9:30 P.M. Sunday night following *The Loretta Young Show* and featured 30 minutes of nonstop entertainment from one of America's great showstoppers.

Building on the audience formula of *Home*, NBC introduced *Tennessee Ernie Ford* as a weekly daytime program. It was so successful in daytime that it moved to prime time the following year.

"Good night, David... Good night, Chet"

In the summer of 1956, two new stars of network news were paired together for the first time. Chet Huntley and David Brinkley presented gavel-to-gavel coverage of the Democratic and Republican National Conventions. They gave Tri-State viewers their first TV glimpse of the convention process. They first covered the Democrats in Chicago, who nominated former Illinois Governor Adlai Stevenson as their standard bearer. Estes Kefauver of Missouri was tabbed as Stevenson's running mate, beating out an unknown senator from Massachusetts named John Kennedy and Senator Albert Gore, Sr. of Tennessee.

Based on the success of the team, NBC introduced the nightly *Huntley-Brinkley Report* in 1956. Originally, the program ran 15 minutes until it expanded in 1963. Huntley reported from NBC in New York, while Brinkley interconnected from Washington D.C. With its signature closing of "Goodnight, David, Goodnight, Chet, and Goodnight for NBC News," the show became a staple of the WGEM TV program line-up until Huntley retired in 1970.



(Left) Local live segments were mingled with cartoons on *Popeye*. Here a lucky winner wins a puppy. Washington Theatre manager Charles Lugo looks on. Lugo later became an account executive with WGEM TV. (Right) Mary Harvey Colgan pitched the value of a diet with plenty of calcium on *Popeye*.

Mary Harvey Colgan Fred Colgan

Mary Harvey Colgan was born in Quincy, Illinois, graduated from Quincy Senior High School and attended Quincy University. Like Bill Wegman, she was a protégé of Enid Ireland's theatre and broadcasting class at QHS. Her brother, Moe Harvey, was an announcer at WGEM Radio and recommended his 19 year-old sister for an announcing position. Ireland endorsed the recommendation and she began her career at WGEM in late 1949 on a radio show called *Ladies Take Note*, which she co-hosted with her brother. She also worked as the music librarian for the station.

After the premiere of WGEM TV in 1953, she

hosted the children's programs *Once Upon a Time* and the *Magazine of the Air*, in which she modeled and described women's clothing. She also served as a commercial announcer delivering live commercials each evening on camera or from a voice-over booth. In 1955, she became the host of *Noon* and later also hosted *Popeye*.

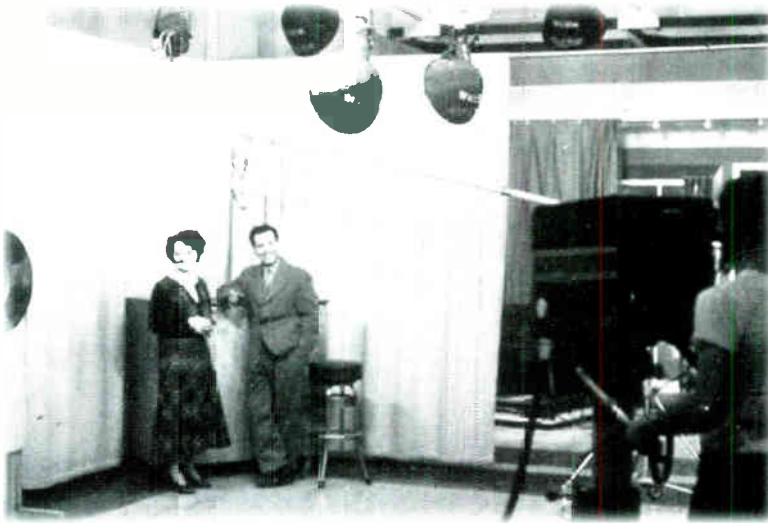
She met her future husband, Fred, at WGEM and retired from the station in 1961 to care for her son Kevin (who later became a switcher-director at WGEM and is an eight time Emmy Award winning producer-editor for Fox Television in Washington D.C.).

Elston "Fred" Colgan was born in San Antonio, Texas and served as a B-26 pilot with the U.S. 9th Air Force in World War II. He attended Texas A & M University and began his broadcasting career in Arkansas.

He started at WGEM in 1950 as an announcer for WGEM Radio. He did commercial announcing work and hosted sports segments on WGEM TV before becoming the station's program director in 1954.

Not only did he supervise the operations staff throughout his career, but he also continued to direct programs and perform on-camera commercial announcing, including the morning segment "Schemming's Showing."

Colgan was credited with training and developing much of the current WGEM operations staff, including Jim Lawrence, Brady Dreasler, Bob Joye, Cecil Stuart, Richard Voss, Richard Crossan, and Dan Wiskirchen. He retired in 1989.



The popularity of Dick Clark's *American Bandstand* on WGEM TV prompted some local spin-offs. Here Bob Scott and guest enjoy some Pepsi as they introduce the top tunes.

Additional weekly local programming was added to the line-up in 1956. The Franciscans at Quincy University and the Deanery Council of Catholic Men organized the weekly *Mass for Shut Ins*, which ran on WGEM for over three decades. About the same time, the pastors and congregations of several Christian churches in the Tri-State area banded together to produce *By the Way*, a weekly religious program that ran on WGEM for over 40 years. *Viewpoint*, a weekly WGEM News public affairs show hosted by Charlie Griffith, began a run that continues to this day. It is now called *WGEM News This Week*.

NBC took a bold step and created "A Lovely Way to Spend an Evening" when it introduced *The Nat King Cole Show*, which premiered in the fall of 1956. Cole was the first black entertainer to host a network television show. The move was controversial at the time. But even musical stars like Peggy Lee, Ella Fitzgerald, Tony Bennett, and Mel Tormé and Cole's personal charm were not enough to overcome the racism in America in the 1950s. The advertisers got cold feet and pulled their sponsorship. The show lasted only one year.

America's musical tastes were changing. The hottest act that year was a youngster from Tupelo, Mississippi with double-jointed hips. Elvis Presley and his musical contemporaries introduced a fresh sound, which distinctly appealed to another new American phenomenon—the teenager. WGEM TV responded to the new trend by picking up a new show from the ABC TV Network called *American Bandstand*. The show originated in Philadelphia and was hosted by Dick Clark. The first song played on the first WGEM TV broadcast was Jerry Lee Lewis' "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On." The lyrics presaged the generation gap that widened in the decade to follow.

Tri-State area viewers tuned in to see an amazing bit of sports history in October 1956 during Game 5 of the World Series between the New York Yankees and the Brooklyn Dodgers, led by Jackie Robinson. They were treated to the fall classic's only perfect game, thrown by Yankee pitcher Don Larsen. Larsen retired 27 batters in a row, no Dodger reached first base, and the 97th and final pitch was a strikeout.



Twenty-One was the quiz show that touched off a national scandal when it was revealed that contestants were provided answers to questions and coached on their performance in advance.

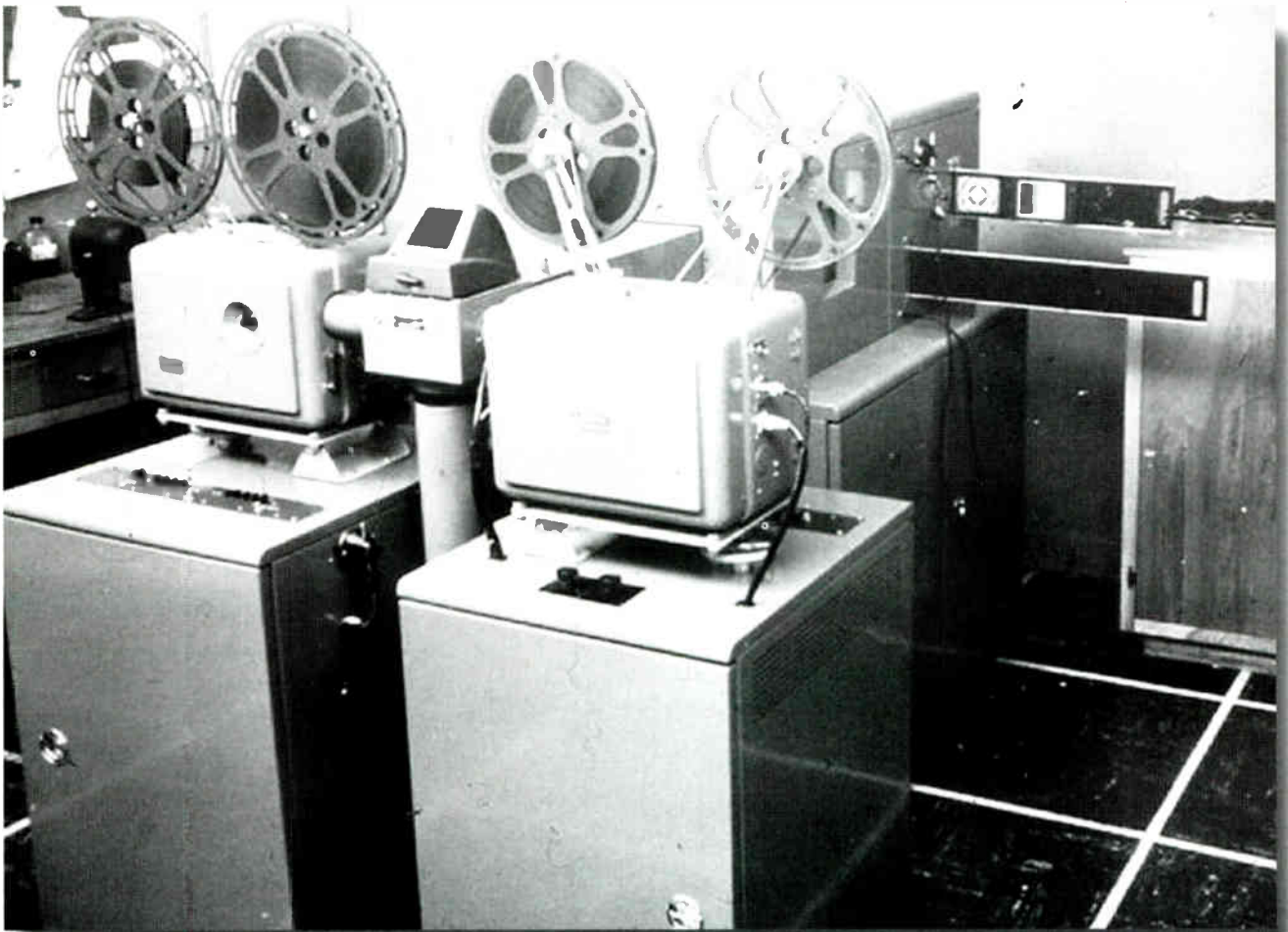
“I have deceived my friends, and I had millions of them.”

In the 1956–1957 season, NBC was desperate to get traction in the Nielsen Ratings. Only Perry Como was able to crack the top 10 and dent CBS TV’s stranglehold as America’s top network. At the same time, network executives were looking for ways to cut costs. Much as with today’s so-called reality shows, the low-cost solution then was live quiz shows.

Quiz shows had been popular on network radio and easily

made the transition to television. NBC produced a big winner’s show called *Twenty-One* to counter the CBS runaway hit \$64,000 *Question*. *Twenty-One*’s blackjack format, seemingly tough questions, and big cash prizes caught the fancy of viewers. A handsome Columbia University English professor named Charles Van Doren became a *Twenty-One* champion when he bested the reigning champion, an unemployed trivia whiz named Herbert Stempel. Van Doren became an instant celebrity and a media darling, using his fame to get a substitute guest host job on *Today*. Stempel was sent back to Queens and obscurity. Disgruntled, Stempel revealed that he took a dive on national TV for a cash payout. Van Doren had been supplied answers by show producers in advance. The resulting scandal prompted hearings in the U.S. House of Representatives, where it was learned that many of the other TV quiz shows were similarly rigged. By 1958, the big-money quiz shows had disappeared from prime-time network television.

In 1957, WGEM purchased a new Standard Television transmitter, which for the first time allowed the station to pass through a color television signal from NBC. A color slide scanner was purchased later that year, and some local commercials could be presented on color slides.



A new film chain and a color transmitter allowed WGEM TV to present some programs in color to Tri-State viewers for the first time in 1957.

“The following program is brought to you in living color on NBC.”

On September 7, 1957, a new logo appeared at the beginning of *Your Hit Parade*. It was an artist's depiction of a peacock and the announcer proclaimed, “The following program is brought to you in living color on NBC.” Thus began NBC's rollout as America's first full-color network. The process would take several years to complete (WGEM TV would not present local news in color for 10 years). Likewise, Tri-State area consumers needed time to adjust. Most people had only recently purchased black and white consoles. The first color TVs were expensive so the full conversion to color took some time.



Jack Paar took over *The Tonight Show* in September 1957 and approached the show like it was a sophisticated cocktail party featuring the literary, artistic, and political luminaries of the time.

“My personality is not split; it's shredded.”

That same month *The Tonight Show* introduced a new host named Jack Paar. As a gifted comedian and musician, Steve Allen's version of *The Tonight Show* was about high energy. Paar preferred conversation and contrasting opinions. He approached the show like a sophisticated cocktail party. He loved to argue and picked fights with Walter Winchell, Ed Sullivan, and Dorothy Kilgallen, the leading gossip columnists of the day. His guests included Billy Graham, Albert Schweitzer, Robert and Jack Kennedy, Richard Nixon, and Eleanor Roosevelt.

In 1960, Paar stunned WGEM TV viewers when he walked off the program after NBC censors had edited a bathroom joke. A few minutes into the opening of the show, he tearfully declared, “I am leaving *The Tonight Show*,” and left the set, leaving his announcer Hugh Downs to fill the remaining 90 minutes.

To compliment Perry Como's Saturday night success, NBC created *The Dinah Shore Chevy Show* on Sunday nights at 8:00 P.M. The program enjoyed popularity in the Tri-State area and was known for her signature song, “See the USA in your Chevrolet, America's the greatest land of all!” which was



Doug McClure (left) and Gary Clarke (right) flank Roberta Shore as they survey the Shiloh ranch in Laramie.

Robert Fuller starred in *Laramie*, a popular late-1950s Western on NBC.

followed by Shore blowing a smacking kiss to the TV audience.

But even feel-good Shore could not hold back TV's move westward. WGEM began carrying the show *Wagon Train* starring Ward Bond in 1957. It was followed by a stampede of Westerns including *Tales of Wells Fargo* with Dale Robertson, *Laramie*, and *The Virginian* with Doug McClure, James Drury, and Lee J. Cobb. *The Dinah Shore Chevy Show* succumbed in 1959 when the sponsor directed its resources toward the biggest Western of them all—*Bonanza*.

Quincy celebrated its sesquicentennial in October 1958. WGEM TV cameras were there to capture all the excitement of the anniversary parade down Hampshire Street. It was the first extended live WGEM coverage of a civic celebration and began a long history of local-event telecasts throughout the viewing area.



Quincy celebrated its sesquicentennial in 1958. WGEM TV cameras that were perched above the portico of the Hotel Quincy captured the parade down Hampshire Street.



Pro football came of age in the 1958 NFL Championship game broadcast on NBC and WGEM TV. The Baltimore Colts beat the New York Giants in overtime. Here running back Frank Gifford sweeps over the frozen gridiron at Yankee Stadium.

“The greatest football game ever played.”

WGEM TV carried NFL football broadcasts from its earliest days on the network grid. But the NFL on TV really did not come of age until 1958 when the Baltimore Colts took on the New York Giants for the league title on a cold and blustery December afternoon at Yankee Stadium. The startup Colts, led by never-say-die quarterback John Unitas, engineered an overtime victory, propelling the NFL into a dominant position in American professional sports.

“It was our most ambitious broadcast to that date.”

Local television tested its mettle as a regional fundraising tool in 1959 when WGEM TV presented the United Cerebral Palsy Telethon. The show was completely local, originating entirely from the stage of the Quincy Junior High School Auditorium. The station did not have access to a remote production van, so almost all the studio production equipment had to be moved from the main studio to the auditorium in order to present the broadcast. The show went on for close to 20 hours and featured local acts and music from the Bob Foster Orchestra. Actress Judy Canova appeared, along with Jan Clayton, star of the TV series *Lassie*. Clayton took the stage with “Lassie Boy,” an offspring of the original TV dog, which had been won by Joe Bonansinga, WGEM general manager, at a TV industry convention.

The UCP Telethon was an important milestone for WGEM TV. It proved that with dedication, teamwork, and coordination, the station could accomplish extraordinarily good community programming. It set a precedent of excellence in community broadcasting that was passed down through the generations and laid the groundwork for the larger-scale community broadcast events of the present day.

As the decade of the 1950s drew to a close, television in the Tri-State region had changed from a luxury that our friends and relatives in the big city talked about to a major force in family and community life. Network and local programs were becoming more sophisticated, production techniques were improving, and the original business investment was beginning to show signs of a return.



The Bob Foster Orchestra provided music for the United Cerebral Palsy Telethon. Joe Bonansinga is seen leading the orchestra dressed in a black suit.



(Top to bottom) Backstage at the UCP Telethon at Quincy Junior High School's Auditorium. (bottom row left to right) Engineers Jack Moller and Jim Waters, (top row, left to right) WGEM program director Fred Colgan, chief engineer Frank Laughlin, and engineer Jim Martens; WGEM general manager Joe Banansingo (left) with Jan Clayton (right), star of the syndicated edition of *Lassie*, and Joe's dog, "Lassie Boy," a descendant of the real canine TV star, during the United Cerebral Palsy Telethon in 1959. The UCP Telethon production required moving almost all of WGEM TV's broadcast equipment to Quincy Junior High School.



**SCHOOLS
OPEN**



**Drive
Carefully**

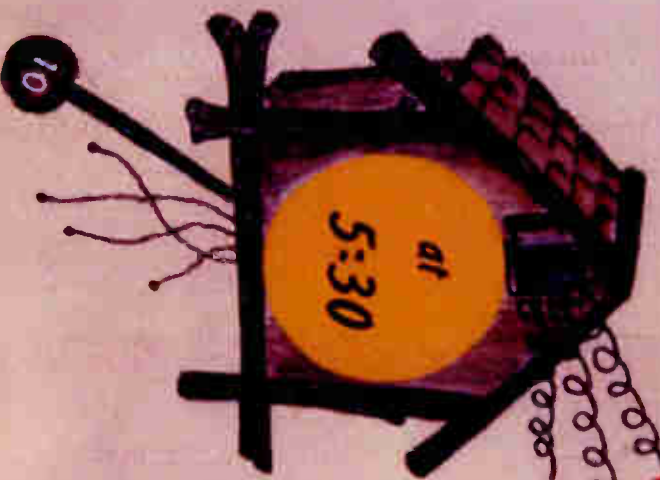
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CHANNEL

**WEATHER
SPORTS
NEWS**

10 on 10 6 on 10

**FULL HOUR
of the
LATEST NEWS**



CHANNEL 10

TUNE IN, TURN ON 1960-1969

Few decades in American history were as tumultuous as the 1960s. WGEM TV began the period literally and figuratively presenting the world in black and white and ended it showing a vivid spectrum of color and shading. It was a time of change, for the nation, the world, and WGEM TV.

As telecommunications, satellite transmission, film-processing techniques, and videotape improved, viewers began to take for granted the instant knowledge of all major world events and catastrophes. In turn, they began demanding equally instant answers and remedies to global and regional problems. WGEM TV stood witness to the emergence of the first televised presidency, the struggle for civil rights, the assassination of leaders, the rebellion of youth, the emergence of counter culture, and the tragedy of an unwinnable war. In addition, it brought events in the Tri-State area into focus as never before.

The 1960s were fused with exhilaration, impatience, liberation, freedom, fear, hate, and anger. Viewers traveled for the first time to the depths of space and gazed at the surface of the moon. They watched widespread and disturbing social upheaval unfold and explored new scientific frontiers. The experience was, at once, amazing, frustrating, and confusing.

Network and local news came of age as the public turned more and more to TV news, not only as a source of immediate information, but also as a mechanism to help absorb all the turbulence. Despite the national chaos of the time, the Tri-State region basically stayed centered on its Midwestern values and civic pride.



The Cartwrights, lords of the Ponderosa ranch. (left to right) Dan Blocker (Hoss), Lorne Greene (Ben), Pernell Roberts (Adam), and Michael Landon (Little Joe).

“Head back to the Ponderosa.”

One program spanned the decade and earned a permanent place in American popular culture by extolling old-fashioned values. *Bonanza*, starring Lorne Greene, Michael Landon, Dan Blocker, and Pernell Roberts, dominated Sunday night television for 14 years on NBC and WGEM. Americans of all ages followed the saga of the Cartwright family on their picturesque homestead, the Ponderosa. The show focused on family relationships. The Cartwrights were pillars of the community, unlike the outlaws and gunslingers of earlier Western TV shows. The program tackled many significant social issues before it rode off into the sunset in 1973.



Walt Disney's *Wonderful World of Color* moved to NBC to take advantage of NBC's considerable lead in color TV technology at the time.

Sunday night was a ratings bonanza for WGEM TV. NBC, which by then was more advanced in color TV technology than the other networks, lured *The World of Disney* from ABC to showcase the studio's library of color films, cartoons, and features. *Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color* teamed up with *Bonanza* for a one-two ratings punch that was “Must-See-TV” for most of the decade.



(Left) WGEM TV provided live coverage of the first-ever television debates between Richard M. Nixon (in TV monitor) and John F. Kennedy in 1960; (Right) Chet Huntley (left) and David Brinkley (right) report election returns in 1960. The election swung on votes from Cook County, Illinois.

TV coverage of the 1960 presidential election campaign was like no other before. Both the Democratic candidate, John F. Kennedy, and the Republican nominee, Richard M. Nixon, had risen to prominence by skillfully using television. Their political careers paralleled the growth of the new medium, and both were regularly coached by television consultants. Kennedy's advisor boasted, "We're going to sell Jack like soap flakes."

The decisive campaign moments came in a series of nationally televised debates between Kennedy and Nixon carried on WGEM TV. Nixon was generally thought to have won on the basic points, but Kennedy had the advantage for style. Style won when Kennedy was elected by an extremely close margin in November.

The early 1960s also brought great changes to local news presentations. Standard local news delivery was greatly enhanced by the addition of over-the-shoulder graphics and film. Daily use of black and white film with optical sound enabled the presentation of more vivid on-the-scene reports.

"The Flying Reporter"

WGEM TV newscasts took on a more active promotional flavor as well. The 10:00 P.M. news was presented by Jim Smith ("Big Jim—The Flying Reporter"). Smith was a pilot but traveled throughout the area (by car) during the day, shooting film and Polaroid pictures in towns and cities along the way. The daily pictures were the centerpiece of his nightly reports.



Jim Smith ("Big Jim, The Flying Reporter") anchored newscasts for WGEM in the early 1960s.

In May 1961, Tri-State viewers sat transfixed with excitement and concern when Mercury astronaut Alan B. Shepard climbed aboard a tiny capsule on the tip of a Redstone rocket and prepared for the 15-minute ride that would make him the first American in space. Russian Yuri Gagarin had already completed an orbit of the earth just a few weeks earlier.

"Everything is A-OK."

WGEM TV presented America's move into the new frontier by providing live coverage of all Project Mercury flights, including John Glenn's historic orbital flight. NBC's Frank McGee and journalist Jay Barbree covered America's space program throughout the decade.

Meanwhile, the Cold War was at its height, and in August 1961, Russian premiere Nikita Khrushchev tested America's resolve when he ordered the construction of a concrete wall sealing off the east side of Berlin, Germany. For a few anxious weeks, TV reports seemed to say that there could be a world war, but the crisis ended in stalemate.



Presidential candidate Senator John F. Kennedy meets with Quincy officials of the Lincoln-Douglas Hotel in early 1960. (left to right) Joe Bononsinga, WGEM general manager; an unknown Kennedy aide; Pierre Solinger, Kennedy's press secretary; and the candidate.



Derrick "Boots" Bush, a long-time WGEM Radio play-by-play sports announcer, also did the commentary for QU basketball games on WGEM TV in the early 1960s. Games were filmed for later playback.



A new Gates transmitter was installed for WGEM AM in 1962. (left to right) Frank Loughlin, WGEM chief engineer; Joe Bonansinga, WGEM general manager; and Thomas C. Oakley, president of Quincy Broadcasting Company.

Every Sunday night during this same time, WGEM TV broadcast an adult cartoon that played on the stereotypes of the Cold War era. The concept was offbeat: a moose and squirrel against two bumbling Soviet spies. *Rocky And His Friends* was an instant hit with its satirical characters Rocky, Bullwinkle, Boris Badenov, and Natasha. It also featured curiosities from Mr. Peabody (a dog that provided tutoring to his boy-master Sherman). The show included a segment called "Fractured Fairy Tales," which was narrated by Edward Everett Horton.

If the threat of nuclear holocaust with the Soviets was too real, area families could always escape to prime-time television on WGEM TV. For several years, actor Robert Young dispensed sage parental advice to America in *Father Knows Best*. John Forsythe headed one of TV's first single-parent households on *Bachelor Father*. Another family dealt with an early example of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder on *Demis The Menace*. And, if TV parents were totally engaged in their careers, tea and sympathy were always available from *Hazel*, a kindly housemaid played by Shirley Booth. Fred Gwynn and Joe E. Ross provided a comical look at New York

cops in *Car 54, Where Are You?*

Live broadcasts of local basketball came to WGEM TV for the first time in 1962 when the Quincy Senior High School Blue Devils competed in the Illinois High School Association State Tournament. The Devils placed second in the last tournament game played at venerable Huff Gymnasium in Champaign, Illinois. QHS would make another live WGEM TV appearance in the 1965 IHSA Finals in the new Assembly Hall at the University of Illinois.

About the same time, WGEM TV also presented a selection of Quincy University basketball games that were broadcast on film. Shot in black and white and using the audio commentary from WGEM Radio sportscaster Boots Bush, the telecasts received a positive audience reaction but were ultimately too expensive to produce.

In 1962, WGEM TV added a new film and slide chain, which enabled the station to broadcast film commercials and programs in color for the first time. The development of videotape enabled syndicated shows to be sent to the station on tape, giving these programs a live TV quality.



(Left to right) *Rocky And His Friends* spoofed Cold War attitudes in a highly creative cartoon series targeted to all ages; Robert Young played Jim Andersen, a dad with all the answers, in *Father Knows Best*. (left to right) Billy Gray (Bud), Laurin Chapin (Kathy), Young (Jim), Jane Wyatt (Margaret), and Elinor Donahue (Betty); On the show *Hazel*, the endearing, busybody maid, played by Shirley Booth, dispensed the sage advice for the Baxter family; Fred Gwynn (left) and Joe E. Ross (right) starred as two comical New York cops in *Car 54, Where Are You?*

Richard W. Elsenpeter "Toby Dick Ellis"

Richard Elsenpeter and Al Harvey of Barry, Illinois were the co-creators of *Possum Holler Opry*, a weekly country music and comedy show that was broadcast by WGEM TV from 1960–1970.

Elsenpeter performed under the stage name Dick Ellis and assumed the role of Toby, the simple homespun host of *Possum*. He and Harvey produced the one-hour program, which originated live each week from the WGEM studios.



As the show increased in popularity, it took to the road, playing at county fairs and folk life festivals throughout the Midwest.

At the end of the 1960s, *Possum Holler Opry* attempted to go into regional syndication with a pilot show called *Possum Holler RFD*, but the show failed to catch on.

Elsenpeter studied drama at the University of Minnesota and the McPhail School of Dramatic Arts. He served his early apprenticeship with the Telton Comedians Tent Theatre, a summertime traveling show, and later acted in summer stock before returning to Barry as a theatre teacher.

He was well known throughout the region as a master puppeteer and received several distinguished awards for his work with puppets and marionettes. His puppet productions in schools entertained generations of area children. He also directed the Quincy Junior Theatre, a summer program of the Quincy Park District, for 20 years.



Al Harvey (second from left), Peaches Bennett (second from right), and Toby Dick Ellis (far right) welcome the Canadian Ramblers from Toronto.

"Our show"

The early 1960s also saw the emergence of the most popular locally produced non-news show in WGEM TV history. *Possum Holler Opry* had a 3-week trial and remained on the air for a 10-year run. Richard Elsenpeter of Barry, Illinois played the simple, guileless master of ceremonies named Toby Dick in a weekly live barn dance show produced in the WGEM studios.

Possum Holler had its regular performers, such as Al Harvey and Peaches Bennett, and country stars of note, including Sonny James and Barbara Fairchild. The traditional bluegrass Ozark Mountain Trio appeared on the show for years. *Possum Holler* turned out to be a good training ground for John Hartford, a skinny banjo picker, who went on to national TV fame with Glen Campbell and the Smothers Brothers and wrote the hit song "Gentle On My Mind."

The strength of the show was its local talent. The *Possum* troupe also took the act on the road to commercial remotes, county fairs, and state fairs to open for acts like Minnie Pearl, Ernest Tubb, Ferlin Huskey, Jimmy Dean, Flatt and Scruggs, and Roy Orbison.

A few years after *Possum Holler Opry* signed off for the last time at the end of the decade, a new show called *Hee Haw* went into national syndication. It borrowed the same musical ideas and cornball humor that made *Possum* a local hit on WGEM.

Richard Elsenpeter, aka "Toby Dick Ellis," was the cornball host of *Possum Holler Opry*, a weekly live country music and comedy show that ran for 10 years on WGEM TV.





Toby Dick (center) jokes with the house band, which was led by co-host Al Harvey (left in the white shoes).



Sorry Bennett sings for the TV audience.



Despite the limited studio space, Ray Tryon and the Four-H dancers did some clogging.



The Harvey twins were *Possum Haller* regulars.

“Heeere’s Johnny!”

When Jack Paar retired from *The Tonight Show* in early 1962, NBC turned to the nation’s Midwest for a replacement host. Nebraska-raised comic Johnny Carson had previously worked on a CBS show in 1956 and done stand-up comedy for several years before landing a spot as host of the game show *Who Do You Trust?* on ABC.

Once he stepped on the set on October 1, 1962, he became the undisputed king of late-night TV for three decades. Carson had a boyish and easy demeanor and was a master of “double meaning.” In many ways, he set the trend for men in the 1960s. Men dressed like him and used catch phrases culled from the show. Necktie sales tanked when Carson started wearing turtlenecks under his sport coat each night.



The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson made its debut in 1962 and dominated late-night viewing for 30 years. (left to right) Mel Brooks, Phyllis Diller, Miss Vicki, Tiny Tim, and Johnny Carson on the night of Tiny Tim’s celebrated TV wedding.

Carson’s nightly monologue became a reflection of public opinion, and the targets of his jokes often had reason to worry. The show’s antics were punctuated by sidekicks Ed McMahon, Skitch Henderson, Doc Severinson, and the star-studded NBC Orchestra. The guests, animal acts, and sketch comedy turned the program into a cultural icon. The on-camera marriage of Tiny Tim and Miss Vicky in December 1969 symbolized the zany aspects of Carson’s first decade.

The Tonight Show originated from NBC Studios in New York from 1954 until it relocated permanently to Burbank, California in 1972. Carson left *The Tonight Show* in a memorable broadcast in May 1992 after being the signature performer on NBC and WGEM TV for 30 years.



Former governor of Illinois, candidate for president, and United States U.N. ambassador Aclai E. Stevenson II (seated on the right side) reveals U.S. intelligence regarding Soviet intermediate range nuclear missiles in Cuba during live TV coverage in October 1962.

“Requiring a full retaliatory response”

Two weeks after Johnny Carson’s debut on *The Tonight Show*, U-2 spy flights revealed the presence of Soviet intermediate range missiles in Cuba. Once again, America stood on the brink of nuclear Armageddon with the Soviet Union. Within a week, area TV sets were tuned in continuously as the government worked on the latest crisis. City governments began to activate civil defense plans. Many people worried if they would live to see another sunrise.

On Tuesday, October 22, 1962, President Kennedy appeared on WGEM TV and announced a Naval blockade of Cuba. The U.S. Armed Forces would stop and search all Soviet vessels entering or leaving the island nation. A nuclear holocaust was averted when the Soviets agreed to remove the missiles in exchange for a U.S. promise not to invade Cuba. The 13-day Cuban Missile Crisis was the first use of local TV in a true national emergency. It would be called upon to help hold the nation together a year later.





Quincy's entry in the 1965 Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, California. Tri-state viewers never got to watch the float pass by on live TV after NBC experienced technical problems in the network feed.

“This is Quincy, the All-America City.”

The 1960s were a time of great optimism in the Quincy area. In 1962, Quincy Mayor Wes Olsen and civic leaders including Joe Bonansinga were looking for a way to give the city a positive boost and secure some needed national exposure. At the time, *Look*, a national weekly photo magazine, recognized local civic projects with “All-America City” awards each year. Bonansinga suggested to Olsen that the community take up a project to light the Quincy Memorial Bridge. Olsen and Bonansinga used WGEM TV to marshal widespread civic support and participation in the necessary fundraising effort. Service clubs, adults, and schoolchildren eventually achieved the goal, and lights were installed on the bridge. A nomination was later submitted to *Look*, and in early 1963, Quincy was named an “All-America City.” The magazine included a full write-up and photographs.

A community celebration was planned for April 1963, complete with a large parade and a huge community banquet at the Quincy Senior High School Gymnasium. WGEM was at the epicenter of the activities, providing both live and film coverage of the parade (the largest in Quincy’s history) and producing a one-hour film documentary recapping the weekend events. The broadcasts went flawlessly (though WGEM TV’s entry in the parade, a spectacularly decorated “20th Century Showboat” float, finished dead last after an engine boil over).

Bonansinga also attempted to secure an in-person

performance by Quincy trombonist Bob Havens, who was a feature musician on ABC’s *The Lawrence Welk Show*. Welk could not spare Havens for the trip, but promised to showcase Havens in a live TV performance of “Ole Man River” on the show, followed by a personal salute to Quincy.

The live telecast of *Lawrence Welk* was scheduled at the same time as the civic banquet. With the help of another Quincyan, Elmer Wavering, then a top executive with Motorola (manufacturer of television sets in Quincy), the QHS Gym was ringed with monitors so that the people attending the banquet could witness the live telecast on WGEM TV.

All-America City organizers later decided to enter a promotional float in the 1965 Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, California. The float was completed at great expense. Joe Bonansinga received assurance from NBC station



(Top) Bob Turek hosts WGEM TV live coverage of the All-America City Parade from 5th and Maine Street in Quincy; (Bottom) Lawrence Welk presents a plaque to lead trombonist and Quincy native Bob Havens, giving his hometown special recognition as an All-America City during an April 1963 broadcast on the ABC TV network carried on WGEM TV.

Thomas A. Oakley

Thomas Allison Oakley was born in Quincy in 1932. He was the eldest son of Thomas A. Oakley (general manager of *The Quincy Herald-Whig*, president of WQDI FM, president of Quincy Broadcasting Company, and executive vice president of Quincy Newspapers, Inc.) and Mary Sullivan Oakley.

Thomas A. Oakley attended Quincy Public Schools and graduated from Duke University with a degree in business economics. He began his full-time career with *The Quincy Herald-Whig* in 1954 and later spent three years in the U.S. Air Force, two as a B47 pilot in the Strategic Air Command. He returned to the newspaper in 1957, and became production manager in 1958 and business manager in 1962.



He was named a director of Quincy Broadcasting Company in 1958, secretary of Quincy Newspapers, Inc. in 1965, and vice president of Quincy Broadcasting Company in 1968. He was instrumental in the development of cable television in the Tri-State area when QNI and QBC joined with Continental Cablevision to form Quincy Cablevision in 1965. Oakley later directed the redevelopment of the Hotel Quincy and the WGEM studios. He became president of QBC in 1969 and was appointed to the newly created position of president and CEO of QNI in 1971.

Under his guidance, the company has expanded, and now owns 2 newspapers and 11 television stations serving 9 states.

Well known for his dedication to transportation development in the region, he served on the Quincy Highway Committee since its formation and directed its activities as chairman since 1983. He was co-founder and chairman of the Joint Industrial Development Commission and served on the Illinois State Chamber of Commerce Economic Development Commission.

He served as a director and officer of the Rotary Club, the YMCA, and the Two River Council Girl Scouts of America, and chaired the United Fund drive in 1968. He was a trustee of Quincy College for 14 years, chaired the QC Partnership Fund in 1974, and received an honorary doctorate from the college in 1975. He was named a trustee of the Lincoln Academy of Illinois in 1982.

Oakley has served as a director for a number of industry trade associations, including the National Association of Broadcasters, the Television Bureau of Advertising, and the NBC Affiliates Government Relations Committee.

He received the Parker S. Gates Award from the Quincy Chamber of Commerce, the Distinguished Citizen Award from the Boy Scouts of America, and the Christian Borstadt Award from Quincy University. He also became the third QBC executive to receive the Vincent T. Wasilewski Award from the Illinois Broadcasters Association.



Quincy Broadcasting Company has always been at the forefront of area economic development. (left to right seated) Adams County Board Chairman Horner Myers, Quincy Mayor Wes Olsen, (standing) Quincy Chamber of Commerce President Bob Mays, and Joint Industrial Development Commission Chairman Thomas A. Oakley at a planning meeting in 1962.

relations that the Quincy float would appear on TV at the promoted time, and WGEM promptly began to promote the broadcast. One minute before the scheduled time, the NBC microwave went blank with technical difficulties only to return a few minutes later. By that time, it was too late. Quincy's All-America City float had already passed by the NBC cameras. With great effort, WGEM secured a videotape of the parade from NBC for rebroadcast to the area a week later and Tri-State viewers finally got to see their Rose Parade entry.

Another spin-off from the All-America City celebration was the introduction of a new musical act to WGEM's daily show *Noon*. The male All-America Quartet performed regularly on the show and did promotional work for the station.

Another example of WGEM TV's involvement in the community began in the early 1960s. Company executives joined with other area community leaders to begin the fight for better roads in West Central Illinois. Thomas A. Oakley, son of founder Thomas C. Oakley, joined the company after serving in the Air Force, and together with the other principals in the company, seriously took up the highway cause.

Oakley and the station would be active in the campaigns for better transportation in the Tri-State area for the next 40 years. WGEM News would devote time and resources to illuminating the importance of this issue for area viewers.

The TV station also began to emerge as an important catalyst in economic development, helping in the formation of the Joint Industrial Development Commission (JIDC), which later evolved into the Great River Economic Development Foundation. Thomas A. Oakley was its first chairman. His brother David R. Oakley, WGEM general manager from 1976-1983, also led the JIDC.

Joe Bonansinga served as the chairman of the Quincy Area Chamber of Commerce in the 1960s and began his long association with the Salvation Army and scores of other community organizations. WGEM managers and employees became increasingly involved in community causes like United Way. The station developed a strong sense of community service, which has remained its hallmark for five decades.



Sing Along With Mitch was a popular music show that encouraged viewer participation. In the turbulent 1960s, Mitch Miller's concept was a bit past its time.

direction of band leader Mitch Miller. The group sang old favorites and invited viewers to sing along by following a bouncing ball over the superimposed lyrics. In hindsight, *Sing Along With Mitch* was a lot more like "whistling in the dark," given the social upheaval that WGEM TV would transmit into Tri-State homes in subsequent years.

"I have a dream today."

At the same time, area viewers watched reports about the struggle for civil rights unfold on the *Huntley-Brinkley Report*. TV bore witness to events such as the sit-ins at lunch counters in North Carolina in 1960, the "Freedom Rides" to desegregate bus terminals throughout the South in 1961, President Kennedy's activation of federal troops to enforce the admittance of James Meredith to the University of Mississippi in 1962, and the strife in Birmingham, Alabama in early 1963.

WGEM TV presented live coverage of the March on Washington on August 28 of that same year. Two hundred thousand marchers stood on the Mall in front of the Lincoln Memorial in what Dr. Martin Luther King called "the greatest demonstration of freedom in the history of our nation" in his immortal "I Have a Dream" speech.



(Left) Hundreds of thousands of civil rights demonstrators joined Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King in the March on Washington in August 1963; (Right) Dr. King delivers his famous "I Have a Dream" speech before live TV cameras at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

Another form of escapism from the threat of atomic war was music and variety shows, which remained popular on WGEM TV in the early 1960s. *Sing Along With Mitch* featured a large chorus under the



"Three shots were fired."

Around 1:00 P.M. on Friday, November 22, 1963, WGEM news director Charlie Griffith just completed a live newscast on WGEM Radio. "I just came out of the studio and heard alarm bells on the AP machines. I leaned over and read 'Flash (Dallas TX) Three shots were fired at President Kennedy's motorcade in downtown Dallas. The first reports say that President Kennedy has been seriously wounded by this shooting,'" Griffith recalled.

He rushed to alert the WGEM TV control room to stand by for a special network news report and within minutes NBC's Frank McGee, Chet Huntley, and Bill Ryan were on the air. All three held telephones to their ear, fumbling with a makeshift connection to reporter Robert McNeil, who was standing by with a live report from Parkland Hospital in Dallas. McGee had to slowly repeat McNeil's words because technicians had not yet patched the telephone audio to the air. As he relayed that President Kennedy had died, McNeil's audio kicked in, providing an eerie echo to the death notice.

The network and WGEM TV then suspended regular operations until Tuesday, November 26. Tri-State viewers and all of America sat mesmerized through a weekend of shock and mourning. McGee was right when he almost immediately commented on WGEM, "This afternoon, wherever you are and whatever you might have been doing when you received word of the death of President Kennedy, that is a moment that will be emblazoned in your memory, and you will never forget it, as long as you live."

One of the saddest periods in American history became one of the proudest moments of television as the images poured out of TV sets and into American hearts.

"He's been shot, he's been shot!"

On Sunday, November 24, as preparations were being made to carry the slain president's body from the White House to the



NBC reporter Tom Pettit was positioned with a live TV crew in the basement of the Dallas City Police Station when nightclub owner Jack Ruby stepped forward and shot alleged JFK assassin Lee Harvey Oswald.

Capitol Rotunda, NBC News cut away (the only network to do so) to the basement of the Dallas City Police Station to cover the transfer of accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald. Reporter Tom Pettit shouted in disbelief as gunshots rang out, "He's been shot, he's been shot." Dallas nightclub owner Jack Ruby slipped through police lines and shot Oswald. It was the first murder carried live on television.

WGEM TV stayed with the broadcast Sunday night through Monday night, showing the endless procession of grief-stricken Americans passing the flag-draped coffin and the solemn burial in Arlington National Cemetery.

Variety's George Rosen later wrote, "In a totally unforeseen and awesome crisis, TV immediately, almost automatically, was transformed into a participating organ of American life whose value, whose indispensability, no Nielsen audimeters could measure or statistics reveal."

The medium that had begun largely to showcase comedians, singers, and aging vaudeville acts was then and forever established as a national and local lifeline during times of crisis and emergency.

WGEM TV got its first taste of Olympic gold in 1964 with the coverage of the Summer Games from Tokyo. Improvements in satellite relay allowed NBC to provide the first live coverage of the opening ceremony.

Sandwiched between the Olympic coverage was NBC's coverage of the 1964 World Series, which had special interest to the viewing area. The St. Louis Cardinals, led by Bob Gibson, Lou Brock, Ken Boyer, Curt Flood, and Tim McGarver,



The on-air crew of *Today* in the early 1960s. (left to right) Betty Furness, Jack Lescaulie, and Hugh Downs.



Barbara Walters joined *Today* in 1964. She is pictured here with (left to right) sportscaster Joe Garagiola, co-host Hugh Downs, and news reader Frank Blair.



Pat Henthorn was a former Miss Quincy and assumed weathercast responsibilities from Jackie Bean in 1965.

captured the pennant on the last day of the season and upset the mighty New York Yankees in seven games.

After a decade as the king of morning TV, Dave Garroway retired in 1961 and ushered in a new era for *Today*. He was replaced on the show by Illinois native John Chancellor, a serious journalist who was never comfortable with the show biz aspects of the program. He soon gave way to Hugh Downs, a WMAQ TV, Chicago veteran, who made his network reputation as Jack Paar's announcer on *The Tonight Show*.

In 1964, Downs was paired with a young NBC writer who was first thought by NBC executives to be "too Jewish" for the program. Barbara Walters and Downs had instant chemistry. Unlike the *Today* "girls" who preceded her, she was knowledgeable on a range of topics and had no intention of playing second fiddle to the male anchors. She expected and received license to conduct the tough interviews and ask the difficult questions. Sportscaster Joe Garagiola joined with news reader Frank Blair to round out the *Today* team that dominated morning TV until Walters' departure in the mid-1970s.

"A weather girl"

WGEM TV copied the *Today* format on the local level by pairing anchormen Dick Edwards and Bob Turek with Jackie Bean, WGEM's first "weather girl". Studio sets became more elaborate, and the station increasingly relied on film reports. Turnaround time on film processing was a little over 30 minutes. It took a little longer if editing was required. The time lag to air for film from breaking news events had been greatly reduced.



(Clockwise from top) Co-hosts Pat Henthorn and Dick Edwards interview a guest on Noon in 1964. The cameraman is Rome Averbeck; Jimmy Dodd of the Mickey Mouse Club performs with WGEM TV's second weather girl Jackie Beon on a commercial remote. Bear later moved to Alaska where she was a member of the state legislature for a number of years; Jazz great Lionel Hampton is interviewed by WGEM Radio's Bob Joye during a Noon segment; Engineer Jay Sace watched video levels from the control room during a 1960s newscast. Sace is the longest-serving WGEM employee with over 49 years of service.



Turning the Corner

In modern management parlance, it is called a "Return On Investment" (ROI). And with new business ventures, stockholders and lenders expect the ROI in a short period of time.

QNI's entry into radio broadcasting in 1947, and especially the venture into the TV industry in 1953, was no sure thing. The capital needs and operational expense of these quickly expanding businesses made it difficult to turn a profit. In fact, it was not until 1960 that QNI was finally able to recover its accumulated losses in broadcasting. It took 13 years of continual investment before Quincy Broadcasting Company was finally able to stand on its own.

QNI officers and shareholders demonstrated a tremendous amount of patience and faith in the new media and the Tri-State community, a confidence that most companies could not countenance today.

Nielsen Top 25 Shows 1968-69

1. *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In* (NBC)
2. *Gomer Pyle, U.S.M.C.* (CBS)
3. *Bonanza* (NBC)
4. *Mayberry R.F.D.* (CBS)
5. *Family Affair* (CBS)
6. *Gunsmoke* (CBS)
7. *Julia* (NBC)
8. *The Dean Martin Show* (NBC)
9. *Here's Lucy* (CBS)
10. *The Beverly Hillbillies* (CBS)
11. *Mission: Impossible* (CBS)
12. *Bewitched* (ABC)
13. *The Red Skelton Hour* (CBS)
14. *My Three Sons* (ABC)
15. *The Glen Campbell Goodtime Hour* (NBC)
16. *Ironside* (NBC)
17. *The Virginian* (NBC)
18. *The F.B.I.* (ABC)
19. *Green Acres* (CBS)
20. *Dragnet* (NBC)
21. *Daniel Boone* (NBC)
22. *Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color* (NBC)
23. *The Ed Sullivan Show* (CBS)
24. *The Carol Burnett Show* (CBS)
25. *The Jackie Gleason Show* (CBS)

Daytime TV on WGEM was spiced up in 1965 when MacDonald Carey first announced, "Like sands through the hourglass, so are the days of our lives." *Days of Our Lives* was the first daytime drama presented in color. It has maintained its popularity for close to 40 years by sticking to the basics—warm love stories with special attention to the all-important first love. *Days* thrives by maintaining a living relationship with the most loyal audience in all of broadcasting, an audience that grew exponentially with the advent of the home VCR.



"Like sands through the hourglass," *Days of Our Lives* has been a staple of WGEM TV daytime programming since the mid-1960s. The show has maintained its popularity through several generations.

In cinema, James Bond films such as *Dr. No*, *From Russia With Love*, and *Goldfinger* made the numbers 007 part of popular lexicon. TV also decided to cash in with a bevy of spy programs. Robert Vaughn, David McCallum, and Leo G. Carroll starred in *Man from U.N.C.L.E.* starting in 1964. Next came *I Spy* with Robert Culp and the first black actor in a leading series role, Bill Cosby. Both shows featured campy over-the-top espionage that made quite a hit with the young audience.

"Would you believe?"

Get Smart, a comedy that debuted in 1965, was espionage with *shtick*. Don Adams played bumbling Agent 86, whose real name was Maxwell Smart. Created by Buck Henry and Mel Brooks, it was more Inspector Clouseau than James Bond. The only intelligent character in the script was Smart's female partner, Agent 99, played by fashion model Barbara Feldon.

Two classic TV shows came to WGEM TV in September 1965. Just after feminist Betty Friedan rallied for recognition of women in her book *The Feminine Mystique*, NBC rolled out the last of the old-line variety shows. *The Dean Martin Show* took the concept of a chorus line to extremes and unabashedly served notice to the feminist movement that it still had a long way to go. Dino and his stage set were almost always decorated with beautiful, compliant, and adoring women. He sang, danced, and performed skits with 12 gorgeous performers called "The Goldiggers." Nonetheless, the most sexist show ever presented on television remained wildly popular in the Tri-State area into the 1970s.



(Left to right) Bill Cosby (left) and Robert Culp (right) starred in *I Spy* starting in 1964. Cosby was the first black actor to star in a dramatic lead role on television; Robert Vaughn played Napoleon Solo, a master spy in *Man from U.N.C.L.E.*; *Get Smart* was a spy show spoof starring Don Adams as Agent 86, aka Maxwell Smart. But Agent 99, played by Barbara Feldon, was the only one with any sense in this Mel Brooks/Buck Henry farce.



Barbara Eden was a 1960s "every-man's-dream-come-true" in *I Dream of Jeannie*.

"I haven't lifted a finger since I found you."

Another program in the "every-man's-dream-come-true" category was based on this premise: An astronaut (played by Larry Hagman, who later played J.R. Ewing on *Dallas*) finds a mysterious bottle on a deserted island following an aborted space launch. In the bottle is a 2,000-year-old Barbara Eden, who emerges to fulfill every wish of her "master." NBC Standards and

Practices were concerned about an unmarried woman cavorting about an unmarried man's home, dressed in a belly-dancer costume, with an exposed navel and a come-hither wink. But the viewing audience winked too and loved *I Dream of Jeannie*, giving it a successful five-year run.

NBC televised the first NFL football game in 1939 and WGEM TV carried the pro football games in the 1950s. CBS locked up the league franchise in the 1960s. The rival American Football League started play in 1960 and was broadcast on ABC. The fledgling league featured new stars, wide-open offense, and lots of scoring. Most of the franchises were located in cities not served by the NFL, and the audience for the AFL grew every year.

"I guarantee it."

In the fall of 1965, NBC acquired broadcast rights to AFL games and tabbed announcers Curt Gowdy and Paul Chrisman to deliver the national game each week. WGEM TV also received regional telecasts of the Kansas City Chiefs. The AFL pulled off a major coup when they lured All-America quarterback Joe Willie Namath from the University of Alabama away from a contract with the NFL.



The first three Super Bowls matched the NFL champions with the AFL champions.

By 1966, NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle saw the threat and the opportunity for his league and proposed a merger. The union would take a few years to complete, but an AFL/NFL Championship game was planned for January 1967. The powerful Green Bay Packers, coached by Vince Lombardi, manhandled Hank Stram's Kansas City Chiefs in a game that would later be called the Super Bowl. Oddly enough, that first Super Bowl was carried in the area by both WGEM and KHQA.

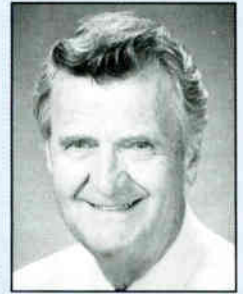
WGEM's next Super Bowl telecast was in January 1969 when the AFL's underrated New York Jets, led by Joe Namath, shocked the football world by upsetting the NFL's Baltimore Colts. The AFC on NBC was a sports staple on WGEM until the end of the century.



Joe Namath promised a victory for the AFL and delivered by beating Don Shula's powerful Baltimore Colts in Super Bowl III. Curt Gowdy called the game for NBC.

J. Ben Stewart

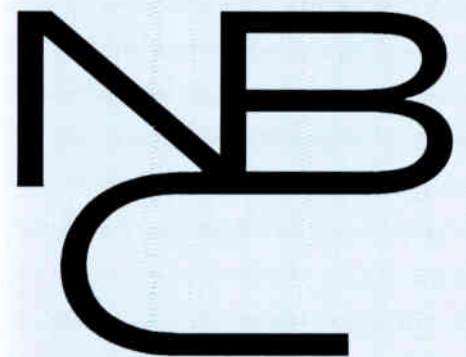
James Bennett ("Ben") Stewart had a 38-year career at Quincy Broadcasting Company, serving as the commercial manager, the sales manager, and eventually the vice president of sales. His sales leadership helped guide WGEM Radio



and TV through the lean years of its infancy until it became a prosperous company. He started at WGEM in 1956, and was responsible for all aspects of sales for WGEM AM FM TV and QBC's Muzak operation.

He assisted in the development of color TV on WGEM TV, the expansion of WGEM AM to full power in 1962, and the development of WGEM FM as Gem Country 105, the area's first full-time country music station.

Stewart graduated from Quincy Notre Dame High School and attended Purdue University and Quincy College. He served in the U.S. Navy. He was active in community affairs, particularly with charitable fundraising activities, including Quincy Notre Dame, Quincy University, and the YMCA. He was a perennial division chairman of the annual United Way campaign, and was a co-founder and coordinator of the Quincy Chamber of Commerce Ambassadors. He also served as president of the Quincy Sales and Marketing Executives Club. He retired from WGEM in 1994.



WGEM TV introduced local television newscasts in color in September 1967. This completed a 10-year project to convert the station entirely to a color studio and transmission system.

The most persistent dateline of the decade was Saigon, Republic of South Vietnam. American involvement in Indochina began during the Eisenhower administration, expanded under John Kennedy, and ballooned to a force commitment of over a half million men and women with Lyndon Johnson. The Vietnam War received unprecedented television coverage. Network newsmen and cameramen ventured into combat with American troops, and battle updates were as common in nightly newscasts as weather reports and sports scores.



Television images of the war in Vietnam dominated evening network newscasts throughout the decade.

“Our purpose in Vietnam is to prevent the success of aggression.”

The bloodshed slogged on from 1964 through 1967. Then the North Vietnamese Army and their Viet Cong shock troops launched the Tet Offensive in January 1968. The offensive was a military failure, but it was unexpected and widely covered on television. It demonstrated to the nation that America could not win the war.

As the news from the battlefield worsened, Pentagon leaders became further detached from the reality. Journalists were soon unable to mask their skepticism. Political leaders openly criticized the Vietnam policy. Student activists took to the streets in protest.

The home front during the Vietnam War was on fire. Three straight summers had produced deadly violence and civil disorder in America’s cities, especially Los Angeles, Detroit, and Chicago.



In 1967 and 1968, popular sentiment against the war began to build and was first displayed by draft-aged students.

Frustration reached another boiling point in 1968. By March, NBC reported a strong showing by peace candidate Senator Eugene McCarthy in the New Hampshire primary. Senator Robert F. Kennedy entered the race in opposition to the war. Within days, Lyndon Johnson threw in the towel, surprising everyone by announcing in a speech carried on WGEM TV that he would not seek another presidential term.

“Martin Luther King, Jr. was shot tonight in Memphis.”

On April 4, toward the end of the *Huntley-Brinkley Report*, it was announced that civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had been shot and wounded in Memphis, Tennessee. Minutes later, Chet Huntley returned to the air to say that King had been killed. The accused assassin James Earl Ray had links to the Tri-State area.



Rev. Ralph Abernathy and other civil rights leaders lead the mule-drawn cart carrying the body of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King to its final resting place in Atlanta, Georgia. The funeral cortege was carried live on WGEM TV.

Just as it had done with the Kennedy assassination in 1963,

TV was called upon to bind up the nation’s wounds. WGEM TV carried complete coverage of the King funeral from Atlanta, Georgia. But holding a nation together amid the dissension of 1968 was a tall order. Violence exploded in cities throughout the land.

“And now it’s on to Chicago.”

In a WGEM News report on the night of King’s assassination, Robert F. Kennedy said, “We will have difficult times in the future. It is not the end of violence; it is not the end of lawlessness; it is not the end of disorder.” The words were prophetic. Exactly two months later, Kennedy himself was gunned down by a Palestinian assassin named Sirhan B. Sirhan moments after delivering a victory speech for the California presidential primary.

WGEM TV broadcast full coverage of the funeral Mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York and the slow moving funeral train as the senator’s body was brought to its final resting place beside his slain brother in Arlington, Virginia.



Demonstrators promised trouble at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in August 1968. NBC positioned a live truck across from Grant Park and captured what investigators later called “a police riot.”

“The whole world is watching.”

Even then, the madness of the year was not over. Thousands of protesters gathered in Chicago in late August during the Democratic National Convention. Mayor Richard Daley wanted no problems with protesters, so he tried to confine network coverage to the grounds of the International Amphitheater, the convention site, to thwart the TV-savvy protesters. He failed.

NBC set up a remote truck across from Chicago’s Grant Park and captured the live images as demonstrators taunted police with shouts of “The whole world is watching.” What followed on live television was later described as a “police riot” as officers forcefully cleared the street and pushed protesters into paddy wagons.

WGEM stayed with the coverage as it returned to the convention hall. There, Connecticut Senator Abraham Ribicoff denounced Daley for using “gestapo” tactics on the streets of Chicago as the cameras captured Daley shouting at aids to remove Ribicoff from the rostrum.

The stage manager quickly signaled music director Leo Henning (father of future WGEM general manager Leo Henning) to lead the band in some “chase” music. Henning kicked off the next available tune in the folio, a Democrat



The interior of the International Amphitheatre on Chicago’s South Side during the 1968 Democratic National Convention. The chaos in the hall mirrored the mayhem in the streets and became the TV apotheosis of 1960s political unrest.

favorite, “Happy Days Are Here Again.” It served as a surreal accompaniment to the voice-over commentary by Chet Huntley and David Brinkley as TV cameras panned the convention hall capturing shouts, heated arguments, and raised fists.

America had seen enough. Republican presidential nominee Richard H. Nixon promised law and order and an end to the Vietnam War. He was elected in November promising to “Bring us together.”



Captain James Kirk (played by William Shatner) and the crew of the starship Enterprise lasted only three seasons on WGEM TV before they became a multibillion-dollar franchise.

“Beam me up, Scottie.”

The change and social upheaval of the latter half of the decade was reflected in prime-time TV. NASA created much excitement about the new frontier of space. TV producer and former Western writer Gene Roddenberry envisioned a “Wagon Train to the stars” set in the twenty-third century. NBC bought the idea. The critics called it a “space opera,” but *Star Trek* developed a passionate following of Trekkies, who sustained the show for three historic seasons. The starship *Enterprise* zoomed around the galaxy at “warp speed,” spreading the gospel of peace and democracy. The 3-year run on WGEM TV spawned 9 motion picture sequels, 4 television series, and 150 novels over the next 35 years. *Star Trek* became permanently woven into the fabric of American culture.

Another portrait of the times could be found in music shows geared toward younger viewers. Aside from Ed Sullivan who introduced Elvis, The Beatles, and the Rolling Stones to American audiences, networks had been squeamish about presenting the stars of the rock revolution. But the teen market was too big to ignore. About the time Mitch Miller laid down his baton and bouncing ball on *Sing Along With Mitch*, WGEM TV began carrying *Hullabaloo*, a weekly show that introduced the area to artists such as The Animals, Mitch Ryder, The Kinks, and Petula Clark.

Quincy Cablevision

Quincy Broadcasting Company and Quincy Newspapers, Inc. played a key role in first bringing cable television to the area. Prior to 1968, viewers had only two choices for clear television viewing. WGEM TV (NBC) and KHQA TV (CBS) served the same coverage as they do today. Depending on location and antenna, some viewers could also pick up KTVO TV in Kirksville, Missouri.

Cable television of the time was simply a community antenna system that allowed the operator to import distant signals from adjacent markets and provide more choices to TV viewers. By the mid-1960s, two businessmen, Herb Groubeck and Amos "Bud" Hostetter, had established a community antenna system in Fostoria and Tiffin, Ohio. In 1965, they approached Quincy Newspapers, Inc. and Quincy Broadcasting Company about securing cable television franchises in Quincy, Keokuk, and Hannibal.

The introduction of cable TV in the market was one of the most controversial local issues of the decade. Led by the vocal opposition of the Quincy Chamber of Commerce and Walter Rothchild at KHQA TV, the Quincy City Council was divided on the idea of a cable franchise. The cable TV proposal was to import five St. Louis television stations, along with KTVO, Kirksville in the original channel line-up. There was widespread fear that the introduction of St. Louis advertising to area viewers would induce them to shop outside the Tri-State market.

Quincy Newspapers, Inc. and Quincy Broadcasting Company joined with Groubeck and Hostetter to form Quincy Cablevision, Inc. and lobbied hard for the cable TV franchise.

QNI executive Thomas A. Oakley argued in Quincy that there would be no diversion of local business to the St. Louis market. At the same time, QBC vice president and general manager Joe Bonansinga made a similar argument before the Keokuk City Council. In 1965, Keokuk approved the franchise agreement with minimal opposition. However, the City of Quincy was deadlocked. The final vote was a tie, and Mayor Wes Olsen cast the deciding vote to bring cable TV to Quincy.

It took a few more years to build the system, but Quincy Cablevision began taking its first customers in late 1967 and was in full operation by 1968. Quincy Newspapers, Inc. and Quincy Broadcasting Company sold its interest in Quincy Cablevision in 1974, and used the proceeds from that sale to begin expansion in local television stations.



The Monkees was a TV show about a band that later became a band without a TV show. (left to right) Michael Nesmith, Peter Tork, Micky Dolenz, and Davy Jones.

"I'm a believer."

NBC later issued a casting call for "four insane boys, ages 17-21." A Beatles TV knock-off called *The Monkees* employed music, mad-cap adventures, mop-tops, and psychedelic production techniques like fast and slow motion and blurred focus. As a music group, *The Monkees* were manufactured by the studio, but the group soon became a Top 40 favorite on radio with hits like "I'm A Believer" and "Daydream Believer."

By the mid-1960s, Elvis Presley, the bad boy of the previous decade, had become a mainstream singer and his popularity gradually waned with the British music invasion. Then, on December 3, 1968, Elvis appeared on WGEM in his famous "Comeback Special" (though he had never really left) looking tanned and fit. The show was a huge ratings success and restored his place as the "King of Rock 'N Roll."

Ten years after advertising agencies forced *The Nat King Cole Show* off NBC, and three years after Bill Cosby's breakthrough role in *I Spy*, Diahann Carroll became the first black leading lady on TV in *Julia*. A single mom whose husband died in Vietnam, Julia was a devoted mother and caring nurse. Critics of the time said it was not an accurate portrayal of the hardships African-Americans endured, but there was no doubt that the show was a positive presentation of an African-American woman living with dignity and harmony with her white neighbors.

"You bet your sweet bippy."

One program above all truly reflected the anarchic energy of the late 1960s. *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In* captured the times perfectly. America had sit-ins, love-ins, and teach-ins. So why not a laugh-in? The weekly hour-long program lampooned everything, but the political satire was carefully wrapped in silliness, wire-to-wire one-liners, catch phrases, and non sequiturs. Gags were delivered at lightning speed by a recurring cast of characters. Most of the actors began the show as unknowns (much like *Saturday Night Live* actors several years later).

Comedians Dan Rowan and Dick Martin



Comedians Dick Martin and Dan Rowan present the "Fickle Finger of Fate" on the smash hit *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In*.

were joined by Arte Johnson, "Sock It to Me" Judy Carne, Goldie Hawn, Lily Tomlin, Joanne Worley, Gary Owens, Ruth Buzzi, Richard Dawson, and Tiny Tim, forming one of the most significant and influential series in the history of television.

By 1968, WGEM TV was growing. More space was needed to house its growing staff and increasingly sophisticated technical equipment. From its beginning in 1948, WGEM rented space for its studios from the Hotel Quincy. In the late 1960s, the station had plans to build new studio facility across from *The Quincy Herald-Whig* on Jersey Street. The owners of the Hotel Quincy relied heavily on WGEM's rent and a move by the station to a new facility would force them to close the hotel, leaving the long-term residents of the apartment complex without shelter. In January 1968, Quincy Broadcasting Buildings was incorporated and acquired the Hotel Quincy. Thomas A. Oakley, working closely with his father, devised a plan to renovate the first floor and lower level into new offices and studios for WGEM. The rest of the Hotel Quincy was completely remodeled into single-room, efficiency, and two-room apartments. The new studios were completed in September 1972.

The purchase of the Hotel Quincy was a major investment in the redevelopment of downtown Quincy. Over the years, a number of improvements have been made to the WGEM campus. The station acquired and demolished decaying vacant property west of the Hotel Quincy. WGEM was making significant changes in other areas of operation as well. In 1969, WGEM TV converted its news film process to color with magnetic sound. For the first time, they began editing film into broadcast "packages." Later in the decade, the station achieved another area broadcasting first when Maggie Thomas became the Tri-State area's first female broadcast news reporter and anchor.

Richard Nixon took office in 1969 and announced the slow withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam. Among the first units brought home was the 126th Supply and Service Company of the Illinois National Guard based in Quincy. The unit had been called up for active duty during the riots in Chicago after the death of Dr. Martin Luther King and was later assigned to overseas duty. The Quincy area held a parade when the unit returned and in typical fashion, WGEM responded with film coverage of the event.

"One giant leap for mankind"

As frenetic and disturbing as the 1960s had been, WGEM viewers and the world finished the decade with their eyes lifted to heaven. In July 1969, astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin boarded a lunar expeditionary module (LEM) known as the *Eagle*. The world held its breath as the two maneuvered toward the surface of the moon. WGEM provided 60 hours of live coverage of the lunar mission, including 31 hours of nonstop coverage.



After astronaut Neil Armstrong took his first historic steps on the moon, a television camera was set up to look back on the LEM shining against the lunar doylight.

During the descent to the lunar surface, it was all audio, no video. "Looking good, down a half... 30 feet, down two and a half, kicking up some dust, drifting to the right...okay engine stop. Houston, Tranquility base here. The *Eagle* has landed." A few hours later Armstrong took the historic first steps on the moon, which were transmitted live to TV sets on Earth in fuzzy, glorious, and astonishing black and white. It was a triumph for America and mankind and a stunning achievement for television.

Then in August WGEM presented reports of a rock festival that was taking place on a farm near Woodstock, New York. Five hundred thousand young people weathered 20-mile traffic jams, lack of food, sparse sanitation, rain, and mud to hear 32 superstar groups perform. The "me" generation left the Catskills and the decade having discovered the meaning of patience, helping, sharing, consideration, and respect. Soon the flower children of 1969 would become the leaders of a new age.





The WGEM News team in 1972 (left to right) Ran Price, Maggie Thomas, Bob Mason, Charlie Griffith, Bob Turek, and Max Lee.



By the 1970s,
television cameras
were getting smaller.
The camera operator
is William Haire.

IT GETS REAL 1970-1979

The baby boomers, America's first television generation, dominated the decade of the 1960s as teenagers and then drove culture in the 1970s toward a realistic view of life. The era was characterized by irony, satire, and sometimes deep cynicism.

News from Washington in the 1970s created a major shift in local television. First came the congressional ban on cigarette advertising on TV. Then the FCC's Prime Access Rule gave local stations like WGEM TV greater programming flexibility in the 6:30–7:00 P.M. time slot.

Network shows began to tackle more political and social issues during this time. Local news and public affairs programs became a bit more edgy and began to reflect the complexity and diversity of the area and American life. Network crime shows provided new views of law enforcement. Late-night programming expanded. Still, the majority of Tri-State viewers kept the faith, showing loyalty to programs that emphasized traditional values.

“Oh, there’s just one more thing...”

Cops and Docs on NBC shows were portrayed as real people. Crime dramas became more real, and, in some cases, more violent. *Police Story*, an early 1970s series written by Joseph Wambaugh, was ahead of its time. It focused on the psychological toll of police work. *The Rockford Files* and *McMillan and Wife* were more about the personal lives of the main characters than chasing the bad guys. Some shows like *Ironsides*, starring Raymond Burr, focused on the challenges of people with physical handicaps. *Adam-12* depicted life on the mean streets of Los Angeles, while *Emergency* told us about a new profession—paramedicine.

Police Woman, *C.H.I.P.S.*, and *Columbo* were almost fanciful compared to the later harsh reality of *Hill Street Blues* in the 1980s or *Homicide* and *Law & Order* in the 1990s.

“Elizabeth, it’s the big one.”

Other shows made us laugh with them, not at them. *Sanford & Son* broke new ground with unapologetic ethnic humor that had people of all races laughing and helped bridge a tense racial divide. The success of *Sanford* spawned *Chico and The Man* a few years later. The show about an aging garage mechanic and his young Latino assistant took on cultural misunderstanding and generational tension. But *Chico's* run was tragically shortened when its star, Freddie Prinze, took his own life.

“The devil made me do it!”

Variety shows were not quite dead, but the content had changed radically. *The Flip Wilson Show* showcased its star as a one-man

repertory company with oddball characters like Reverend Leroy (pastor of the “Church of What’s Happenin’ Now”), Sonny (the White House janitor), and the sassy, liberated, and perfectly outrageous Geraldine Jones. She was always devoted to her man “Killer” and let him know that “What you see is what you get.” She explained every extravagance with, “The devil made me do it!” All of these phrases outlived the show and became part of 1970s-speak.



Flip Wilson as the irrepressible Geraldine Jones in 1973.

In the spring of 1970, the United States military launched an offensive into Cambodia in an attempt to destroy Viet Cong safe havens to hasten America's withdrawal from Vietnam. After almost a year of relative quiet on college campuses, violent protests erupted again.



(Left to right) Peter Falk starred as dumb-like-a-fox detective Columbo on the *NBC Mystery Theatre*; Larry Wilcox and Erik Estrada played two California Highway Patrolmen in *C.H.I.P.S.*, one of NBC TV's most popular shows in the late 1970s; Freddie Prinze and Jack Albertson bridged the ethnic and generation gaps in *Chico and The Man*; Redd Foxx (right) and Demond Wilson (left) starred in *Sanford and Son*.

James M. Lawrence

No individual has had more to do with the style and presentation of WGEM TV over the past 30 years than Jim Lawrence. He was born in Naperville, Illinois in 1957 and moved with his family to Quincy in 1969. He graduated from Quincy Catholic Boys High School (now Quincy Notre Dame) in 1975.

He started at WGEM at the age of 16 as a studio assistant and quickly became involved in radio program automation. He started full time as a news film photographer in 1976 and later anchored weekend weather and sports. He was named production manager of WGEM TV in 1984 and coordinated the rapid advancement of the station in videotape production techniques. He became operations manager of WGEM TV in 1998 and assumed operations responsibility for WGEM AM FM and CGEM a year later.

During his tenure, he produced and directed *The Jerry Lewis Telethon* local segments, the Arthritis Telethon, and the annual Dogwood Festival Parade. He coordinated the production for hundreds of live broadcasts by WGEM News, the *Floodwatch '93* video, continuous coverage of President Clinton's visit to Quincy, coverage of Pope John Paul II's visit to St. Louis, and live coverage of the tornados in 2003. He developed *Gem Kids*, a program for teens that was recognized as an "Outstanding Children's Program" by the Illinois Broadcasters Association.

Lawrence served as a director of the Quincy Community Little Theatre, the Quincy Art Center, and the Quincy Area Chamber of Commerce Technology Committee. He was named to the Washington Theatre Commission in 2003.



"National Guardsmen opened fire."

On May 4, the *Huntley-Brinkley Report* reported that Ohio National Guardsmen opened fire on protesters at Kent State University. Four students were killed and others were severely injured. The Kent State tragedy marked the end of widespread student protest. The consequences were now all too real.

"This is *The Tenth Hour Report*."

With the new decade, WGEM News underwent a face-lift. Color cameras for local news shows were added, and a new technology called "Chromakey" allowed for on-camera talent and graphics to be electronically blended. Chromakey was a leap forward for news and weather presentations.

The 6:00 P.M. newscast was renamed *The Sixth Hour Report*, and the 10:00 P.M. newscast became *The Tenth Hour Report*. Max Lee anchored the news, while Bob Mason handled weather and sports. The newscast slowly began to resemble the kind of local presentation we see today. The increased use of film packages provided context, and on-the-scene actualities brought more realism to regional stories.

NBC also reformatted its nightly news program after the retirement of Chet Huntley. David Brinkley moved on to special projects for NBC and the program reemerged as the *NBC Nightly News with John Chancellor*.

In February 1972, President Nixon, a staunch anti-communist, boldly went to China to open a new relationship with the world's most populated country. WGEM TV carried extensive live coverage of the historic visit. Historic coverage was repeated again three months later when Nixon became the first sitting U.S. president to visit the Soviet Union.



NBC Nightly News with John Chancellor replaced the Huntley-Brinkley Report in 1971.



WGEM TV Master Control in 1974.





Ron Price (left) and Bob Mason (right) anchor *The Sixth Hour Report* in early 1973.



Bob Mason anchored weather and sports for WGEM TV for most of the 1970s.

The foreign policy coups would propel Nixon's re-election in November. But, on June 17, 1972, *NBC Nightly News with Garrick Utley* reported that five men, including one former CIA employee, were arrested trying to bug the offices of the Democratic National Committee in Washington D.C. It was the first mention of the deeper scandal that would be known as Watergate.

WGEM TV viewers watched the last days of America's direct involvement in the Vietnam War as a peace treaty was signed in Paris in January 1973 and prisoners of war (including future Senator John McCain) landed at Clark Air Force base in the Philippines.

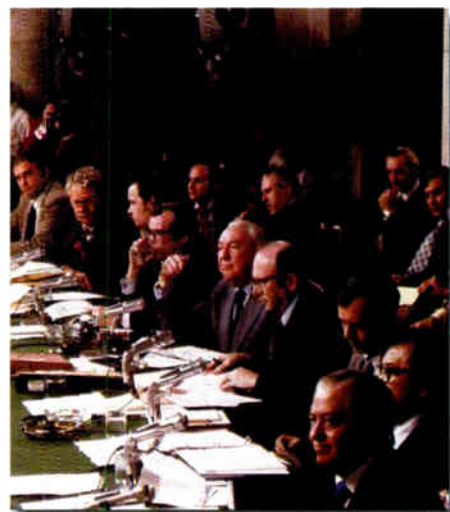
Later that month, live coverage of the funeral of President Lyndon Johnson had barely finished when the Watergate grand jury convened and began to reveal something sinister in the White House.

“What did the President know, and when did he know it?”

A few months later, the Senate Watergate Committee turned daytime TV watchers into hearing junkies as daily details were uncovered about illicit activities that were as salacious as any soap opera. The White House was under siege. Much of the daily information put forth by the press office was presented by a young NBC reporter named Tom Brokaw.



The WGEM studios were remodeled as part of the complete renovation of the Hotel Quincy building, which was completed in 1972.



Created on February 7, 1973, the Watergate Committee was officially known as the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities and generated a lead story virtually every day.

David R. Oakley

Dave Oakley was born in Quincy in 1940. He attended Quincy Public Schools and graduated from Lake Forest Academy. He attended the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University and graduated from Quincy College in 1964 with a degree in business administration.

He began his full-time media career as a classified and retail advertising representative at *The Quincy Herald-Whig*, where he was instrumental in the development of the newspaper's weekly Home Section. He was named advertising manager of *The Herald-Whig* in 1968. Oakley was elected as a director of Quincy Newspapers, Inc. in 1969 and was named vice president of QNI in 1973.



That same year, he coordinated a special promotional program called "Speak Out for Expressways," a multifaceted media campaign to draw attention to the need for better highways in West Central Illinois.

He became vice president and general manager of Quincy Broadcasting Company after the retirement of Joe Bonansinga in 1975. He spearheaded a number of local programming and public affairs initiatives during his tenure at WGEM including *Capsule Comments*, *Kids Comments*, *WGEM Wants To Know*, and *Feedback*. He also developed the WGEM Home & Living Show, the WGEM Agri-Fair, and the WGEM Community Service Award.

He served as a director and chairman of the Quincy Area Chamber of Commerce from 1968 to 1974, a director of the Two Rivers Council Girls Scouts of America, a director of St. Mary Hospital, and president of the Quincy Sales and Marketing Executives Club. He was chairman of the Joint Industrial Development Commission, where he developed the first economic development film for the Quincy area and directed the effort for federal grants that led to the creation of the Great River Economic Development Foundation, where he also served as a director.

Oakley was active in the promotion of a school bond issue, the renovations to Quincy Regional Airport, and the development of Clat Adams Bicentennial Park. He served as chairman of the United Way Drive in 1981 and assisted in fundraising efforts for the YMCA, Blessing Hospital, the Quincy Public Library, Transitions of Western Illinois, and Quincy Notre Dame.

He served two terms as a director of the Illinois Broadcasters Association and was a member of the NBC Affiliates Board. An experience public speaker, Oakley retired from WGEM in 1983 to form his own business consulting firm, Satisfaction Guaranteed.

He served two terms as a director of the Illinois Broadcasters Association and was a member of the NBC Affiliates Board. An experience public speaker, Oakley retired from WGEM in 1983 to form his own business consulting firm, Satisfaction Guaranteed.

"I shall resign the presidency.."

For over a year, Watergate was the main drama on WGEM TV. Nixon's popularity plummeted and the House of Representatives voted on Articles of Impeachment. Nixon resigned in an Oval Office speech. The newly elected President Gerald Ford summed up the feelings of the time when he said, "Our long national nightmare is over."



(Top) Richard Nixon boards Marine One for the last time after resigning the presidency in August 1974; (Below) Gerald Ford is sworn in as president by Chief Justice Warren Burger.

"Downtown Hannibal resembled Venice."

Amid the nation's constitutional crisis, WGEM TV still managed to provide notable coverage of major local events. In April 1973, a long harsh winter and heavy spring rains raised the Mississippi River to new record levels. Levees throughout the area began to give way, flooding thousands of acres and inundating villages and towns, including a large section of downtown Hannibal. WGEM News provided unprecedented film coverage of the Flood of '73, anchored by Ron Price.

Later that same year, there was more war in the Middle East. This time the Arab nations, including Saudi Arabia, implemented an oil embargo against America, which touched off a decade of shortages, soaring gas prices, and runaway inflation. Drivers queued up at local gas stations for hours to fill their large, heavy, and inefficient automobiles.



A view of flooded downtown Hannibal comes to viewers through 16mm news film.

The Knapheide Manufacturing plant in West Quincy was inundated during the flood of April 1973.



Saturday afternoon baseball was still big in the 1970s. Curt Gowdy (left) and Tony Kubek (right) were NBC's lead broadcast team.



Boston Red Sox catcher Carlton Fisk directs a long ball fair in the 1975 World Series.

“He did it! He did it!”

Sports events carried on WGEM TV grew in popularity. In addition to the NFL and Major League Baseball, NBC broadcast championship tennis, carrying the French Open and Wimbledon. Throughout the decade, the action of the superstars at center court was among the hottest sports events on TV.

WGEM TV also presented baseball history to the region in April 1973 when the Atlanta Braves' "Hammerin' Hank" Aaron broke Babe Ruth's record for career home runs. Regular weekend regional broadcasts of the St. Louis Cardinals bolstered the NBC Saturday baseball coverage. That fall, viewers also witnessed the triumph before the ignominy when O.J. Simpson set a new NFL single season rushing record.

Baseball fans celebrated the 1975 World Series as one of the greatest ever, with Game 6 providing the ultimate moment. NBC's left-field camera, which was shot from the fabled "green monster" at Boston's Fenway Park, picked up a long curving fly ball off the bat of Carlton Fisk, as he coaxed the ball fair for a home run in one of the most memorable television images in sports history.

“The nicest word”

As in the 1960s, Tri-State viewers continued to prefer TV entertainment shows that reflected Midwestern sensibilities. Laura Ingalls Wilder once wrote, "Home is the nicest word there is." In 1974, Michael Landon, who starred in *Bonanza*, thought Wilder's *Little House* books had potential as a television series. Set in the small town of Walnut Grove, Minnesota, the warm, sentimental themes and continuing story lines built a huge following over the show's nine years. It was consistently among the top-rated programs in the area, even after its strength had waned across the entire network. *Little House* reprised several years later in the afternoon on WGEM TV in syndicated reruns. Landon followed up *Little House* with another hit with area viewers called *Highway to Heaven*, which ran on WGEM TV for five years.



Little House on the Prairie brought Midwestern family values to prime time. (top row left to right) Michael Landon, Lindsay Greenbush, and Melissa Sue Anderson (bottom row left to right) Karen Grossle and Melissa Gilbert.

Maggie Thomas

Maggie Thomas was born in Evansville, Indiana in 1929, but spent her childhood in the Quincy area. She graduated from Quincy Senior High School and attended William Woods College and Quincy College.

She began her broadcasting career during college at WTAD Radio. She left the area after marrying, but returned to WTAD in 1961 as a copywriter. She began her association with WGEM in 1971 and was for many years the area's first and only female TV news reporter. She also served as a weekend news anchor.



In 1976, she produced the film documentary *WGEM Goes To Washington*, a glimpse at the nation's capitol during the bicentennial year. Thomas excelled with feature reporting, and covered virtually every major weekend event and festival in the region during the two decades of her TV news career. She was also a skillful crime reporter and provided WGEM's initial reporting of the Alan Madden murder in 1981.

Thomas was also a gifted actress and starred in 10 Quincy Community Little Theatre productions. Revered by her colleagues and respected by viewers, she received many accolades when she retired in 1991. The Quincy YWCA later instituted the Maggie Thomas Award for Communications in their annual Women of Achievement program.

Nielsen Top 25 Shows 1972-73

1. *All in the Family* (CBS)
2. *Sanford and Son* (NBC)
3. *Hawaii Five-O* (CBS)
4. *Maude* (CBS)
5. *Bridget Loves Bernie* (CBS)
6. *Sunday Mystery Movie* (NBC)
7. *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (CBS)
8. *Gunsmoke* (CBS)
9. *The Wonderful World of Disney* (NBC)
10. *Ironside* (NBC)
11. *Adam-12* (NBC)
12. *The Flip Wilson Show* (NBC)
13. *Marcus Welby, M.D.* (ABC)
14. *Cannon* (CBS)
15. *Here's Lucy* (CBS)
16. *The Bob Newhart Show* (CBS)
17. *Tuesday Movie of the Week* (NBC)
18. *ABC NFL Football* (ABC)
19. *The Partridge Family* (ABC)
20. *The Waltons* (CBS)
21. *Medical Center* (CBS)
22. *The Carol Burnett Show* (CBS)
23. *ABC Sunday Movie* (ABC)
24. *The Rookies* (ABC)
25. *Escape* (ABC)

“Thanks for the memories.”

For most of the century, no entertainer was more closely associated with NBC than Bob Hope. His 284 TV comedy specials and GI Road Shows for the network produced blockbuster ratings and kept America laughing in war and peace. The *Bob Hope Specials* reached the zenith of popularity in the 1970s. He presented annual Christmas joy to American soldiers in Korea, Germany, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf, which was filmed or videotaped and replayed back home in America.



Comedian Bob Hope produced hundreds of specials for the NBC network.

“Stay up and watch the stars come out.”

On the local level, two broadcast traditions were started in 1974. WGEM provided the first live coverage of the Dogwood Festival Parade and has covered the event live and on tape every year since. That same year, *The Jerry Lewis Telethon* for the Muscular Dystrophy Association became the highlight of Labor Day weekend. The first show was hosted locally by Bill Wegman and Bob Mason. Over the past 30 years, the annual WGEM effort has generated millions to help fight neuromuscular disease.

(Clockwise from right) The first *Jerry Lewis Telethon* was broadcast by WGEM TV on Labor Day in 1974; Bill Wegman, Jerry Lewis, and Bob Turek at the Sahara Hotel in Las Vegas, recording promos for WGEM's telethon broadcast in 1977; WGEM TV studio during the local segments of the 1976 *Jerry Lewis Telethon*. Comeraman Duane Nichols and producer-director Leo Henning.





The Bee Gees were one of the hottest acts on *The Midnight Special*.

Late-night programming on WGEM expanded past Johnny Carson when *Tomorrow* with Tom Snyder was added to the line-up in 1974. NBC recognized that teenagers in the 1970s wanted to do two things—stay up late and watch rock concerts—so a show called *The Midnight Special* filled a slot on Friday night. The show was hosted by Wolfman Jack and featured pop stars like Alice Cooper, Linda Ronstadt, Elton John, Aretha Franklin, Prince, Helen Reddy, the Bee Gees, Rod Stewart, Billy Joel, the Village People, Aerosmith, and Jim Croce.

“Live from New York, it’s Saturday night!”

In 1975, NBC called upon a 31-year-old producer to launch a late-night experiment to replace the Saturday night reruns of *The Tonight Show*. Lorne Michaels had been a writer on *Laugh-In* and had produced some successful Lily Tomlin specials for ABC. He planned the new show to feature smart humor that tapped into the shared experience of the TV generation.



Executive producer Lorne Michaels guided *SNL* through over 28 years of cutting-edge comedy.

On October 11, 1975 in NBC Studio 8H (built originally as home to Arturo Toscanini and the NBC Symphony), Michaels’ *Saturday Night* (later renamed *Saturday Night Live*) “experiment” took wings and instantly became America’s pop-culture touchstone. The unknown “Not-Ready-For-Prime-Time-Players” Chevy Chase, Dan Aykroyd, John Belushi, Garrett Morris, Lorraine Newman, and Gilda Radner were the first in a long line of future superstars to break through on *SNL*.

The first show also featured a wacky routine from comedian Andy Kaufman, lip-syncing to the theme

John Belushi was one of the “Not-Ready-For-Prime-Time-Players” who revolutionized late-night comedy with *Saturday Night Live*.



from *Mighty Mouse*. Bill Murray joined the cast in its second season. For the next five years, the first *SNL* company added new phrases to American English: “two wild and crazy guys,” “never mind,” “but nooooo!,” “bery, bery good to me,” and “consume mass quantities.”

“Shots were fired at President Ford.”

The comic one-liners and characters from *SNL* were not the only expressions and names new to Tri-State viewers of the time. Names like the “Symbionese Liberation Army” (kidnappers of newspaper heiress Patti Hearst) and Lynette “Squeaky” Fromme (Manson cult member who attempted to kill President Gerald Ford) dominated the news. NBC broke into prime-time shows twice in 1975 to report failed attempts on the president’s life.

Other breaking and closely followed news events included the fall of Saigon to the North Vietnamese Army and the Marine rescue of seamen from the U.S. merchant ship *Mayaguez*, which was held captive in Communist Cambodia.



Refugees cue up to escape the fall of Saigon in 1975.

NBC made more changes in its morning line-up. Barbara Walters’ departure in 1976 prompted auditions from seasoned female broadcasters throughout the country. In the end, NBC gambled and brought in a young anchor from Indianapolis with barely four years experience in the TV business. Jane Pauley was teamed with Tom Brokaw, film critic Gene Shalit, and homey weatherman Willard Scott to create a new era in the storied history of *Today*.



Today in 1979. (left to right) Gene Shalit, Jane Pauley, Willard Scott, and Tom Brokaw.

Brady W. Dreasler

Brady Dreasler was born in Quincy in 1956. He graduated from Quincy Senior High School, attended Quincy College, and received a degree in broadcast engineering from John Wood Community College.

He began his career with WGEM while he was still a high school student in 1972 as a studio assistant before joining WGEM News as a film photographer. In 1978, he moved to WGEM AM Radio where he hosted the afternoon drive time show until 1982.



Dreasler was later transferred to WGEM TV sales as an account executive from 1982–1990 before being named local sales manager in 1990. He returned to the production side of the business when he was promoted to operations manager of WGEM TV in 1991. He became station manager of WGEM AM FM TV in 1998. He moved to the corporate offices of Quincy Newspapers, Inc. in 1999 and was later named director of facilities, capital, and engineering for QNI.

Dreasler was a key member of the team of managers who developed WGEM over the past quarter century. His production and technical expertise guided the integration of several generations of radio automation systems, the conversion to satellite reception systems for TV and radio networks, the development of WGEM DT (the area's first digital television station), and the creation of CGEM TV.

He has been active in the community and served as director of the United Way of Adams County and the Family Service Agency of Adams County. He was also the former president of the Quincy Rotary East Club.



The first local newscasts using two color cameras were presented in 1974. Scott Smith (left) and Ran Price (right) present *The Tenth Hour Report*.

1976 was America's bicentennial year. The local celebration began with a boom on January 1 as a replica revolutionary war cannon, crafted by employees of Gardner-Denver Company in Quincy, was fired on the lawn of the Adams County Courthouse in front of WGEM cameras to kick off the year-long celebration.

Later, the station produced *WGEM Goes To Washington*, which was hosted by Maggie Thomas. It was a special documentary highlighting the bicentennial year in the nation's capital. On America's 200th birthday, WGEM provided wall-to-wall coverage of the celebration from coast to coast.

“Indiana is the 1976 NCAA Champion!”

In March 1976, the undefeated Indiana Hoosiers played Michigan for the NCAA Basketball Championship on NBC and WGEM, and showcased a local boy who made good. Indiana's star point guard Bobby Wilkerson left the game early with an injury. Indiana coach Bob Knight turned to a backup player for help. Jim Wisman was a former Illinois All-State standout for the Quincy High School Blue Devils. His biggest moment at Indiana to that point had come when Coach Knight grabbed him by the jersey and angrily shook him in an incident that generated national headlines earlier in the season. Area sports fans were delighted when Wisman came off the bench and coolly guided Indiana's front-line superstars to winning the National Championship.

“Big Events”

WGEM's regular prime-time series fell on hard times in the late 1970s. The mini-series dominated the schedule during every station ratings period at the end of the decade. Regular series programming hardly had a chance.

ABC's historic broadcast of Alex Haley's *Roots* prompted NBC to counter with its own Big Events, including the television premiere of *The Godfather*, which attracted 80 million viewers (along with vocal protest from Italian-Americans). James Woods and Meryl Streep starred in *Holocaust*, a stunning and powerful film that ran over four nights in April 1978. *Jesus of Nazareth* attracted an



Meryl Streep starred in *Holocaust*, an NBC mini-series in 1978.





To Tell The Truth was a syndicated game show that aired during the “checkerboard” era in prime access programs.

Popular shows of the checkerboard era on WGEM included *To Tell The Truth*, *Beat the Clock*, *Police Surgeon*, *Circus!*, *Salty*, *the Sea Lion*, and *Buck Owens*.

By the mid-1970s, prime access checkerboard schedules gave way to “strips,” that is, the same program every day in the same time period. WGEM TV’s first stripped show in prime access was Jack Webb’s *Adam-12*, which was presented in off-network reruns. After a successful three-year run, it was replaced by popular reruns of *My Three Sons*. Stripped off-network reruns extended to the late afternoon hours with *Gunsmoke* and *Gilligan’s Island*.

WGEM News was beginning a new era with a crop of young talent. Ron Price, Les Sachs, and Bob Mason anchored the 6:00 and 10:00 P.M. newscasts. Reporter Maggie Thomas became the first female news anchor in the market when she was assigned weekend news shows on WGEM. The news staff was expanded with added reporters and photographers. Major studio renovations gave all news programs a fresh look.



Rep. Harold Volkmer (D-MO) (left) and Ron Price (right) on *Feedback*, a monthly live call-in show from 1975–1979.

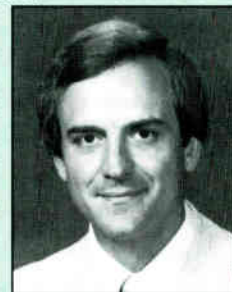
“This is *Feedback*.”

The late 1970s ushered in a period of reinvigorated local program development and community outreach at WGEM. *Feedback*, hosted by Ron Price, was a monthly live viewer participation program on issues affecting the area. Charlie Griffith hosted *Contempo*, a monthly discussion show about the arts and regional nonprofit activities. Major regional issues were examined in *WGEM Wants To Know* forums, some of which were broadcast in prime time. Topics of concern were also presented in short form with *Capsule Comments*, which was hosted by Charlie Griffith and Bill Wegman.

Les Sachs

Les Sachs was born in 1950 in Warrenton, Missouri and grew up in Wentzville, Missouri. He received a degree in journalism from the University of Missouri at Columbia in 1972 and began his broadcasting career as news director of WJAK Radio in Jackson, Tennessee.

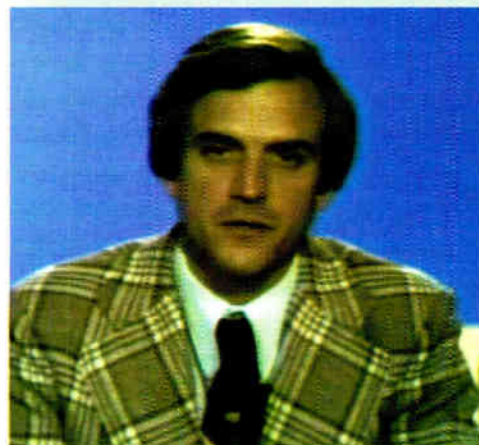
He was hired as a general assignment reporter for WGEM in 1973 and soon began anchoring weekend newscasts. In 1978, he became the main anchor for the 6:00 and 10:00 P.M. weeknight newscasts. That same year, he was involved in a number of the film documentaries produced by WGEM News at the time.



He was named assignment editor in 1979 in addition to his anchoring duties and became news director in 1983. Under his leadership, WGEM News evolved into the area’s dominant source for news and information.

He left WGEM in 1989 to become news director of WHOI TV in Peoria, Illinois and later moved to KGAN TV in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He returned to WGEM as news director in March 1993. A few months after his return, WGEM News would become engaged in the biggest news story in its 50-year history during the Flood of 1993. Sachs directed and stretched the station’s news resources to the limit to cover the story and guided the coverage that received the Edward R. Murrow Award from the Radio and Television News Directors Association and the National Headliner Award from the Press Club of Atlantic City. WGEM was also named Station of the Year that year by the Illinois Associated Press.

Sachs has been at the WGEM anchor desk for virtually every major breaking news story in the area over the past 25 years. He has a distinguished record as a mentor to long-time WGEM News employees and other journalists who served apprenticeships at the station before moving on to larger markets.



Les Sachs in a 1978 video clip showing the 1970s style of bright plaids and wide lapels.

The news department was also responsible for the production of a series of documentary films prepared for broadcast in prime access. *The Sixty Million Dollar Preview* showcased economic development projects in the Tri-State area, including the Clarence Cannon Dam, Mark Twain Lake, and the Quincy East Bypass project (now Interstate 172).

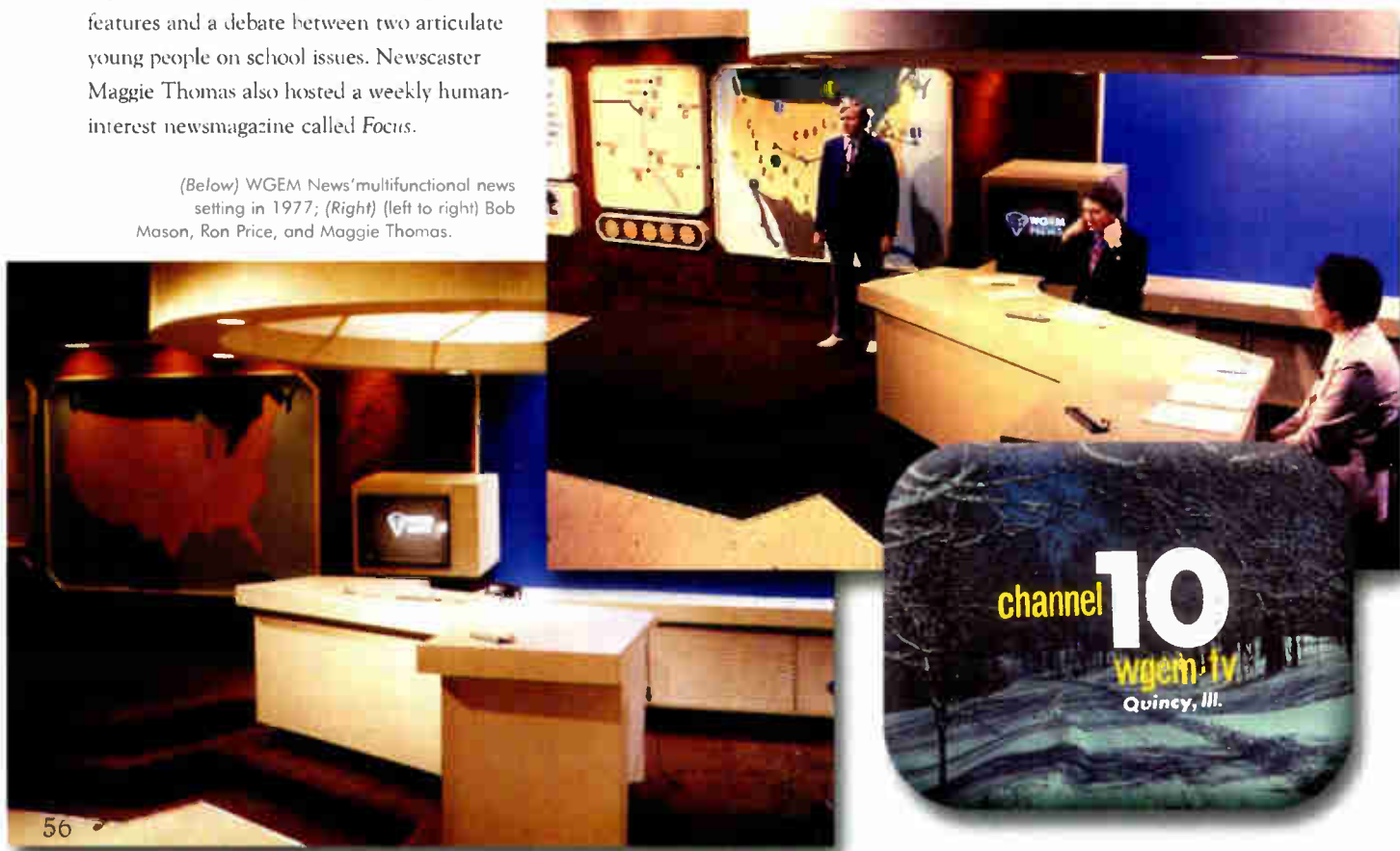
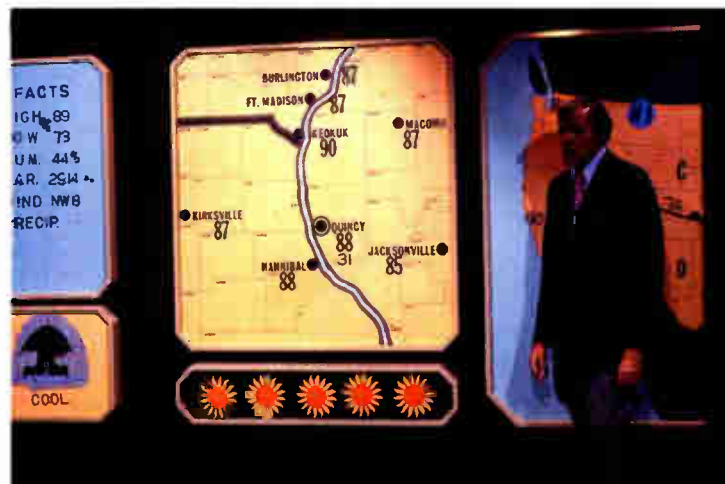
Les Sachs produced *Rural Law Enforcement and Crime*, which addressed the difficulties of policing remote parts of the viewing area, foreshadowing illegal drug activity in rural areas today. *Oh Say, Can You See?*, hosted by Scott Smith, examined a rash of bizarre UFO sightings throughout the Tri-State area.

Local and state election coverage expanded with the first-ever live TV reports from campaign headquarters on election night, coordinated vote tabulation, and comprehensive live reports from all area counties.

WGEM News also provided extended coverage of the major breaking news of the time, including a major chemical fire at the America Cyanamid Plant in Palmyra, Missouri, major fires in Keokuk and Quincy, and the structural failure of earth works at the construction site of the Clarence Cannon Dam. The catastrophe set the Mark Twain Lake project back for years.

WGEM TV also launched several local program initiatives aimed at children and young adults. *Kids Komments*, hosted by Quincy University reading instructor Sue Francour, was a five-minute program that was aired during local cut-ins on *Today*. Monthly half-hour specials of the show followed. *Quincy College Quiz Bowl* began in 1977 and was emceed by Bill Wegman. The station also developed a show called *Cub Reporter*, which was a monthly newsmagazine for area junior high school students. It included news features and a debate between two articulate young people on school issues. Newscaster Maggie Thomas also hosted a weekly human-interest newsmagazine called *Focus*.

(Below) WGEM News' multifunctional news setting in 1977; (Right) (left to right) Bob Mason, Ron Price, and Maggie Thomas.





New reporters Scott Smith (left) and Les Sachs (right) share ideas in 1975.



Today in Quincy in 1978. (left to right) John Spring, Quincy Notre Dame; Joe Boransingco and Ken Amen, QND fundraising co-chairs; and Bill Wegman.



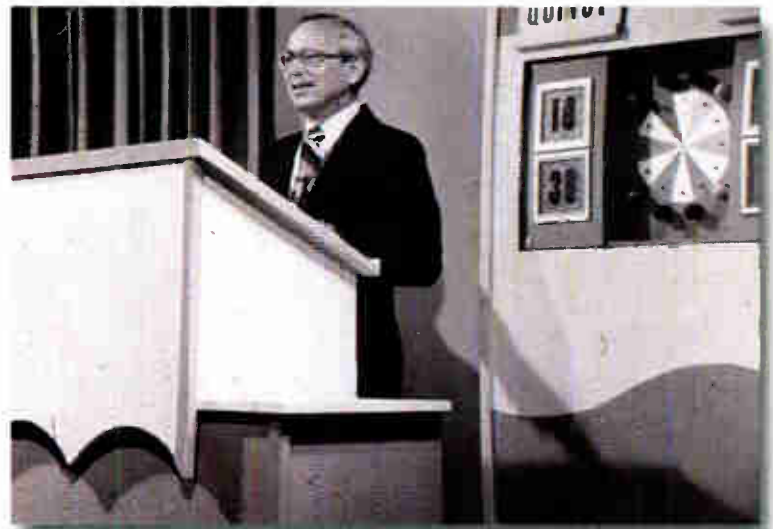
A WGEM Wants To Know Forum in 1976 tackled critical funding problems in area schools.



Charlie Griffith interviews Illinois State Representative Mary Lou Kent on Viewpoint.



Charlie Griffith (left) and Ron Price (right) report WGEM's local election returns in November 1976.



Bill Wegman hosts Quincy College Quiz Bowl in 1978.

“Weirdos, loonies, cranks, and screwballs.”

Reality TV is thought of as a recent television phenomenon. The idea of watching people in prime time throwing off inhibitions for friends, neighbors, and countrymen actually had its start in 1979. George Schlatter, the producer of *Laugh-In*, developed an innovative weekly series called *Real People*. *Newsweek* said the show combined “the exhibitionism of *The Gong Show*, the voyeurism of *Candid Camera*, and the freaky fascination of *Ripley’s Believe It or Not*.”

Hosts Fred Willard, John Barbour, Sarah Purcell, and Skip Stephenson solicited opinions from the studio audience and gave rise to a TV formula later emulated by Phil Donahue, Jerry Springer, and Geraldo Rivera.



(Left) Skip Stephenson, Fred Willard, and Sarah Purcell hosted the wacky show *Real People* in 1979; (right) Chuck Barris, the creator and host of *The Gong Show*, the zaniest game show of the 1970s.

In August 1979, President Jimmy Carter, then tracking behind in election polling, decided to take a week-long vacation-campaign swing through America’s heartland aboard the historic Delta Queen Riverboat. The trip included an extended stop in Hannibal, Missouri.



Charlie Griffith was WGEM’s news director from 1953 to 1976. He later served as director of public affairs until 1995.



WGEM News photographer Steve Starnes. He is pictured here with a CP-16, the most advanced television news camera of the era.

“The President walks toward Cardiff Hill.”

WGEM News mobilized to provide nine hours of exclusive and continuous live radio and TV coverage of the historic event. Coverage followed the early morning docking, a presidential walking tour through the Hannibal Historic District, and the presidential party’s afternoon departure from the riverfront.

The broadcast was a remarkable technical achievement for its time. Four large color television cameras were positioned on scaffolding that was placed among the thousands of well-wishers who arrived in Hannibal for the day. Camera cables were strung on telephone poles and railroad crossings to a single remote truck, which directed the TV signal back to the Quincy studios through a microwave transmitter perched atop the old Hannibal grain terminal. Ron Price, Les Sachs, Paul Martino, and Maggie

Thomas provided up-close coverage as President Carter slowly made his way through the crowds.

On a sunny September afternoon one month later, Carter appeared on WGEM TV with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin to sign the Camp David Accords, ending decades of war between Egypt and Israel.

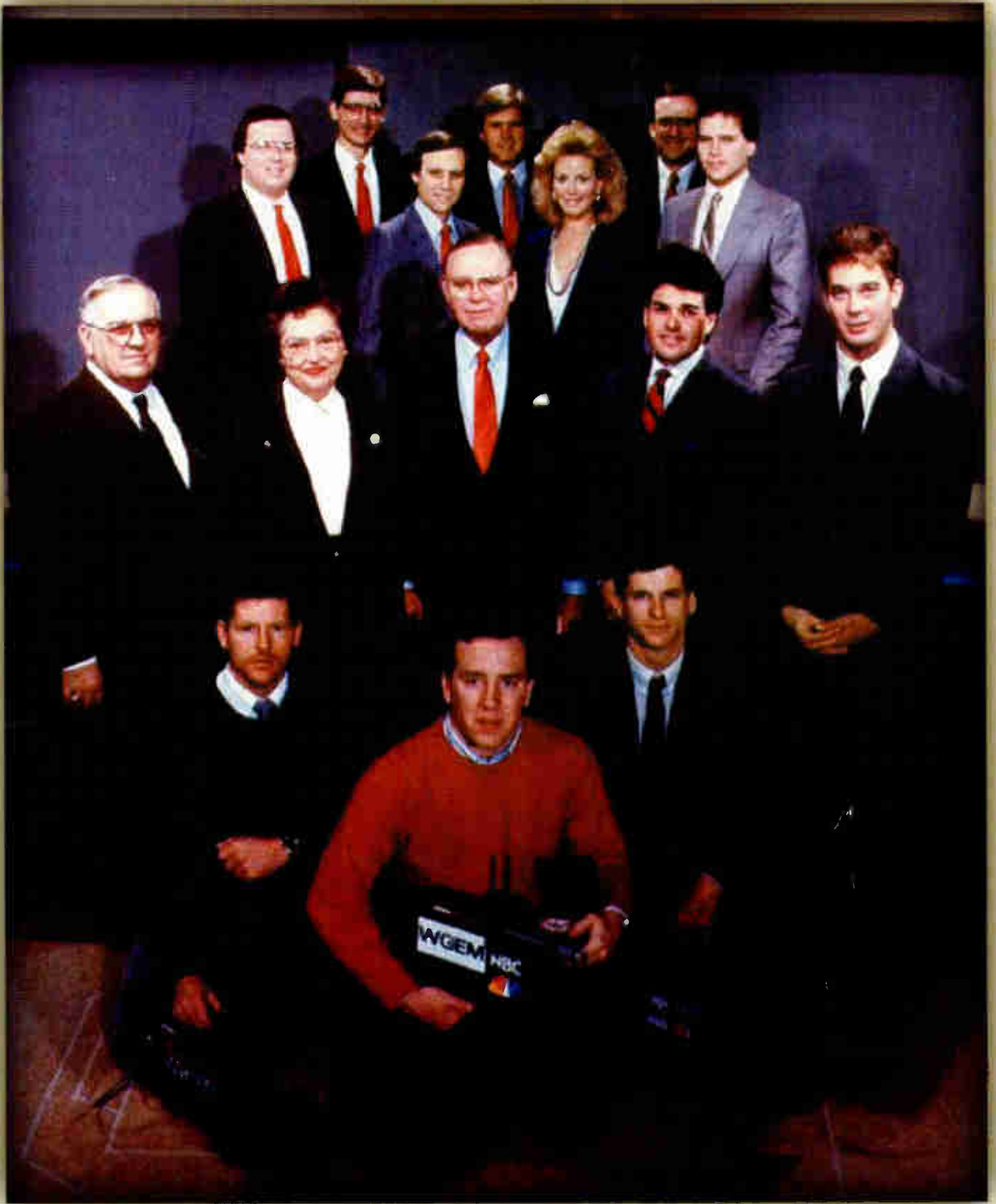
In November, Iranian revolutionaries stormed the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and seized 53 American diplomats as hostages. The Iran Hostage Crisis played out on WGEM TV for over a year. The failure of the Carter Administration to resolve the crisis seemed emblematic of a decade of malaise and cynicism.

America and the people of the Tri-State area had serious doubts during this time. They had questioned the institutional status quo back in the 1960s, but at least there were alternative proposals. The pervading doubt at the end of the 1970s was paralyzing. There was doubt about future prosperity, about American industry and productivity, and about the ability of leaders to shape events. By the end of the decade, many people shared the angst echoed by country music singer Merle Haggard when he intoned, "Are the good times really over for good?"



President Jimmy Carter visits Hannibal, Missouri in August 1979. WGEM TV provided over nine hours of continuous live coverage of the historic event.





The WGEM News team in 1986. (top row left to right) Tom Vodač, Dave Taylor, and Les Sachs. (third row left to right) Steve Looten, Ralph Bristol, Shan Hendrix Whiston, and Dave Hennen. (second row left to right) Bob Turek, Maggie Thomas, Charlie Griffith, Mike Jones, and Dan Krosse. (bottom row left to right) Rick Junkerman, Jim Whifield, and Tim Hellhake

A SECOND GOLDEN AGE 1980-1989

In 1980, Ronald Reagan was swept into office with the promise of “a new beginning.” At his Presidential Inauguration on a sunny winter day in 1981, he said that the cure for the malaise of the 1970s was simply a “willingness to believe in ourselves and to believe in our capacity to perform great deeds.”

To many Americans, it felt like a fresh start. January 20, 1981 also turned out to be an incredible day in the history of local television. It was no ordinary Inaugural as outgoing President Jimmy Carter worked feverishly until his last moment in office to free the 53 Americans hostages still held in Iran.

Live television pictures and overseas reports about the release of the captives were interlaced with the pomp and majesty of the nation’s quadrennial transfer of power. As Reagan recited the oath of office, the hostages were winging their way to freedom.

The remainder of that day was pure celebration—the promise of brighter times in America and the overwhelming joy depicted in live pictures as the hostages arrived at Main-Rhine air base in Germany.

Americans seem to awake from 10 years of low expectations, presidential scandal, increasing crime and poverty, and runaway inflation to a more optimistic era that would later be described as “Morning in America.”

The nation seemed to be slowly reinvigorated under the leadership of a seemingly sunny and kind man in the White



House, who presided over a decade of solid growth and prosperity. Before the decade ended, WGEM TV showcased the end of the Cold War hostilities and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

“No one claimed the little boy’s body.”

The same month that Ronald Reagan took office, the Quincy area was riveted by the death of a little boy. Five-year-old Alan Madden was found dead in his mother’s home, the victim of neglect and physical abuse. WGEM’s Maggie Thomas reported that his mother, Pamela Sue Berg, and her boyfriend, James Crain, had been arrested and charged with murder. She also said that no one had come forward to claim the child’s body. A local funeral director stepped in with arrangements, a cemetery plot was donated, and, a few days later, an honor guard of Quincy Police officers carried the small coffin past hundreds of area residents to its resting place.

Within weeks, a top-to-bottom investigation was under way at the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services for their late response to the Madden case. Berg and Crain were later convicted of involuntary manslaughter in separate trials. WGEM covered the dramatic testimony with daily reports from Chicago, where the trials were moved because of local pre-trial publicity.

The Alan Madden trial coverage marked the first use of video cameras for electronic news gathering (ENG) by WGEM TV. Film was permanently abandoned in favor of the economy, quality, and speed of portable video cameras.



Quincy Police officers carry the body of five-year-old Alan Madden to the gravesite in January 1981.

John D. Varnier

Jack Varnier was born in Ursa, Illinois, and attended school in the Mendon School District. After serving in the military, he began a career in advertising with Campbell-Ewald Company in Chicago.

He was later transferred to the Detroit office to work on the General Motors account. He eventually became senior vice president and media director of the Detroit office. One of his responsibilities at the agency was to review the scripts and shooting of television programs under the full sponsorship of Chevrolet. He was also assigned to be the agency liaison for *Bonanza* on NBC. He retired from Campbell-Ewald in 1977 and returned to the Quincy area. Varnier became station manager of WGEM in 1978, and was named vice president and general manager in March 1983. He retired from WGEM in 1984.

Varnier served as a director of Woodland Home and Quincy Preserves. He was also an American Red Cross crisis volunteer.



Richard Herbst

Rich Herbst served as vice president and general manager of Quincy Broadcasting Company from 1984–1987. He was born and raised in St. Louis, and graduated from Southern Illinois University in Carbondale with a degree in management and accounting. He began his broadcasting career with KPLR TV in St. Louis.

From 1976–1982, Herbst was vice president and general manager of WTMJ Inc., which operated WTMJ TV and WTMJ AM in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. From 1982–1984, he served as executive vice president of Teltron, Inc., an electronic publishing division of The Journal Company from 1982–1984.

During his tenure at WGEM, Herbst developed a number of news, promotion, and community involvement initiatives, including the first regular live remote news broadcasts and the annual Salvation Army Bucket Blitz.

After leaving QBC in 1988, he became general manager of KGAN TV in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.



(left to right) Anchorman John Schutte, weatherman Skip Dane, and sportscaster Rich Gould on WGEM News in 1980.

“I forgot to duck.”

In March 1981, NBC News broke into the broadcast of *Days of Our Lives* to report that shots had been fired at President Reagan outside a Washington hotel. A videotape replay of the incident was broadcast within seconds. Although White House Press Secretary James Brady and a Washington police officer were gravely wounded, it appeared initially that the president was unharmed. But soon, it was revealed that Reagan had been seriously wounded and he was rushed to emergency surgery.

WGEM TV stayed with live coverage throughout the day and evening as the government steadied itself. Days after the assassination attempt by John Hinckley, Jr., Reagan resumed his duties in the Oval Office.



(Clockwise from upper left) Charlotte Ray played housemother in the 1980s hit *The Facts of Life*; Before he became 007 Pierce Brosnan made the ladies swoon on *Remington Steele*, Bill Wegman (right) interviews the young stars of *Silver Spoons*, Alfonso Ribeiro (left) and Ricky Schroder (middle); Don Johnson (left) and Phillip Michael Thomas (right) showed American men it was okay to wear pink in *Miami Vice*.

“America has returned to space.”

Less than two weeks later, Tri-State viewers followed America back into space as the first space shuttle *Columbia* blasted off from the Kennedy Space Center, completed several orbits of the earth, and landed safely in a California desert.

In the early 1980s, the NBC prime-time schedule on WGEM TV was badly in need of a face-lift. Grant Tinker, the president of the highly successful MTM Enterprises, was called back to NBC as CEO and chairman. Tinker, together with his youthful programming chief Brandon Tartikoff, made a commitment to deliver quality programming and slowly brought NBC prime-time back to the top.

“Let’s be careful out there.”



Hill Street Blues revolutionized television drama during its run from 1981–1987.

Despite discouraging first season ratings, they held on to shows like *St. Elsewhere* and *Hill Street Blues*. This gave the programs breathing room to find their audience. Patience soon paid off when *Cheers* and *The Cosby Show* slowly took off. By 1983, NBC had secured a record 133 Emmy nominations, and the shows of the Tinker-Tartikoff era at NBC became the signature for the TV decade.

Hill Street Blues changed the face of TV drama. Viewers really had to pay attention to keep up with the fast pace and double-digit plot lines. The show broke new ground and laid the foundation for almost all successful TV dramas that followed.

“Best catfish in America”

Vowing to “fill the void left by J. Fred Muggs” (Dave Garroway’s chimpanzee on *Today*), homey weatherman Willard Scott joined *Today* in 1980. Over the next 20 years, he brought a lovable zaniness to America’s daily wake-up call.

Shortly after joining *Today*, Scott paid a visit to the Tri-State area to headline the WGEM Home & Living Show. After his appearance, he told his WGEM hosts that he was hungry for some authentic “home-cookin’.” Scott was treated to the fried catfish plate at the Sky Ride Inn on Quincy’s riverfront. From that day forward, Scott’s *Today* comments concerning the weather along the Illinois-Missouri stretch of the Mississippi River frequently contained a compliment about the great catfish in Quincy.



A TV snapshot of *Today* in 1984. (left to right) Gene Shalit, Jane Pauley, Bryant Gumbel, and Willard Scott.

NBC’s signature logo has changed several times in the 50 years of WGEM TV.



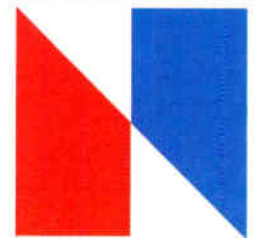
1954–1955



1956–1975



1959–1975



1975–1979



1980–1985



1986–



Tom Brokaw took over *NBC Nightly News* when John Chancellor retired in 1982.

In the summer of 1981, WGEM TV viewers tuned in by the thousands in the wee hours of the morning for the live telecast of the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer in St. Paul's Cathedral in London.

Within the next few months, Tom Brokaw left *Today* to anchor the *NBC Nightly News*. He was replaced on the morning show by well-regarded NBC sportscaster Bryant Gumbel. Gumbel took to the new job quickly, showing a knack for aggressive and intelligent questions. His co-host, Jane Pauley, later commented that, "The success of our partnership was in part that I didn't take any guff from Bryant." Though Gumbel was not a particular favorite of viewers in the WGEM area, Pauley's charm helped the 1980s version of *Today* remain strong.

"Film to ENG"

The conversion from film cameras to TV mini-cams created new local programming flexibility. Local specials became economical and easy to produce. WGEM TV produced a series of videotape replays of basketball and football games at Western Illinois University, Quincy University, Quincy High School, and Quincy Notre Dame.

Video documentaries for National Tom Sawyer Days in Hannibal and the Kahoka Bluegrass Festival gave area viewers a chance to experience regional events up close.



Bob Turek (left) and Ralph Bristol (right) report from the many live telecasts of National Tom Sawyer Days in Hannibal, Missouri.

"Serenade for insomniacs"

Late night on WGEM TV continued to be a growing time period. The success of *The Midnight Special* in the 1970s proved that not everyone went to bed after Johnny Carson signed off. An off-beat and smart-alecky program called *Late Night with David Letterman* made its debut in 1982.

Staple skits like Dave's "Top Ten List," "Stupid Pet Tricks," and "Nightcap Theatre" became water cooler topics for the young hip audience. When Letterman later jumped to CBS in 1993, Conan O'Brien took over as the host of *Late Night*.



David Letterman extended TV viewing when *Late Night* debuted in 1982.

Then NBC discovered that people were staying up even later than *Late Night* so the network introduced *Late* in 1988. Bob Costas was the first host, followed by Greg Kinnear and Carson Daly.

"Where everybody knows your name"

In 1982, NBC was searching for a show that would capture the atmosphere of the era's popular Miller Lite commercials. They found it in *Cheers*, the longest-running comedy series presented on WGEM TV.

The show earned 26 Emmy Awards (a record 111 nominations) and was filled with witty dialogue, caustic put-downs, and comic situations. The social issues, ethnic edge, and preachiness of 1970s comedy were dismissed. *Cheers* had a total disregard for the political correctness of the time. Sam was a charming, but unapologetic womanizer. Diane was intellectually pretentious, and Frasier Crane was insecure, neurotic, and snooty. The show even had its own version of a classic Greek chorus as bar colleagues Cliff, Norm, Woody, and Carla traded one-liners and put-downs and subverted every poignant moment with a caustic observation. *Cheers* became a fixture of the Thursday night line-up and was one of the building blocks of "Must-See-TV on NBC."



(Left to right) *The Cosby Show* was America's favorite show during the 1980s (clockwise) Sabrina LeBeauf (Sondra), Tempestt Bledsoe (Vanessa), Bill Cosby (Cliff), Lisa Bonet (Denise), Keshia Knight-Pulliam (Rudy), Phylicia Rashad (Claire), and Malcolm-Jamal Warner (Theo); The anti-1950s hit *Family Ties* with (left to right) Michael Gross (Steven), Meredith Baxter (Elise), Michael J. Fox (Alex), Tina Yothers (Jennifer), and Justine Bateman (Mallory); No one took life seriously on *Cheers*. (left to right) Ted Danson (Sam), Woody Harrelson (Woody), John Ratzenberger (Cliff), and George Wendt (Norm).

Another show on WGEM reacted against the social consciousness and self-absorption of the 1970s and seemed more like a throw back to family comedies of the 1950s. *Family Ties* was Ronald Reagan's favorite 1980s TV series. Michael J. Fox played the young neo-conservative Alex P. Keaton, who together with his shop-aholic sister, Mallory, made their tie-dyed ex-Woodstock-hippie parents think there was a splice in the gene pool.

“That’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard!”

Almost 30 years after *The Nat King Cole Show* was forced off NBC, *The Cosby Show* permanently altered the common perception of the African-American family. The show's debut was a smashing success and rocketed to become the No. 1 show in television for several seasons.

Cosby played Dr. Cliff Huxtable, the father of a loving, but tough family. The show scoffed at child-rearing psycho-babble. His son Theo once said in a flourish touchy-feely manipulation, “Dad? Can't you just accept and love me 'cause I'm your son?” To which Dr. Huxtable replied, “That's the dumbest thing I ever heard!”

The Huxtables were educated, stable, and affluent. The father was a doctor and the mother was a lawyer. One daughter attended Princeton University. As funny and lighthearted as the show was, it challenged widely held assumptions about urban African-Americans.

The Cosby Show, *Family Ties*, and *Cheers* formed a programming “murderer's row” on WGEM TV's Thursday night for the remainder of the decade.

Beginning in 1955, NBC programming reached WGEM through terrestrial microwave links maintained by AT&T. That all changed in 1983, when NBC erected two large satellite “earth stations” on a special platform beside the WGEM studios. Soon satellite dishes began to sprout up like weeds on the rooftop of the station. Satellite delivery improved signal quality and provided a greater diversity of programming options.

“Through the eyes of the immigrant”

Though sometimes lost in the gauze of history, the first optimistic years of the Reagan years were marked by agonizingly slow economic recovery. Interest rates hit all-time highs and the stock market remained sluggish. The economy of the Tri-State region also languished.

Times had been very hard for the region in the wake of the shutdown of the huge Motorola (Quasar) TV plant in 1976 and other bad economic news. There was brief optimism when Cummins Engine announced a new manufacturing facility for Quincy in a live press conference carried by WGEM TV. But hopes faded when Cummins later retreated from the project. Plant closures affected every Tri-State community, and many skilled workers were displaced. WGEM TV responded with special news programming and the sponsorship of a community job fair for displaced workers.

1983 marked the 300th anniversary of the first German emigration to America. While researching the anniversary, WGEM News found that the economic conditions that forced Germans to emigrate to the Tri-State area during the



Leo Henning reports from the East German border in the series and documentary *German-Americans* in 1983.



John Schutte (left) and Jill Wagner (right) anchor *Newswatch 10* in 1982.



The *News Channel 10 at Six* anchors, Les Sachs (left) and Ralph Bristol (right).

nineteenth century were remarkably similar to the economic conditions facing their area descendants in the 1980s.

The station presented a series of seven news reports and a one-hour documentary entitled *German-Americans*. The project, videotaped entirely in the Federal Republic of Germany, chronicled the journey of the Tri-States' first German emigrants, and their adaptation and assimilation into life in the Quincy area.

WGEM News was constantly improving the presentation of local news in the early 1980s. Computerized graphic systems dramatically improved the quality of weather presentations and news stories. However, there were still only two half-hour local news programs each day. *Newswatch 10 at Six* was anchored by Les Sachs and John Schutte, weather was presented by meteorologist Bob Hocks, and sports news was reported by Rich Gould. Later, Cathy Weiss joined Sachs on the early program, and she teamed with Schutte, Hocks, and Gould for the 10:00 P.M. edition.

Gould later went on to become a sports anchor and part of the Cardinals baseball broadcast team.

Ralph Bristol became co-anchor of the 10:00 P.M. news program in 1985 and was eventually paired with Shan Hendrix (later Whiston), who also co-anchored the 6:00 P.M. show with Les Sachs. Hendrix came to WGEM straight from the University of Missouri School of Journalism and has been with WGEM ever since.

Along with Hocks, several meteorologists and weathercasters provided weather forecasts during the 1980s, including Skip Dane, Frank Cariello, and Dave Hennen. Cariello became a meteorologist with several major market stations, and Hennen had a long career in weather with CNN in Atlanta.

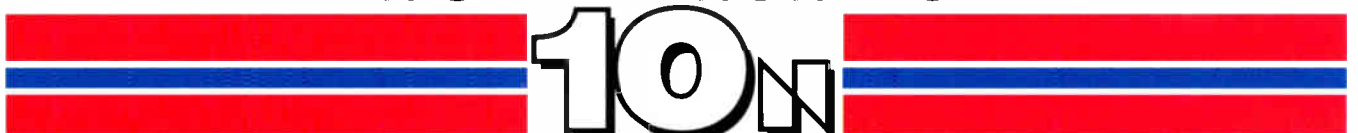


In 1984, Mike Jones (left) anchored the weekend news, and Jim Lawrence (right) delivered sports and weather.



The anchors for the 10:00 P.M. news in early 1984. (left to right) Rich Gould, Jill Wagner, Ralph Bristol, and Deborah Howell.

WGEM NEWSWATCH





Skip Dene delivers the weather in 1980.



Rich Gould was a WGEM sportscaster from 1980-1985 before moving on to KPLR TV, St. Louis and the St. Louis Cardinals.



Ralph Bristol joined WGEM News in 1982 and served as news director from 1989-1993.



Steve Looten joined WGEM TV as a sportscaster in 1985 and stayed with the station past the end of the century.



The News Channel 10 at Ten team in late 1984. (left to right) Anchor Cathy Weiss, weatherman Bob Hocks, sportscaster Rich Gould, and anchor Ralph Bristol.

In 1984, the hottest new show in syndication was *Wheel of Fortune*. For the first few years of the *Wheel's* extended run, it was broadcast nightly on WGEM TV. Long before letter-spinner Vanna White became a pop culture icon, she came to the Tri-State area to make an appearance at the WGEM Home & Living Show. Throngs of eager fans clogged the show floor aisles as White patiently and professionally answered every question and filled every request for an autograph. WGEM TV followed up White's successful personal appearance with an annual promotion called "Super Spin." Viewers mailed in postcards by the thousands each week for a chance to spin a giant wheel and win valuable prizes from participating sponsors. It was the most successful audience promotion ever presented by WGEM.

"Isn't that special?!"

NBC's *Saturday Night Live* fell on hard times after the departure of the Not-Ready-For-Prime-Time Players in 1980. Producer Lorne Michaels slowly reinvigorated the show with two budding stars, Eddie Murphy and Joe Piscopo. SNL became a



"You look marvelous!" says Billy Crystal in a 1985 broadcast of *Saturday Night Live*.

force again in 1985 with a one-year-only all-star cast of Billy Crystal, Martin Short, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, and Christopher Guest. The following season introduced a new generation of talent (Mike Myers, Dana Carvey, Chris Rock, Adam Sandler, Phil Hartman, Jon Lovitz, Dennis Miller, Jan Hooks, Julia Sweeney, and Chris Farley) who infused the show with great comedy and classic characters. By the end of the decade, SNL was enjoying its largest audiences ever.

Ralph M. Oakley

Ralph MacDonald Oakley was born in Quincy in 1956, the son of Thomas A. and Anne MacDonald Oakley, and the grandson of Thomas C. and Mary Sullivan Oakley. He graduated from Quincy Senior High School and attended Southern Methodist University. He graduated from Quincy University with a degree in management in 1980.

Oakley began his broadcasting career at WGEM while attending college and served as a weekend radio announcer



and news photographer. He was a play-by-play sports announcer for WGEM Radio for a number of years, and presented the radio call of the Quincy High School State Basketball Championship in 1981 and several N.A.I.A. championship soccer matches for Quincy University.

He became promotion manager and assistant station manager for QNI-owned WSJV TV in Elkhart, Indiana, and was station manager for WVVA TV in Bluefield, West Virginia, before returning to Quincy to serve as vice president and general manager of Quincy Broadcasting Company in 1988.

While at WGEM, Oakley developed a year-long news series called *Drug Free—The Place to Be*, which highlighted the problem of substance abuse in the Tri-State area. He was also the chief architect of the WGEM/County Market Fall Harvest program for the Salvation Army and introduced Operation Prom-Graduation as an annual WGEM public service promotion.

Oakley has been active in community affairs throughout his career, including serving as chairman of the Quincy Area Community Foundation and a director of the Great River Economic Development Foundation. He is chairman of the Quincy University Board of Trustees and also chaired the capital fundraising campaign for the Quincy University Health and Fitness Center. He was president of the Illinois Broadcasters Association; chairman of the Adams County United Way annual fund drive; a director of the Quincy Foundation for Quality Education, the Quincy Area Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Elkhart (Indiana) Chamber of Commerce, and the Greater Bluefield (West Virginia) United Way; and former president of the Greater Bluefield Community Center. He is also a member of the Quincy Highway Committee.

Oakley moved to QNI's corporate office to serve as vice president of the QNI Broadcast Group in 1996, and was later promoted to the position of chief operating officer of the Broadcast Group and a vice president of Quincy Newspapers, Inc. He also serves as assistant secretary of the corporation.

“Lawyers and love”

“Must-See” Thursdays on WGEM TV got even bigger with the addition of the Steven Bochco series *L.A. Law*. The show deployed the *Hill Street Blues*/*St. Elsewhere* recipe of multiple story lines and an ensemble cast. Courtroom and human drama intertwined with office romance, making the show a big hit with the younger, affluent viewers of the late 1980s.



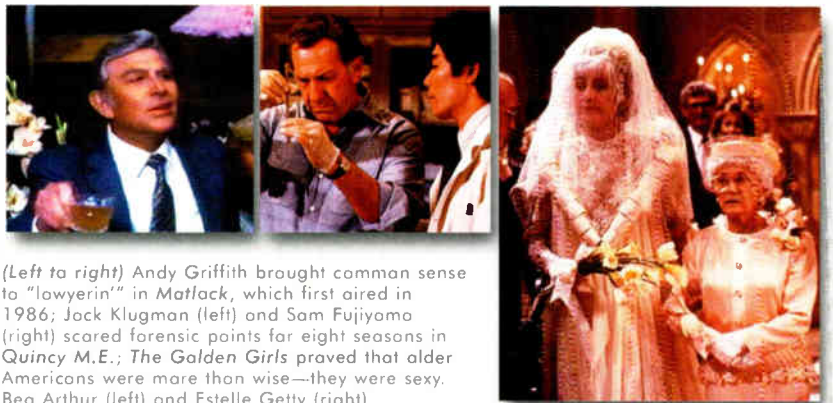
Adversaries in the courtroom and lovers outside. Susan Dey and Harry Hamlin starred in *L.A. Law*.

“Golden girls”

For many years, older people were invisible on television. But as the moms and dads of the television generation got older (and a few of the baby boomers began to sprout gray hair), TV stereotypes of older people began to change. *The Golden Girls* presented four vital, lively, independent, and sexy women over the age of 50. *Quincy M.E.*, played by Jack Klugman, specialized in second guessing young police detectives and district attorneys with his forensic know-how. *Matlock* was a Harvard lawyer wrapped in hayseed. Andy Griffith used a good-ole-boy smokescreen to conceal formidable courtroom skill.

All of these shows portrayed smart, hip, and very much alive heroes and heroines, and demonstrated that the TV generation could grow old with grace. And each show went over big with WGEM TV viewers.

In 1985, WGEM News expanded its commitment to local political coverage with the first of many live prime-time television candidate debates, featuring the two candidates for Mayor of Quincy.



(Left to right) Andy Griffith brought common sense to “lowyerin’” in *Matlock*, which first aired in 1986; Jack Klugman (left) and Sam Fujiyama (right) scared forensic points far eight seasons in *Quincy M.E.*; *The Golden Girls* proved that older Americans were more than wise—they were sexy. Bea Arthur (left) and Estelle Getty (right).

Shan Hendrix Whiston

Shan Hendrix Whiston was born in Decatur, Alabama, and was raised in Atlanta, Georgia and Jackson, Tennessee. She attended Rose College in Memphis, Tennessee, and received a degree in journalism from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 1985.

During college, she worked in the news departments of KBIA FM and KOMU TV in Columbia, Missouri. She came to WGEM in the summer of 1985 as a reporter and news anchor.

Whiston has co-anchored the 6:00 P.M. newscast on WGEM TV since 1985 and also co-anchored the 10:00 P.M. newscast for a number of years. She has co-hosted almost all of the special live events carried by WGEM TV in the past two decades, including the highway and bridge dedication, area civic events and festivals, and the visits of Pope John Paul II to St. Louis and President Bill Clinton to Quincy. After returning from her honeymoon in 1993, Whiston put in several weeks of solid work covering the Flood of 1993. In 1996, she was selected to run a leg of the Olympic Torch Run through Palmyra, Missouri. She also did a special series of behind-the-scenes reports from NBC Studios in Burbank, California, including an interview with comedian Jay Leno. In 2001, she was selected to anchor the resurrected news program *Noon*.

In addition to her contributions to the station, Whiston has been involved in a variety of charitable causes and community organizations, including the Relay For Life and the Salvation Army Fall Harvest. She has also served as the co-host of local segments of *The Jerry Lewis Telethon* for the Muscular Dystrophy Association. Along with being the former president and a director of the Rotary East Club of Quincy, she has also been a director of the Adams County Chapter American Red Cross and the Adams County Safe Kids Coalition. Whiston has also been a lecturer at Quincy University.



A video snapshot of the 1985 Quincy mayoral debate between Democrat Verne Hagstrom and Republican Richard Magliari. Ralph Brisal served as the moderator.

“Sign the pledge. Keep the promise.”

Also that year, WGEM TV planned its first “Operation Prom-Graduation” promotion. The purpose was to try to prevent tragedy on area roads and highways around high school prom time. High school seniors were asked to make a pledge to refrain from using alcohol or drugs during prom season. In return, they received discounts for goods and services from participating sponsors and a chance to win a new car. “Operation Prom-Graduation” was an instant success and continues to be an important annual station project.

In June 1985, Quincy was named an “All-America City” for the second time. The community joined together to work on several projects, including the renovation of seats in Morrison Theatre at Quincy Junior High School. WGEM News followed a local delegation to Washington D.C. and presented a live report of the banquet and award presentation by *USA Today*. A local community celebration was later staged along the Riverfront and captured live by WGEM cameras.

WGEM News also followed the career of Quincy native and PGA Golf Professional D.A. Weibring from the time he received his tour card. The station captured his first major win on film at the Quad Cities Open. Weibring later brought in the biggest names in golf to Quincy for a charity event for the Adams County Retarded Citizens.



D.A. Weibring (left) visits with Steve Looten (right) in a video snapshot during a WGEM/A.R.C. D.A. Weibring TV special.

Nora Baldner

Nora Baldner was born in Seattle, Washington, and was raised in Santa Barbara California. She graduated from the University of California-Davis in 1986 and received an M.A. in journalism from the University of Missouri-Columbia before starting her broadcasting career at WGEM in 1989. She was a general assignment reporter for two years before moving on to WICS TV in Springfield, Illinois as a news anchor.

She returned to WGEM just over a year later as co-anchor of *News Channel 10 at Sunrise* and has held the position ever since. In

addition to her anchoring duties, Baldner provided special reports during President Bill Clinton's visit to Quincy and Al Gore's campaign tour through the Tri-State area in 2000.

Baldner is a director of the local Arthritis Foundation and serves on the state board of the organization. The annual Nora Baldner Ladies' Classic golf tournament in Quincy and Macomb has raised thousands of dollars for the charity. She served as director and president of the Quincy Service League and was a member of the Salvation Army Advisory Board. She has done volunteer project work for the Quincy YMCA, John Wood Community College, Adams County Safe Kids Coalition, Symphony of Trees, the Quincy Humane Society, and the Two Rivers Council Girl Scouts of America. She has also been a lecturer at Quincy University.



Nielsen Top 25 Shows 1984-85

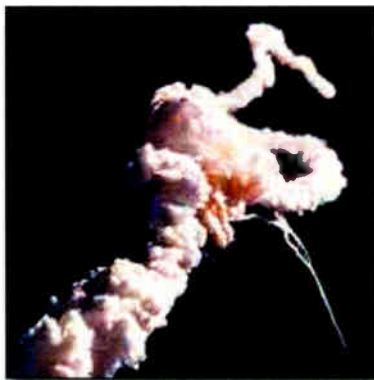
1. *Dynasty* (ABC)
2. *Dallas* (CBS)
3. *The Cosby Show* (NBC)
4. *60 Minutes* (CBS)
5. *Family Ties* (NBC)
6. *The A-Team* (NBC)
7. *Simon & Simon* (CBS)
8. *Murder, She Wrote* (CBS)
9. *Knots Landing* (CBS)
10. *Falcon Crest* (CBS)
11. *Crazy Like A Fox* (CBS)
12. *Hotel* (ABC)
13. *Cheers* (NBC)
14. *Riptide* (NBC)
15. *Magnum P.I.* (CBS)
16. *Newhart* (CBS)
17. *Kate & Allie* (CBS)
18. *Monday Night Movie* (NBC)
19. *Highway to Heaven* (NBC)
20. *Night Court* (NBC)
21. *Sunday Night Movie* (ABC)
22. *Scarecrow & Mrs. King* (CBS)
23. *TV's Bloopers & Practical Jokes* (NBC)
24. *The Fall Guy* (ABC)
25. *Monday Night Football* (ABC)

WGEM News went all-out with live updates from the event throughout the day and a live 30-minute wrap-up show after the tournament concluded. The broadcast commitment to the D.A. Weibring/A.R.C. Pro-Am did not diminish over the years, and the station later increased its support by becoming the main corporate sponsor.

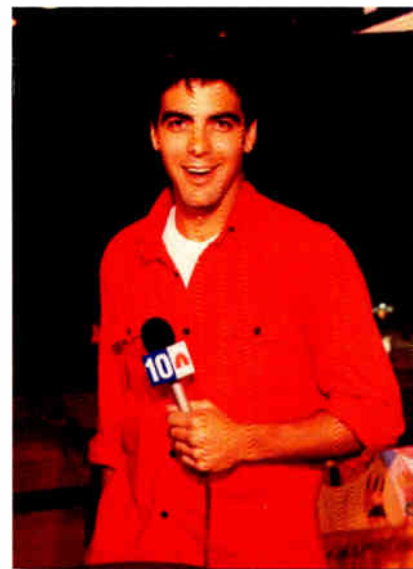
A local TV and radio holiday tradition began one month later. The Salvation Army Christmas campaign in Quincy was going slowly that year. WGEM offered to help, reasoning that if live broadcast attention was directed at the Army's Christmas mission, kettle and mail-in contributions throughout the area would increase. The station set up shop at 24th and Broadway in Quincy to conduct a "Bucket Blitz" of passing motorists, which generated close to \$10,000 in drop-off donations in one day. The "WGEM/Salvation Army Bucket Blitz" has since raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to help needy families during the holiday season.

Ronald Reagan served in the Oval Office for over four years before he had the opportunity to meet face-to-face with a leader of the Soviet Union. A summit was finally scheduled between America's president and a new kind of communist leader, Mikhail Gorbachev. WGEM provided live coverage from NBC as the frigid relations between the two superpowers began to thaw.

"Obviously, a major malfunction."



The space shuttle *Challenger* explodes minutes after lift-off in January 1986. TV played an important role in the national grieving process.



A youthful George Clooney was a guest star of the WGEM Home & Living Show in 1986 when he appeared on *The Facts of Life*.

By January 1986, space shuttle launches had become somewhat routine and were no longer presented live across the broadcast TV networks. NBC did not cover the lift-off of the *Challenger* in January of that year. But within minutes, the network news operation swung into action with wall-to-wall coverage when news of a "major malfunction" with the *Challenger* hit the wires. WGEM carried the unfolding events and the necessary national healing that followed.

Later that month, area sports fans had something to divert attention away from the *Challenger* disaster. By halftime of Super Bowl XX, NBC analyst Pete Axthelm remarked, "This is men against boys." He was not far from wrong, as the Chicago Bears led by Walter Payton and cartoonish William "The Refrigerator" Perry shuffled off with an NFL championship, beating the New England Patriots 46-10.



Thomas A. Oakley, QBC president and chairman of the Quincy Highway Committee, is interviewed in a live broadcast of the dedication of the Quincy Bayview Bridge.



A video capture of *News Channel 10 at Six* in late 1987. (left to right) Steve Luoten, Ralph Bristol, and Les Sachs.

The following spring, WGEM TV rolled out its first live electronic newsgathering truck. The sleek new unit featured a retractable microwave mast and built-in TV switching capability, allowing newscasts to be easily produced from remote locations for the first time. The new capability also introduced a new lexicon as area viewers first heard local anchors say, "Let's go live" to reporters in the field. The station took full advantage of the new resource and began presenting newscasts from various locations in the viewing area.

WGEM and Harris cooperated on another technological innovation in 1986, as the station became one of the first TV stations in America to introduce stereo sound to its over-the-air transmission.

About the same time, WGEM News further expanded its public affairs commitment with the show *Face to Face*. Ralph Bristol hosted a series of 30-minute one-on-one discussions with newsmakers. The show was scheduled weeknights in the 6:30 P.M. time slot.

Daytime television on WGEM got another boost in the summer of 1987 with a two-month real-life soap opera called the Iran-Contra Hearings. In defiance of congressional wishes, Reagan administration officials traded arms for hostages and then diverted proceeds to fund the Contra insurgency in Nicaragua. The star witness at the hearings was Marine Lt. Colonel Oliver North. North did not cower to blistering attacks from Senate Committee leader Daniel Inouye, while he received warm support from Wyoming Representative Dick Cheney.

The Tri-State area celebrated a new lifeline with the dedication of the Bayview Bridge in Quincy. *News Channel 10 at Six* was produced on the deck of the suspension span over the Mississippi the evening before the opening ceremony. The dedication was televised live, which featured the first bridge crossing by thousands of area pedestrians.

WGEM TV took time out in the summer of 1988 to take a nostalgic look back at one of the most successful radio shows in area history. *Teentime* on WGEM Radio was an area cultural phenomenon in the 1960s and early 1970s. A WGEM TV special brought back the sights, sounds, and personalities of the golden age of music radio. Bill Wegman was joined by Mark Mathew, Jack Harry, Chuck Yates, Jim Roberts, and Dr. Eddy Ginsburg for the telecast live from Quincy's Historic Central Business District.



Bill Wegman reads off cue cards during the live broadcast of *Teentime Revisited* at the Gem City Savings Plaza in downtown Quincy.



Margie Thomas (left) visits with Joe Bonansinga (right) during the live broadcast of *Teentime Revisited* in June 1988.



Face to Face brought area issues home to viewers. (left to right) Ralph Bristol, Myrl Shireman (Quincy School Superintendent), and John Baird (Quincy Teacher's Union) discuss school funding.

The 1988 national political campaign also triggered extensive local coverage. Barbara Bush visited Quincy to promote literacy and her husband George's election. Democrat presidential candidate Michael Dukakis appeared to dress for the locals when he arrived in a plaid shirt, blue jeans, and work boots for an appearance in downtown Quincy and Pike County, Illinois. Nonetheless, George Bush, the elder, was elected in November.

That fall, WGEM teamed up for the first time with Niemann Foods/County Market for the Salvation Army Fall Harvest. The annual food drive produces thousands of nonperishable items each year to stock food pantries throughout the viewing area.

“America’s Olympic network”

Prior to 1988, WGEM TV had only two opportunities to present the Olympic Games to Tri-State viewers. NBC carried the Summer Games from Tokyo in 1964 and the Winter Games from Sapporo in 1972. The “Peacock network” was scheduled to televise the Moscow Games in 1980, but the U.S. boycotted the

event after the Soviet government invaded Afghanistan.

NBC presented the Summer Games from Seoul, South Korea in 1988 and began a string of two decades as America's Olympic network. The Seoul Games were marked by the last Olympic competition for the Soviet Union and East Germany. The games showcased outstanding individual performances by American swimmers Matt Biondi and Janet Evans, and track and field star Carl Lewis.

The Games returned to WGEM TV four years later from Barcelona, Spain, where Lewis anchored the U.S. sprint relay team to world record time, and Magic Johnson and Michael Jordan led the Dream Team to complete dominance in men's basketball.

The 1996 Summer Games in Atlanta produced gold medals for America in women's gymnastics and the electrifying 200-meter finish of golden-toed sprinter Michael Johnson. But

the most electrifying television moment of the Atlanta games came when Muhammad Ali, the 1960 Olympic heavyweight boxing champion, crippled with Parkinson's disease, held the Olympic Torch high to light the cauldron at the opening ceremony.

WGEM TV was the local source for the 2000 Summer Games from Sydney and the 2002 Winter Games from Salt Lake City. The station will remain the home of Olympic champions through at least 2012.



Steve Looten rocks with St. Louis Cardinals fans outside Busch Stadium before a World Series game in 1987.



(Left to right) Muhammed Ali, crippled by Parkinson's disease, holds the Olympic torch high to kick off the Summer Games in 1996; Michelle Kwan with a patented move in NBC's broadcast of the 2002 Winter Games in Salt Lake City; Kerry Strug is held in triumph by her coach Bela Korolyi after the U.S. Women's gymnastics team wins the gold medal in the 1996 Summer Games in Atlanta; Sarah Hughes wins the gold medal in women's figure skating with an electrifying performance in the Salt Lake City games.

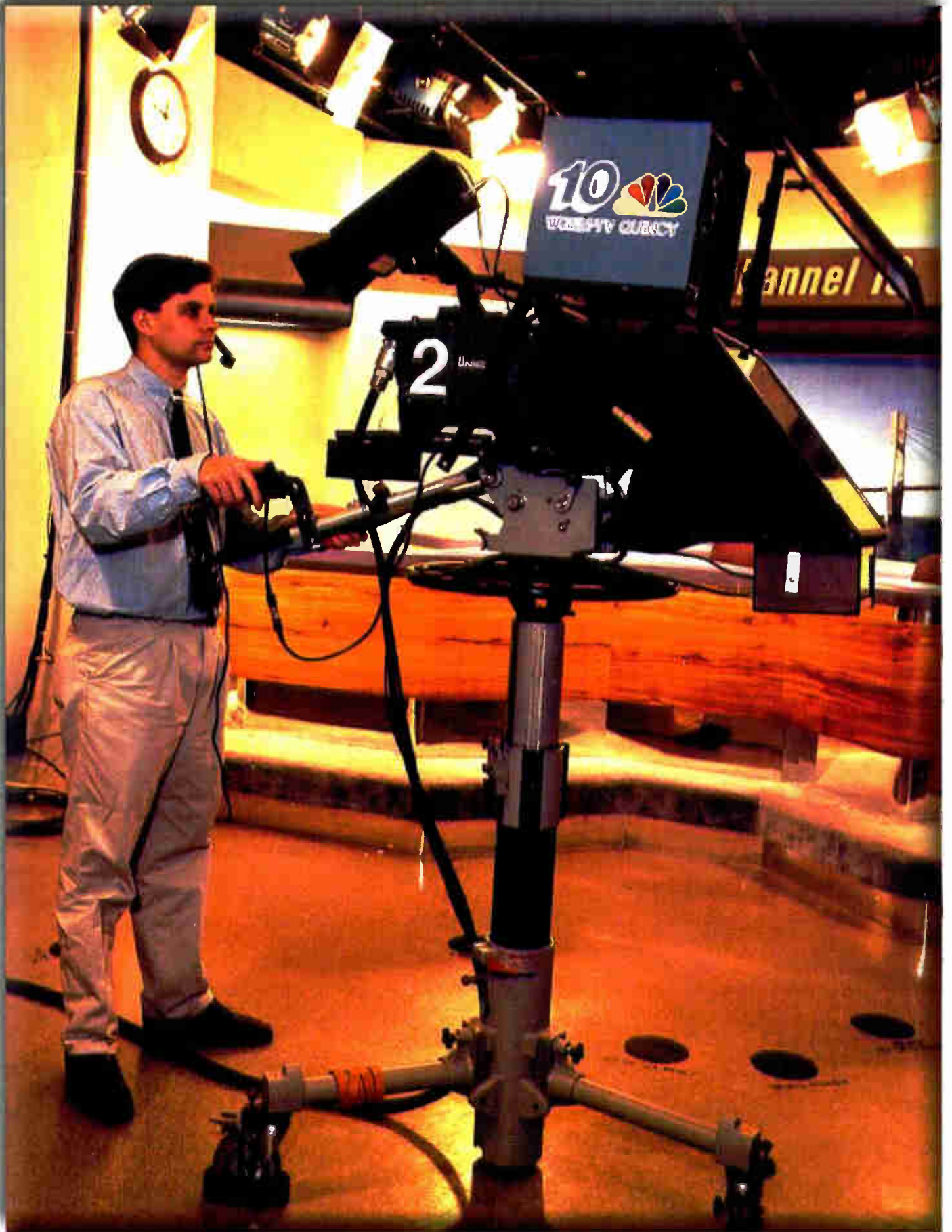
At the end of the decade, Soviet troops left Afghanistan after nine years of stalemate. Throughout the second half of 1989, viewers watched dumbfounded as Soviet power crumbled. Satellite countries and federated republics began to break away from Moscow. First Poland broke away from the Soviet block, and then Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Then, Lithuania, Estonia, and Ukraine agitated for independence. The East German government collapsed along with the Berlin Wall, the symbol of Cold War politics. These incredible events played out with amazing speed before television cameras. The Soviet Union itself was on life support as new threats to its existence loomed on the horizon.

In the same year, the spirit of freedom rose up in China as students occupied Tiananmen Square in a petition for human rights. WGEM TV brought home the unfolding events to the Tri-State area.

The TV decade of the 1980s arrived with grainy film images and departed with the clear reality of live video and instant satellite communications. But the global television village and a new political order did not necessarily make the world a safer place. The superpower conflict merely gave way to an even more unpredictable and sinister menace—global terrorism.



Master control room renovations and improved production editing were completed in the late 1980s.



NEW TIMES, NEW FACES 1990-1999

The last decade of the century and the new millennium brought new challenges for WGEM TV. The 1990s required a renewed emphasis on localism in broadcasting. Times were good, but change was rapid. Cable television and Direct Broadcast Satellite (DBS) were beaming scores of TV choices into area homes. By the beginning of the decade, most area homes were already equipped with VCRs, providing in-home movies and additional viewing options. Individuals and families were pressed for time, and viewing patterns were changing rapidly.

To younger viewers, the nightly local news at 6:00 and 10:00 P.M. was no longer appointment television, and the explosion of the World Wide Web in the middle of the decade presented new challenges. New specialized and targeted TV networks arrived on the scene, challenging the whole notion of broadcasting. Programming became increasingly segmented to smaller and smaller pieces of the audience. However, local TV adapted to the changing landscape and not only maintained, but also increased its audience during the 1990s.



“Drug Free”

WGEM TV began the decade with one of the most comprehensive local news programming initiatives in its history. Drug and alcohol abuse was consistently mentioned as a serious problem for the nation and the Tri-State area. WGEM News decided to devote specific attention to the issue. *Drug Free—The Place to Be* was a series of one-hour programs broadcast live in prime time over several months.



The WGEM News team in 1990. (top row left to right) Jim Whitfield, Tom Vodak, Tim Hellhake, Mark Daggett, and Rick Junkerman. (middle row left to right) Maggie Thomas, Charlie Griffith, Bonnie Kirschman, Steve Looten, Cory McCloskey, and Bob Turek. (bottom row left to right) Don Krosse, Shon Whiston, Ralph Bristol, and Noro Baldner.

Experts from area hospitals, law enforcement, and mental health and recovery clinics defined the problem, its causes, the modes of intervention, and the available rehabilitation services before a live studio audience at MacHugh Theatre at Quincy University.

Quincy University Academic Challenge returned as a regular game show series in 1990, borrowing the format of the late 1970s *Quincy College Quiz Bowl*. Cory McCloskey hosted the tournament in 2000. Ron Brown took over as the grand inquisitor in 2001.

In the early 1990s, highways continued to be the most prominent recurring local story on WGEM News. The Valley City Eagle Bridges, which carried the Central Illinois Expressway (CIE) over the Illinois River, were finally dedicated in 1990 after years of litigation. WGEM News cameras captured the opening of the last major natural boundary to the completion of the CIE.

“America’s First Family”

Morning television also experienced changes at the turn of the decade. Jane Pauley ended a 13-year stint as anchor of *Today* and was replaced by Deborah Norville. Norville neither clicked with her co-host Bryant Gumbel, nor did she catch on

Ron Brown

Ron Brown was born in Chicago and grew up on the city's north side. He graduated from Amundsen High School and served for a number of years in the U.S. Air Force as a military broadcaster in Athens, Greece, Ramstein, West Germany, and South Dakota.

He worked at KEVN TV, the NBC affiliate in Rapid City, South Dakota, for several years before becoming a crime reporter for *The Rapid City Journal*. He returned to broadcasting in 1993 with KTVH TV in Helena, Montana and returned to Rapid City to anchor the news at KOTA TV.

Brown came to WGEM in 1997 as the anchor of *WGEM News at Sunrise* and became the anchor of *WGEM News at Ten* a year later. In addition to his anchoring and regular reporting duties, he developed a historical series called *Tri-State Crossroads*. The stories appear several times throughout the year and have won acclaim from viewers and news organizations. *Crossroads* has been recognized for excellence by both the Illinois and Missouri Associated Press.

Brown is a co-host of the annual Arthritis Telethon and has been active in the Quincy Rotary Club. He has also served the Adams County Retarded Citizens. He is an officer of the Illinois News Broadcasters Association and a night editor for WGEM News.



(Above) Jane Pauley (left) and Bryant Gumbel (right) during a live *Today* broadcast from outside Beijing's Forbidden City. (Left) Katie Couric joined *Today* after the departure of Jane Pauley.

with audiences. That same year, reporter Katherine Couric, soon to be known as "Katie," took a job as a national correspondent for *Today* based in Washington, D.C. She learned from her boss Tim Russert that NBC was thinking about a change in the co-anchor slot for *Today*. She shot up and said, "I can do that job." Soon, Norville was out and Katie was in, seated next to Gumbel, weatherman Al Roker, and newsman Matt Lauer. NBC moved the show back to its roots in a storefront studio on 49th Street in Manhattan, and the new team proceeded to elevate *Today* to new heights.

"This will not stand."

Today viewers awoke in the late summer of 1990 to news that Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein had invaded Kuwait, threatening to strangle world oil supplies. President George H.W. Bush said, "This will not stand." In a few months, close to 500,000 American troops were poised in the Persian Gulf to force Iraqi troops back within their borders.

The January 19, 1991 broadcast of *NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw* was interrupted with word that U.S. forces had begun an attack on Baghdad. WGEM TV stayed with the broadcast commercial free for several days as the Tri-States witnessed the first American war broadcast on live television. The reality of war



A video snapshot of thousands of area residents gathering for WGEM's Desert Storm Rally in Quincy's Washington Park in February 1991.

Nielsen Top 20 Shows 1994-95

1. *Seinfeld* (NBC)
2. *ER* (NBC)
3. *Home Improvement* (ABC)
4. *Grace Under Fire* (ABC)
5. *NFL Monday Night Football* (ABC)
6. *60 Minutes* (CBS)
7. *NYPD Blue* (ABC)
8. *Friends* (NBC)
9. *Roseanne* (ABC)
10. *Murder She Wrote* (CBS)
11. *Mad About You* (NBC)
12. *Madman of the People* (NBC)
13. *Ellen* (ABC)
14. *Hope & Gloria* (NBC)
15. *Frasier* (NBC)
16. *Murphy Brown* (CBS)
17. *20/20* (ABC)
18. *CBS Sunday Movie* (CBS)
19. *NBC Monday Night Movies* (NBC)
20. *Dave's World* (CBS)



Rich Cain announce: at *Riverfront 4th*, the annual concert and fireworks display in Quincy, which has been sponsored by WGEM since 1991.

came directly home as viewers watched in real-time as NBC reporter Arthur Kent donned a gas mask during Scud missile raids on Saudi Arabia.

As the air war raged into February, WGEM TV organized a rally in support of U.S. troops in Quincy's Washington Park. Hundreds of people attended and heard words of support for soldiers, air troops, sailors, and their families, and prayed for a speedy victory. The prayers did not go unanswered as the war ended just 100 hours after the first ground attack with the liberation of Kuwait.

On July 4, 1991, WGEM, together with County Market, Refreshment Services Pepsi, McDonalds, and State Street Bank, organized *Home on the 4th*, a civic celebration honoring all those who served in the first Gulf War. Over 20,000 people convened along Quincy's newly renovated riverfront for a patriotic concert by the Quincy Park Band and a fireworks show by the Bayview Bridge. The western sky served as the television backdrop. Rechristened *Riverfront 4th* the following year, the spectacle has been an annual event for WGEM delighting old and young alike for over a decade.

Today also first reported a very strange turn of events in the Soviet Union in 1991. Mikhail Gorbachev's summer vacation was interrupted by a coup d'état in the Soviet Union led by hard liners in the communist military. Gorbachev was able to reclaim his position, but only with the intervention of Russian President and arch-nemesis Boris Yeltsin, who boldly led forces to put down the revolt. The coup was a death knell, and the Soviet Union was formally dissolved a short time later. Gorbachev was out and Yeltsin was in as president of the new Russian Federation.

“In the criminal justice system”

The early 1990s also marked the first appearance of the most durable drama in television history on WGEM TV. *Law & Order* refocused crime drama toward capturing criminals rather than examining the personal lives of cops and lawyers. It emphasized character development and serialized stories in order to lure viewers every week. Because the series was story driven, it remained impervious to cast changes. By the end of the 1990s, *Law & Order* turned into an NBC franchise with spin-offs such as *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* and later *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*.

“A show about nothing”

In 1991, NBC began broadcasting a comedy show about nothing. As one viewer put it, “You can't get excited about people going to a laundromat.” Nobody gave the new show much of a chance, so stand-up comedian Jerry Seinfeld and his partner Larry David decided to throw mass appeal to the wind and do the kind of show *they* wanted to do.

Seinfeld was slow to become a ratings hit, but it was an immediate cult favorite with sight gags and zany catchphrases. It took eccentricity to new heights and depths (coining phrases like “Not that there's anything wrong with that!”) with Jerry's quirky circle of friends: hapless George (Jason Alexander), brittle Elaine (Julia Louis-Dreyfus), and insanely bizarre Kramer (Michael Richards).

When the show moved to Thursday night after *Cheers*' last call in 1993, it exploded to the top of the TV ratings and pop culture. The “Soup Nazi,” the diabolical Newman, the recurring parental interventions, and the off-beat plot twists became the leading Friday morning water-cooler topics of the age. When *Seinfeld* ended production, it was still the No. 1 show on television, proving that a big part of comedic genius is also knowing when to leave.



(Left) *Law & Order* is the longest-running prime-time drama in television history; (Right) Jerry Seinfeld (Jerry) (left) and Michael Richards (Kramer) (right) were “masters of their domain” on *Seinfeld* for nine glorious seasons on WGEM TV.

The 1990s also brought a new sports franchise to WGEM TV, and the timing could not have been more perfect. NBC struck a long-term deal with the NBA in 1990. Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls were beginning an extended stampede through pro basketball and won the first of their six NBA Championships in 1991. The *NBA on NBC* soared with "His Airness" and showcased some of the great moments in sports history.

"This is Sunrise."

The explosion of 24-hour news on cable television during the 1990s brought about a change in news viewing habits. Local news programs were also affected. WGEM News responded by extending beyond the traditional TV program positions at 6:00 and 10:00 P.M. The first step was to staff the news operation 24 hours a day. Then, a new 30-minute morning TV news program was added. *WGEM News at Sunrise*, which was anchored by



Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls took center stage for the *NBA on NBC* throughout the decade.

Michele McCormack, made its debut in November 1991. Soon, the program was extended to a full hour and McCormack was joined by popular WGEM FM Radio personality Tammy O'Neil.

Sunrise was an immediate success and proved that there was a high demand for local news in the morning. The program increased the WGEM TV audience in the 6:00 to 7:00 A.M. time period sevenfold within two years.

WGEM and its parent company, Quincy Newspapers, Inc., had been at the epicenter of highway development in the area for over 30 years. In 1991, WGEM TV was on hand again capturing live pictures of the last ribbon cutting and the opening of the final leg of the Central Illinois Expressway. The road stretched from Danville to Quincy, Illinois. It would not take long for this new transportation link to begin to fulfill its promise as a pipeline for economic progress.



(Left) Michele McCormack was the first anchor of *News Channel 10 at Sunrise* and also anchored the weekend news for WGEM before becoming a reporter for ABC Television in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. (Right) Tammy O'Neil was a morning DJ for Gem Country 105 (WGEM FM) before reporting the weather on *News Channel 10 at Sunrise*.



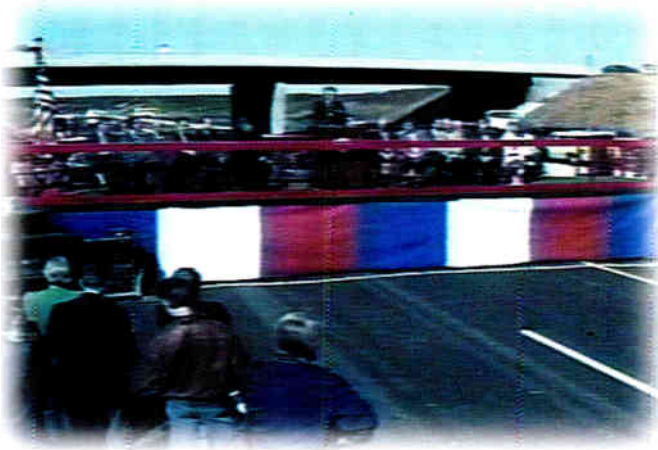
Tom Vodak (left) and Nora Baldner (right) team up for a live extended *Sunrise* broadcast on WGEM TV.



Tom Vodak came to WGEM in the mid-1980s as a reporter, assignment editor, and later co-host of *Sunrise*.



Nora Baldner on *News Channel 10 at Sunrise* in 1995.



A video snapshot culminating decades of effort as the Central Illinois Expressway (I-72) is dedicated in a live broadcast in 1991.

“A high-tech lynching”

The 1990s also brought a new voyeurism to television. The Senate Watergate Hearings of 1973 and the Iran Contra Hearings of 1986 became early forms of reality TV and proved that life could imitate art for the daytime audience. However, the Clarence Thomas Confirmation Hearings in 1991 were more a circus than a soap opera. President Bush nominated Thomas, a conservative black judge, to the U.S. Supreme Court that summer. The confirmation hearing presented the star witness, Anita Hill, who was a former lawyer with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. She alleged that she had been sexually harassed by Thomas. For three bitter and contentious days, Hill and Thomas testified before the television cameras, addressing graphic and embarrassing questions. The hearings touched off a renewed debate about the role of men and women in the workplace.



Anita Hill testifies at the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings.

“A fond farewell”

Johnny Carson gave NBC affiliates a year’s notice that he would be leaving *The Tonight Show* after 30 years as the host. With the long goodbye, no one expected the emotional response of the audience, the press, and Carson himself when his tenure ended on May 22, 1992. Carson held back tears throughout the final show. The show signed off with Carson bidding “a fond farewell” followed by a photo of a California sunset, which was taken by his son Rick, who had died the previous year in a car accident.

In the period leading up to Carson’s retirement, there was much speculation as to whether late-night funnyman David Letterman or permanent *Tonight Show* guest host Jay Leno would assume the mantle. NBC opted for the hard-working Leno, but the transition was anything but smooth. Letterman departed for CBS to go head to head with Leno.



Johnny Carson bidding goodbye to his viewers on WGEM TV in May 1992.

The new *Tonight Show* had a new trendy set, but tried to use the same Carson formula. Letterman’s new show on CBS quickly jumped to No. 1. But Leno handled the turbulence with grace. Within a few years, Leno reworked the show and adopted more of a nightclub atmosphere. The new format allowed more time for Leno to showcase his comedic talent. The changes worked, and with the ongoing foibles of politicians, celebrities, and any other famous person you could think of, Leno quickly overtook Letterman and has never looked back. *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* cheerfully maintains its position at the summit of late-night TV.

WGEM TV again geared up coverage during the presidential election of 1992. The Democrat Party that year borrowed heavily from the Ronald Reagan campaign playbook as they positioned their charismatic candidate Bill Clinton. After the Party convention in New York, Clinton and Senator Al Gore boarded buses for a tour across Mid-America. The route took them through Hannibal where they stopped for an extended appearance on WGEM TV.



Jay Leno took over *The Tonight Show* and endured two years of struggle before emerging as the king of late night in 1994.

Jon Van Ness

Jonathan L. Van Ness was born in Bloomington, Illinois. He graduated from the University of Arizona with a degree in marketing and joined WGEM in 1981 as promotion manager.

He became an account executive for WGEM TV in 1984 and was named Local and Regional Sales Manager in 1988. He became General Sales Manager for WGEM TV in January 1996 and Director of Marketing for Quincy Broadcasting Company, with responsibility for sales of TV AM FM CGEM and WEWB in November 2001.



He developed a comprehensive local marketing program for NBC Olympics coverage and helped direct the transition to WGEM News Radio 105 in 2002.

Van Ness served as a Quincy Chamber of Commerce Ambassador, a campaign division leader and loaned executive for the annual United Way Campaign and served on the United Way Allocations Committee. He was a director and president of the Quincy YMCA, a director of the Adams County Chapter American Red Cross.

He also served on the NBC Regional Sales Marketing Committee.

Brenda Wiskirchen

Brenda S. Wiskirchen was born in Hannibal, Missouri, graduated from Hannibal High School and Gem City Business College. She began working at WGEM in 1968 as a secretary for the *Teentime* show on WGEM Radio and became secretary to WGEM general manager Joe Bonansinga in 1969.



She was named WGEM administrative assistant and executive secretary in 1976 and became business manager in 1982.

She directed the transition to the first computerized traffic and billing systems at WGEM in 1987 and was responsible for the development of a number of station management systems.

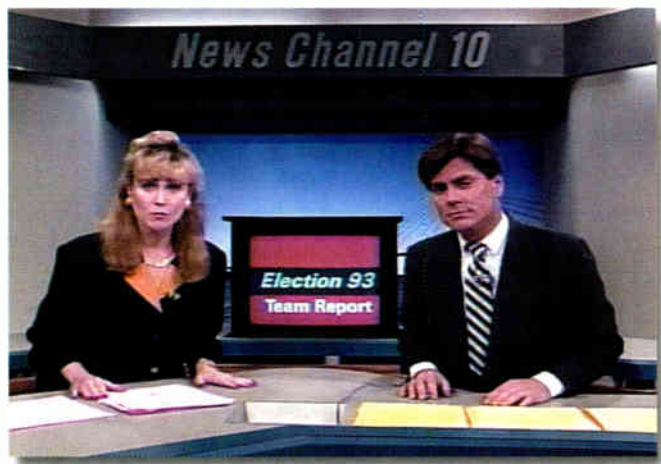
Wiskirchen moved to the QNI corporate office in 1994 as director of monitoring and compliance and management information systems and was later named director of operations support for Quincy Newspaper, Inc. In 2001, she was selected to manage the QNI Broadcast Operations Center in Quincy.

Sara Nutt

Sara M. Nutt was born in Quincy and graduated from Quincy Senior High School. She began her career with WGEM in 1988 as a receptionist. She was assigned to the business office as TV traffic manager and later took on responsibilities for TV programming.



She was named administrative assistant in 1996 and business manager in 1998.



Shan Whiston (left) and Mark Baker (right) deliver election results in April 1993.

A weakened economy and split Republican voting toward maverick third-party candidate Ross Perot propelled Clinton into the presidency with just 43% of the popular vote.

“Dateline on NBC.”

By 1992, NBC had introduced 17 different newsmagazines to match up with 60 Minutes on CBS and later 20/20 on ABC. Among the list of casualties was *First Tuesday*, *Weekend*, *Prime Time Sunday*, *NBC Magazine*, and *First Camera*. When *Dateline NBC* executive producer Neil Shapiro signed off the broadcast with, “Nice job, everybody, see you back here tomorrow night,” the critics snickered and laid odds that NBC would go 0 for 18 very quickly.

With the appeal of experienced anchors Jane Pauley and Stone Phillips, *Dateline NBC* endured a rocky start to become the most-honored news program in television. Like *Law & Order*, the show became a franchise and was able to tool up quickly with additional hours wherever there was a hole in the network schedule—first one night, then two, then three, and eventually up to five nights each week. “I thought it was lunacy,” said Pauley, “But it was brilliant, we created a brand.”

On February 26, 1993, an explosion rocked the parking level of the World Trade Center in downtown Manhattan. TV reports showed smoke billowing from the lower levels of the Twin Towers. Six people were killed and another 50,000 evacuated in the terror attack. Later investigation revealed a link to an emerging terror group called Al Qaeda.

Two months later, Tri-State viewers' lunch hour was interrupted when WGEM TV presented live pictures of a massive fire in Waco, Texas, where federal officers laid siege to a series of buildings owned by a religious sect known as “The Branch Davidians”. The fire spread rapidly, and the entire structure was reduced to ashes within an hour, incinerating 86 people.



Stone Phillips (left) and Jane Pauley (right) hosted several broadcasts of *Dateline NBC* each week on WGEM TV.

Throughout the spring of 1993, WGEM News reported high water. A snowy winter and heavy spring rains kept the Mississippi River, its tributaries, and almost watersheds in the upper Midwest above the flood stage through late June.

“The Bayview Bridge is open.”

On Thursday, July 2, the Quincy area was deluged with a six-inch rainfall within a six-hour period. That morning, WGEM News at Sunrise on TV and WGEM Radio reported widespread power outages and flash flooding throughout the region. The river levels rose like a rocket. Soon experts were predicting a flood of monumental proportions, threatening agricultural districts and towns throughout the WGEM viewing area.

Station management quickly realized that the unfolding events would require a commitment of station resources on a scale never imagined before. WGEM operations manager Leo Henning huddled with Ralph M. Oakley, then station vice president and general manager. “This is going to be big,” said Henning. Oakley responded, “We have to do whatever it takes.”

The entire WGEM staff was enlisted for on-air duty as the station presented over 600 hours of continuous and live coverage on radio and TV. Much of the flood coverage was presented commercial free.



A video snapshot of the fire at the West Quincy Ayerco station minutes after the levee break in West Quincy on July 16, 1993.



(Above) The Mississippi River roars through the breach in the Sny Island levee on July 25, 1993.

(Below) Radio on TV. (left to right) Rich Cain, Leo Henning, and Bob Turck broadcast flood information for over 600 hours on WGEM Radio and TV.





Shan Whistan reports from flooded Niata, Illinois.



WGEM's Steve Cramblit (left) and Leo Henning (right) board an Illinois National Guard helicopter to tour the flood damage.

The station became the conduit for the latest flood information and a giant two-way communications platform for the largest mobilization of manpower and material in the region's history. WGEM became integrated with the crisis, as it helped people throughout the region provide flood relief, controlled rumors, and assisted emergency first responders. The crisis brought out the best in the people of the Tri-State area as they banded together through rain, mud, humidity, and sweltering heat to fight back the raging rivers and streams. The Flood of 1993 also produced the finest hours in the history of WGEM.

The New York Times wrote, "If a flood had an eye like a hurricane does, WGEM would be it. Farmers, the National Guard, and volunteers call from the levees on cellular phones asking for what they need; trucks, sandbaggers, water. They get it."

People Magazine said, "The station has spared no expense to provide the most comprehensive flood coverage in the area." *The New Yorker* said, "Almost without noticing, WGEM became a part of the story, serving as the central means of communication throughout the area."

The station broadcast live pictures of the dramatic levee breaks up and down the Mississippi's main stem. A WGEM News live unit was positioned at the foot of the Quincy Bayview Bridge on July 16, 1993, seconds after the breach of the levee in West Quincy, Missouri. Michele McCormack conducted a live interview with a self-professed levee worker who claimed to be an eyewitness to the break.

Viewers watched as flood water raced through a cornfield in the background toppling a fuel tank at a nearby gas station. The resulting oil spill ignited, and the scene quickly turned into a raging inferno. Then, another camera captured an even more surreal image as a barge, which had broken from its mooring in the river, floated leisurely through a flooded cornfield.



(Left) Some of the people responsible for WGEM's award-winning coverage of the Flood of 1993. (left to right) Bob Turek, Les Sachs, Steve Cramblit, Rich Cain, Tammy O'Neil, Tony Schall, Leo Henning, Cory McCloskey, Rick Junkerman, Jeff Dorsey, Mark Baker, and Brady Dreasler. (Below) WGEM was recognized with some of the most prestigious awards in broadcast journalism for its coverage of FloodWatch '93.



Later, Adams County Sheriff Robert Nall arrived at the station requesting to view the videotape of McCormack's eyewitness interview. The levee worker she interviewed was a man with a past, and deliberate sabotage of the levee was almost immediately suspected. An arrest was made several days later, and James Scott was charged with deliberately causing a catastrophe.

The following morning after the West Quincy levee break, WGEM received a telephone call from Air Force One. President Bill Clinton was on his way to St. Louis to discuss the flood crisis with Midwestern governors. Speaking with Bob Turek, Steve Cramblit, and Jeff Dorsey on WGEM Radio and TV, Clinton said, "[WGEM] had done a remarkable job of coordinating information, keeping people in touch, and keeping them up in the middle of this. I respect your effort and appreciate it very much."

“A break in the Sny Island levee”

A week later, the levee protecting the huge Sny Island district gave way. WGEM TV provided continuous live coverage as the river consumed farmland, homes, and entire towns. Once the water began to subside, the station provided months of coverage of flood recovery efforts.

The effort put forth by WGEM during this crisis brought many honors, including the Sigma Delta Chi Award for Public Service in Journalism from the Society of Professional Journalists and two National Headliner Awards from the Press Club of Atlantic City. The Radio and Television News Directors presented the station with the Edward R. Murrow Award. The coverage of the West Quincy levee break received an Emmy Award nomination, and the Associated Press named WGEM its Station of the Year.

In a speech before the Chicago Humanities Festival in late 1993, Leo Henning said, “We were given a chance to make a profound difference and we did. There was no magic formula or grand plan for this coverage. What happened at WGEM this summer was simply neighbor helping neighbor.”



The anchors of WGEM News at Ten in early 1993. (left to right) Steve Looten, Shan Whiston, Mark Baker, and Cory McCloskey

Leo Henning

Leo T. Henning was born and raised in Evergreen Park, Illinois. He graduated from Quincy University in 1972 with degrees in English and music. He joined WGEM as a radio copywriter in 1973 after serving in the U.S. Army. In 1974, he was named promotion manager of WGEM Radio and TV. TV programming duties were added to his responsibilities two years later.

Henning was instrumental in the development of several local programming initiatives during the 1970s, including *Quincy College Quiz Bowl*, *Kids Kamments*, *Cub Reporter*, and *Focus*. He produced and directed the annual *Jerry Lewis Telethon* from 1974–1979, wrote and produced WGEM TV's prime-time 25th anniversary program in 1978, and helped develop the WGEM Home & Living Show. He joined the sales department of WGEM AM Radio in 1979 and was named WGEM radio operations manager later that year. Henning was also active in special projects for the station, serving as a court reporter for the Alan Madden murder trials, and writing and producing the series and documentary *German-Americans* in 1983.



He was station manager of WGEM AM FM from 1984–1993 and became director of operations for Quincy Broadcasting Company in 1993. He directed WGEM Radio and TV in its award winning-coverage of the Flood of 1993, and was named vice president and general manager of Quincy Broadcasting Company in 1996. He supervised WGEM's studio renovations in 1998, the introduction of WGEM News Radio 105 in 2002, and the development of Studio H, WGEM's street-level showcase studio on Hampshire Street in Quincy.

Henning has served as a director and chairman of the Quincy Symphony Orchestra Association, the Salvation Army Advisory Board, and the Quincy Civic Center Authority, where he guided the development and construction of the Oakley-Lindsay Center in Quincy. He has also been a director of the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, Transitions of West Central Illinois, the Quincy Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Illinois Broadcasters Association.

He chaired the annual fund for the United Way in 1998 and has worked in fundraising activities for Quincy University, Quincy Notre Dame, and Quincy Senior High School.

Cory McCloskey

Cory McCloskey was raised in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and began performing at an early age. His acting and performing talent landed him a brief role on the NBC daytime drama *Another World*.

He attended Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, and graduated from Quincy University. He began working at WGEM in 1989 as a cameraman while attending QU but was soon assigned to weather on weekday newscasts. He presented weather on WGEM TV from 1989–2001, and later accepted a position as a morning show co-host with Fox Television in Phoenix, Arizona.

McCloskey was an instant hit with viewers and in much demand as an emcee at area events. He co-hosted the annual *Jerry Lewis Telethon*, *Quincy University Academic Challenge*, and the annual Dogwood Festival parade in Quincy. He had a special knack for live remote broadcasts and was at his best during WGEM's broadcasts of the Battle of Pea Ridge in Keokuk, Iowa; Heritage Days in Macomb, Illinois; National Tom Sawyer Days in Hannibal, Missouri; and scores of county fairs and special area events. Off-beat and always unpredictable, he always interjected a bit of fun into his broadcasts.

McCloskey served as spokesperson for Operation Prom-Graduation and was active with the Quincy Community Theatre, the Muddy River Opera, the Muscular Dystrophy Association, and the D.A.R.E. program.



A few days after the flood coverage started, WGEM News began a *FloodWatch '93* update at 5:00 P.M. each weeknight. The program, which was hosted by Les Sachs, was so well received that it continued as *Live at Five* and became a permanent fixture in the news schedule. *Live at Five* took on the formidable task of competing with entertainment programs in a traditional non-news time slot. However, the show quickly found an audience and eventually led its time period.

Long before the Flood of 1993 suspended the normal news agenda, WGEM TV was working on a method to easily deliver live video from its coverage of events in Macomb, Illinois. Working in cooperation with CONVOCOM and WQEC, the local public television station, Western Illinois University, and the NBC News Channel, WGEM established the Macomb Newslink in September 1993. This vital telecommunications system is used daily to connect McDonough County newsmakers to their local television station.

“Tossed salads and scrambled eggs”

When *Cheers* left NBC in May 1992, Kelsey Grammer, who played neurotic psychologist Frasier Crane on that show, teamed up with some of *Cheers*' best writers to create a sequel. *Frasier* made its debut in October 1993 and soon was a Tri-State audience favorite. Quincy University alum and well-known character actor John Mahoney joined the ensemble cast as Frasier's father, Martin Crane. The program held a top spot on Thursday night for several years before moving to help build NBC's Tuesday night line-up.

QU presented Mahoney with an honorary doctorate shortly after he began his stint on *Frasier*. He would later serve as a radio spokesperson for the successful political campaign of his nephew, Illinois State Senator John Sullivan of Rushville.



Les Sachs anchored *Live at Five* in 1994. The program started as a nightly update on the Flood of 1993.



A Crane family photo from *Frasier*. (left to right) Kelsey Grammer (Frasier), “Eddie”, John Mahoney (Martin), and David Hyde Pierce (Niles).



A video snapshot of Steve Looter's stunning videography of the J.C. Penney building fire in downtown Quincy.

“A high wind blew embers.”

Steve Looten worked as a sports anchor for WGEM TV from 1985 until 2001. He was an accomplished videographer for



sports coverage, but he had an exceptional knack for being in the right place at the right time during breaking news events. He shot most of the first up-close video of the West Quincy levee break and fire.

Looten was also known for doing a lot of his prep work for his sports show in the wee hours of the morning. As he was leaving the station early on the windy morning of November 4, 1993, he saw smoke billowing from the vacant former J.C. Penney store in downtown Quincy. He quickly returned to the newsroom, grabbed a camera, and ran over to 6th and Maine Street to document a surprisingly intense fire that threatened to engulf several buildings in the central business district and ignited rooftop fires on buildings blocks away.

An event of astronomical proportions was propelled to the forefront of WGEM TV coverage in May 1994. The midday total solar eclipse, the last of the millennium in the United States, prompted the adjustment of school and work schedules. WGEM weatherman Cory McCloskey, surrounded by area school children, hosted live television coverage of the entire historic event.

On June 13, 1994, WGEM *News at Sunrise* presented the first reports that the wife of ex-pro football star O.J. Simpson had been found murdered in Los Angeles. Three days later, NBC interrupted the telecast of an NBA Championship game between the Houston Rockets and the New York Knicks to show helicopter pictures from high above the infamous slow-speed “Bronco Chase” on L.A. freeways. By then, Simpson was a suspect in the killing. The chase ended at his Brentwood home where he was taken into custody.

The next three years were consumed with almost nonstop TV coverage of O.J. Simpson court proceedings. First, there was the criminal trial (in which Simpson was acquitted) and then a civil case (in which he was found liable for the death of his wife).

After Quincy Newspapers, Inc. sold its interests in Quincy Cablevision in 1974, the cable television business changed dramatically. Satellite delivery enabled cable operators to deliver scores of TV channels into homes. Program suppliers like ESPN, MTV, and USA Networks charged cable systems for carrying their programming. Still, by the early 1990s, local television still captured the lion's share of the cable television audience.

“A brand new platform”

Prior to 1993, cable television systems were not required to obtain permission from local television stations before retransmitting its signal. A new law went into effect that year giving local TV broadcasters the right to negotiate value for their retransmission consent to cable systems. WGEM TV and Continental Cablevision reached a retransmission agreement that provided the station with a second channel on cable TV.

WGEM TV commenced operations in July 1994 with a 32-hour TV documentary reviewing the Flood of 1993. Fox TV's prime-time schedule and syndicated programming were soon added. Tri-State viewers could now see shows like *Melrose Place*, *Beverly Hills 90210*, and *The X Files* for the first time. WGEM also picked up Chicago Bulls basketball and Big Ten football and basketball, and carried a full slate of videotape delay coverage of Quincy University, Quincy Senior High School, Quincy Notre Dame, and Western Illinois University sports play



Cory McCloskey (left) and Jerry Lewis (right) ham it up during a promo taping for *The Jerry Lewis Telethon* in 1994.



City Desk first appeared on CGEM before it began airing on WGEM TV. (left to right) Joe Conover, retired Quincy Herald-Whig executive editor, and Marc Magliari and Les Sachs of WGEM News.

by play. New local shows were developed for the platform, including *Major Stories*, *GEM Archives*, and a provocative new public affairs show called *City Desk*. CGEM TV became an important vehicle for repurposed news content generated by WGEM TV and an important advertising vehicle for local businesses.



Tim Allen started in *Home Improvement* in syndicated prime access reruns for seven seasons.

About the same time, then general manager Ralph Oakley made the most astute syndicated television program purchase in the history of WGEM TV when he acquired the broadcast rights to *Home Improvement*. It was broadcast by the station in the prime time access period for seven seasons.

For several seasons, WGEM TV delivered a higher rating for this show than any other television station in the nation.

Interest in genealogy had always been strong in the Tri-State area and interest grew stronger following the 1983 WGEM TV documentary *German-Americans*. A new German Village Society was formed and the City of Quincy established a Sister City Commission and a relationship with the German city of Herford. News anchor Mark Baker and production manager Jim Lawrence traveled to Herford with the Quincy Sister City delegation in the fall of 1994 and documented the visit in the feature *Our Herford Connection*.

Over the years, WGEM has maintained ties to Quincy's Sister City with yearly cooperative broadcasting internships for German students through Radio Herford and the sponsorship of concerts in Quincy by traveling German musical groups.

TV's favorite *Friends*. (left to right) Lisa Kudrow (Phoebe), Matt LeBlanc (Joey), Courtney Cox Arquette (Monica), David Schwimmer (Ross), Jennifer Aniston (Rachel), and Matthew Perry (Chandler).



“Your love life’s D.O.A.”

In the world of TV advertising, decision makers have always paid a high premium to reach young adult demographics. In the fall of 1994, *Friends* went into WGEM's Thursday night “Must-See” line-up as a program that showed the TV audience how young adults lived in the 1990s. Initially dismissed as a *Seinfeld* knock-off, the show quickly made its own mark, drawing on the vulnerabilities of Rachel, her roommate Monica, Monica's brother Ross, Chandler, his roommate Joey, and Phoebe. The group thrived on mutual support whenever they failed at love or work. It remained the top sitcom on TV into the new millennium.

“The action never stopped.”

The same year that *Friends* made its debut, a debate was raging in Washington about the future of health care in America. *ER* gave the nation a major shot of adrenaline with a fast-paced, shot-with-a-steady-cam whirl through the corridors of a hospital emergency ward at “Cook County General.” The pilot had an amazing 87 speaking parts and 45 plot lines. Network executives worried that the show as too intense and fast.



ER brought nonstop, heart-stopping action to television in 1994.

Fears quickly subsided when *ER* shot to the top of the Nielsens, where it has reigned as the favorite television show of Tri-State viewers for a decade. Ironically, the turnover in the show's cast mimics the high turnover at a normal hospital. George Clooney (another guest alumnus from the WGEM Home & Living Show) became an American heartthrob on *ER*. Others gained new notoriety including Anthony Edwards, Julianna Margulies, Eriq LaSalle, and William H. Macy. The *ER* heroes worked tirelessly for their patients, and the gripping weekly stories soured many Americans to the idea that the government would ever be allowed to pick their doctors.



(Above) Will Ferrell and Ana Gasteyer as the singing "Culps" on SNL. (Right) Repressed Catholic school girl "Mary Katherine Gallagher," played by Molly Shannon (right), makes a pit stop at a school dance beside Chris Farley (left).



"We've got Spartan spirit!"

Saturday Night Live underwent another successful transformation in the mid-1990s when the cast of Will Ferrell, Darrell Hammon, Cheri Oteri, Molly Shannon, Anna Gasteyer, Chris Kattan, and Tim Meadows once again made SNL the funhouse mirror of public opinion. Kattan's high-strung exotic dancer "Mango," Shannon's repressed "Mary Katherine Gallagher," Hammond's dead-on "Bill Clinton," Meadows' syntax-mangling "Ladies Man," and Ferrell and Gasteyer's vocal stylings as "Marty and Bobbie Culp" helped America laugh through a bizarre political period, characterized by investigations, scandal, and impeachment.

On April 19, 1995, shortly after *Today* signed off, NBC interrupted WGEM TV's broadcast of *Regis and Kathy Lee* with news of a massive explosion at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Stunned viewers watched as the bodies of men, women, and children were pulled from the rubble. When the smoke cleared, 168 people were dead in what was then called the worst terrorist attack ever on U.S. soil.



Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh is led before live television cameras after his capture.

Broadcast television had not always been kind to feature films. Not only were films edited to fit the TV screen and accommodate commercials, but lines of dialogue were also dubbed over to meet the language standards of TV. In 1995, NBC made an extraordinary decision to present an unedited

broadcast Steven Spielberg's landmark film *Schindler's List*. This important film was a historically accurate depiction of courage, survival, brutality, and dehumanization during the Holocaust. The WGEM TV switchboard was active the following day. Although there were no comments about the film's chilling graphic violence, there were several complaints about full-frontal nudity, as men, women, and children were shown entering the gas chambers. Many viewers voiced support for the decision to show the film in its entirety, citing its historical importance. Others wanted the past buried with its victims. *Schindler's List* was the most controversial program ever presented by WGEM TV.



The Dow Jones Industrial Average topped the 4000 mark for the first time in history in early 1995. At the same time, the Tri-State area was experiencing its own economic boom. Business and community leaders from throughout the region drew inspiration from the cooperative spirit demonstrated during the Flood of 1993.

A working group built upon that concept in planning throughout that year. The first Tri-State Development Summit was held at Culver-Stockton College in 1996. The purpose was to foster regional cooperation and a coordinated approach to economic development.



The lobby of the Oakley-Lindsay Center in Quincy.

News Names

These people have anchored newscasts on WGEM TV in the past 50 years. How many can you remember?

Charlie Griffith	Dave Hennen
Bob Turek	Frank Cariello
Bill Wegman	Dave Taylor
Fred Colgan	Steve Looten
Paul McClelland	Nora Baldner
Don Brohan	Michele McCormack
Mike Olds	Tammy O'Neil
Moe Harvey	Dan Krosse
Gene Beaver	Chris Hunt
Bob Scott	Kelly Weiss
Mary Harvey	Mike Jones
Fred Briggs	Jim Lawrence
Rick Weaver	Cory McCloskey
Bob Joye	Bonnie Kirschmann
Mike May	Mark Baker
Ernie Segrist	Tony Schall
George Chance	John Smith
Jim Marwood	George Eversman
Pat Henthorn	Rich Cain
Dick Edwards	Beau Hicks
Jim Smith	Jenny Dean
Max Lee	Jennifer McIntire Wendling
Bob Mason	Holly Doyle
Jackie Bean	Ianthe Jackson
Pat Harvey	Gordon Boyd
Maggie Thomas	Scott Inman
Ron Price	Nicole Peterson
Les Sachs	Lisa Bertin
Scott Smith	Ron Brown
Paul Martino	Chaundra Carter
Corey McPherrin	John Brandon
Mark Christian	Lew Stowers
Cynthia Schreen	Holly Gregory
John Schutte	Adam Sandler
Rich Herberts	Beau Hicks
Jo Miller	Lathay Pegues
Jack Connors	Jace Verhoeven
Sheila O'Connor	Caitlin Weinstein
Dave Kopp	Chris Broughton
Rich Gould	Jim Poston
Ralph Bristol	Brenda Good
Deborah Howell	John King
Jill Wagner	Chris Haddox
Tom Vodak	Krystal Morris
Cathy Weise	Leslie Carto
Susan Wilson	Amy Bradley
Skip Dane	Brian Inman
Shan Hendrix Whiston	Ben Marth
Bob Hocks	

WGEM TV provided extensive live coverage of the first summit and subsequent meetings in Keokuk, Iowa; Quincy, Illinois; Hannibal, Missouri; and Burlington, Iowa. WGEM newscasts before, during, and after each summit originated from the host communities and focused special attention on the region's economic development agenda.

Later, WGEM News developed a year-long review of that agenda with the show *Vision 2020*. Hosted by Mark Baker, the recurring series appeared on WGEM News for many months. These vignettes asked area leaders to provide a view on where regional development would be by the year 2020. The effort provided a future development road for almost every aspect of Tri-State life.

WGEM TV picked up on the economic development theme in 1997 and ran a weekly series of live radio and TV broadcasts called *Hard Hat Week*, which highlighted a number of capital development projects in the area.

One of those projects was the completion of the new civic center complex in Quincy. The Oakley-Lindsay Foundation of Quincy Newspapers, Inc., Mary S. Oakley, and Leah Lindsay made substantial contributions toward the required local match for the state-funded project. The Oakley-Lindsay Center was dedicated in July 1995. WGEM TV presented *The Vision*, a documentary on the civic center project, which was nominated for an Emmy Award.

By the middle of the decade, the World Wide Web made the Internet user-friendly. In 1995, WGEM launched *wgem.com*, the first media web site in the region. It carried daily news content, weather forecasts, programming information, and community news. In a short time, *wgem.com* affiliated with MSNBC, bringing national and international content. Later, live and on-demand streaming of all newscasts was added and soon *wgem.com* became one of the most visited web sites in the area.

Local television reached into its past to showcase its future when *Gem Kids* made its debut in 1996. The monthly newsmagazine targeted junior high students and was patterned after the successful run of *Cub Reporter* from 1977–79. The show was hosted by students, was geared toward students, and was recognized several times as the best children's program in medium-market television by the Illinois Broadcasters Association (IBA).



Gem Kids was a 1990s version of WGEM TV's *Cub Reporter* and was recognized as an "Outstanding Children's Program" by the Illinois Broadcasters Association. Tad Hilgenbrinck (left) and Megan Winklejohn (right) hosted the show for a time.

The IBA also recognized three leaders of Quincy Broadcasting Company and WGEM during the 1990s with the prestigious Vincent T. Wasilewski Award, which was named after a former president of the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB). The Wasilewski Award is Illinois' highest TV and radio industry honor. F. Merrill Lindsay, former chairman of QNI, received the distinction in 1994. Joe Bonansinga, former WGEM vice president and general manager, was recognized one year later. Thomas A. Oakley, current president and CEO of Quincy Newspapers, Inc., was honored in 2000.



Father Augustine Tolton, born a slave in Missouri, became the first black Catholic priest. A WGEM documentary on his life called *Past the Boundary: The Journey of Augustine Tolton* won the prestigious Gabriel Award and was nominated for an Emmy Award.

“Past the Boundary”

Throughout the 1990s, WGEM TV partnered with the Newman Clinic to present a series of Christmas programs. The *Newman Family Christmas* series, which showcased choirs, bands, and orchestras from Quincy, Hannibal, Keokuk, Ft. Madison, and Macomb, became a holiday tradition.

WGEM began its long association with the Showcase of Excellence in 1994 and the Oktoberfest Parade and Field Competition in 1996. Both events are annual music festivals featuring show choirs, jazz bands, and marching bands from throughout the Tri-State region.

In 1997, hundreds of African-American Catholics, and their bishops and pastors gathered in Quincy to celebrate the life of Father Augustine Tolton. Tolton, born a slave in Missouri, escaped with his family and was raised in Quincy. He later became the first African-American Catholic priest. WGEM TV produced the historical documentary *Past the Boundary: The Journey of Augustine Tolton* in conjunction with the event. The program was nominated for an Emmy award and later received the prestigious Gabriel Award presented by UNDA-USA, the national organization of Catholic communicators.



Shan Whiston holds the Olympic Torch high as she runs through Palmyra, Missouri in 1996.

The mid-1990s were an exciting time for regional sports. When the Olympic Games returned to America in 1996, WGEM TV beefed up its local coverage of the event, organizing a leg of the Olympic Torch Run through Northeast Missouri. Hundreds of runners (and walkers) crossed the Quincy Bayview Bridge to meet the Torch Run at Taylor, Missouri. News anchor Shan Whiston ran a leg of the Torch Run through Palmyra, Missouri. WGEM TV's live coverage followed the event route from Hannibal, Missouri through Keokuk, Iowa. Sports director Steve Looten caught up to the actual torch, providing local coverage from the Atlanta Games.

The St. Louis Rams moved their summer training camp to Macomb, Illinois in 1996. WGEM responded by moving the TV sports operations to Western Illinois University for the entire camp. In subsequent years, the station provided daily live updates and special programs highlighting not only the Rams, but also the influence of the camp on the Macomb area economy.

When Central Illinois Collegiate League baseball returned to Quincy in 1996, WGEM developed a comprehensive marketing plan for the Quincy Gems in conjunction with the Quincy Convention and Visitors Bureau. The games at QU Stadium



The Rams moved to St. Louis in 1994. The team held their summer camp in Macomb a few years later becoming part of the WGEM TV local sports beat.

were a great success. Replays of Gems home games became a regular feature of late-night programming on CGEM TV.

That same year, the Christmastime *Fort Madison Parade of Lights* broadcast was added to WGEM live local broadcast schedule, which included Macomb Heritage Days, Keokuk's Battle of Pea Ridge, National Tom Sawyer Days in Hannibal, and dozens of fairs and festivals in area communities.

The late 1990s brought a shift in the direction of network newscasts. The evening newscasts on NBC, CBS, and ABC were appointment TV. The advent of the 24-hour news day paralleled the development of all-news cable channels. NBC



Brian Williams presented news segments on *Today* before anchoring *NBC Nightly News* on weekends and a nightly show on MSNBC.

partnered with Microsoft to form MSNBC. The cable TV channel and Internet portal gave NBC News a 24-hour platform. In turn, the *NBC Nightly News* changed direction, presenting world and national news in headline form, followed by features on health, money, and the environment. The program began to resemble a prime-time newsmagazine.

The reorganized NBC News was put to the test after the debut of MSNBC in 1996 when TWA Flight 800, a Boeing 747 bound for Paris,

exploded shortly after takeoff near New York's Long Island, killing all 230 people on board. MSNBC reporter Brian Williams, utilizing the resources of the local NBC station in New York, provided the first reports and pictures to the entire NBC network. The newsgathering synergy kept NBC and its affiliated station out in front of the story for several hours.



A video snapshot of the kick-off of the WGEM/County Market Fall Harvest for the Salvation Army in 1997. (left to right) Jenny Deon, Cory McCloskey, Rich Cain, and Jennifer Wendling.

The similar situation arose in August 1997 when viewing on a peaceful Sunday night was interrupted with news that Diana, Princess of Wales, had been critically injured in a car accident in Paris.

WGEM TV's first report came from NBC News, but actually originated from the MSNBC newsroom in Secaucus, New Jersey, until NBC News in Manhattan could get its coverage organized. After several hours of NBC coverage, WGEM switched to MSNBC coverage to provide viewers with up-to-the-minute updates throughout the night.

The new approach to continuous coverage at NBC mirrored changes in local breaking news on WGEM. The scope coverage during the Flood of 1993 required WGEM to exploit the synergies between its radio and TV station. CGEM later moved multiple television cameras into the WGEM Radio studios, allowing for daily coverage and seamless hand-offs during extended coverage. This unique intermedia capability improved the coverage of local breaking news and weather emergencies.

This new capability was employed in November 1997 when two airplanes tragically collided on an airport runway in Quincy, killing all passengers on both planes. Reports of the tragedy were heard on WGEM Radio and quickly relayed to *Live at Five* on WGEM TV. Coverage continued on TV Radio and CGEM for the next 24 hours. The coverage was routed through the WGEM studios to Macomb where it was uplinked via satellite to NBC News and distributed nationwide.



(top left to right) Cory McCloskey and Steve Looten. (bottom left to right) Les Sachs, Shun Whiston, and Gordon Boyd.

WGEM TV expanded its newsgathering capability in 1998 with the addition of the Southeast Iowa Newslink. The microwave relay system made regular live broadcasts from Lee County, Iowa and Northern Hancock County, Illinois possible. That year, the new system carried the tragic news of a house fire in Keokuk that claimed the lives of three children and three firefighters. WGEM News packed up later that year and traveled to St. Louis to provide award-winning live local coverage of Pope John Paul II's visit to the Gateway City.

“It depends on what the meaning of is, is.”

Just as the O.J. Simpson trials dominated TV earlier in the decade, the Monica Lewinsky scandal and the subsequent impeachment hearings and trial of President Bill Clinton enlivened provocative daytime drama as the century came to a close. The TV saga had a rich plot—a randy dalliance, a fall from grace, lies and deceit, heroes and villains, and confession and ultimate redemption.

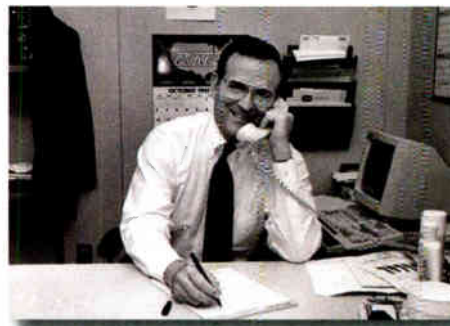


Illinois Representative Henry Hyde addresses the U.S. House before the vote to impeach President Bill Clinton.

In the waning days of the millennium, some people expected the Second Coming. Some predicted no end to the economic boom of the 1990s. Others worried about a technological meltdown with Y2K. Still others worried about a terror attack that could initiate Armageddon. WGEM TV reflected the optimism and the angst, but the new century would arrive quietly. There would be one more year to bask in the glow of a remarkable decade.



(Above) 1998 studio improvements.



Les Sachs, the guiding force of WGEM News for over two decades.



(Above, left to right) Marc Magliari joined WGEM News in 1998 as the managing editor. He also anchored radio news, *WGEM News This Week*, and was a contributing editor to *City Desk*; Holly Doyle was a reporter and weekend news anchor in the late 1990s; Jennifer McIntire Wendling joined WGEM News in 1995 as a reporter and later anchored *WGEM News at Ten* on weekends and eventually weeknights; Jenny Dean became co-anchor of *WGEM News at Ten* in 1997.



WGEM News goes On the Road each summer to area festivals and fairs.

TODAY AND TOMORROW

Despite dire warnings, New Year's Eve 2000 went off like all the others. When Jay Leno cut away from his broadcast for the Times Square countdown to the new millennium, the crowd was orderly and respectful. The nation's power grid did not fail, there was no massive meltdown in cyberspace, and the expected terrorist attacks never materialized. However, thanks to the Y2K scare, there were a lot of brand-new computers at WGEM and in many area homes and businesses.

The hot boom times of the 1990s were already starting to cool, and the new year was greeted with uncertainty. WGEM faced new challenges as the media business nationwide began its biggest economic slump on record, forcing all local stations to re-evaluate their service and modes of operation.

Local news-gathering capabilities were stretched to new limits in January 2000. President Clinton announced that he would visit Quincy the morning after his last State of the Union message to Congress. WGEM News presented the event from his arrival to departure with nine hours of nonstop coverage.

“The President in Quincy”

WGEM TV cameras and reporting teams stood by in the bitter cold as Air Force One landed at Quincy Regional Airport. The live TV cameras followed the motorcade along Maine Street in Quincy and documented Clinton's remarks before a large and respectful crowd in Washington Park. The cameras were in position when Clinton left his motorcade on foot to greet well wishers on the return trip to the airport and then captured Air Force One's departure to Washington, framed against a wintry late afternoon sky.



Steve Luoten reports from the Georgia Dome as the St. Louis Rams win the Super Bowl in January 2000.

“Lock boxes and hanging chads”

The presidential election in 2000 brought a parade of candidates to the area. WGEM News tracked the large field of contenders touring Southeast Iowa during the Iowa Caucuses. Democrat candidate Vice President Al Gore floated down the Mississippi in August aboard the riverboat *Mark Twain* for a campaign swing through Keokuk, Canton, Quincy, and Hannibal. WGEM provided live coverage at each stop, and news director Les Sachs conducted an extended one-on-one interview with the presidential hopeful en route from Quincy to Hannibal. Not to be outdone, Republican candidate George W. Bush invited Sachs for an exclusive interview in St. Louis a few days later. The November election turned into a side show with close to one month of coverage before Bush was finally declared the winner.



President Clinton approaches the podium flanked by Dule Kirlin of Kir-lins, Inc. (left) and Kayt Norris (right). Norris, a Quincy Junior High School student, introduced the president.

Jennifer Wendling

Jennifer McIntire Wendling was born in Jacksonville, Illinois and attended Winchester High School. She received a degree in journalism from the University of Missouri-Columbia and began work at WGEM shortly after graduation in 1995.

She was a general assignment reporter until 1997 when she became anchor of *WGEM News Weekend Edition*. She was named co-anchor of *WGEM News at Ten* in June 2000.

Wendling still does reporting regularly and counts the papal visit to St. Louis, the Olympic Torch Run, and the 1997 airplane crash at Quincy Regional Airport as her most memorable stories.

She also co-hosts the Arthritis Telethon and serves as spokesperson for a number of cause-related promotions on WGEM.



Today throws a wedding in 2001. Matt Lauer (left) and Katie Couric (right) co host an expanded edition that is broadcast until 10.00 A.M. weekdays.

Top 25 TV Shows in the Quincy IL/ Hannibal MO/ Keokuk IA Market (Households) February 2003

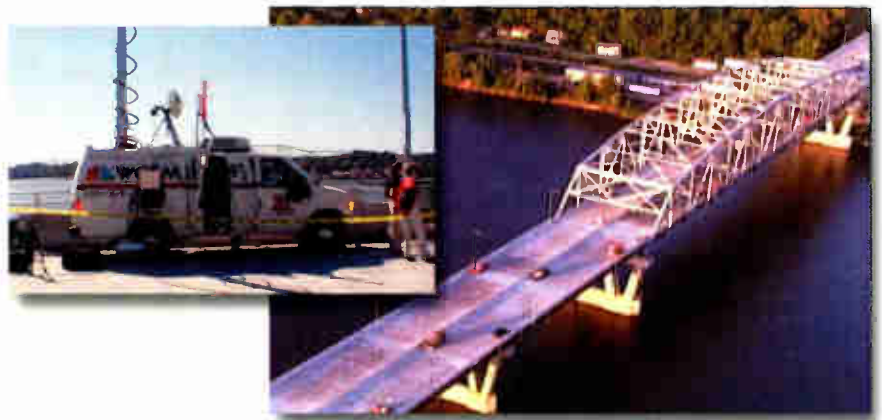
1. *ER* (NBC)
2. *CSI* (CBS)
3. *Friends/Scrubs* (NBC)
4. *WGEM News at Six* (WGEM)
5. *Survivor Africa* (CBS)
6. *Judging Amy* (CBS)
7. *WGEM News at Ten* (WGEM)
8. *Wheel of Fortune* (KHQA)
9. *Everybody Loves Raymond* (CBS)
10. *Family Law* (CBS)
11. *Agency* (CBS)
12. *Everybody Loves Raymond (M-F)* (WGEM)
13. *Law & Order* (NBC)
14. *JAG* (CBS)
15. *Guardian* (CBS)
16. *CBS Sunday Movie* (CBS)
17. *Live at Five* (WGEM)
18. *Will & Grace* (NBC)
19. *Law & Order S.V.U.* (NBC)
20. *KHQA Evening News* (KHQA)
21. *King of Queens* (CBS)
22. *Amazing Race* (CBS)
23. *KHQA Late News* (KHQA)
24. *Fear Factor* (NBC)
25. *Just Shoot Me* (NBC)

“DT and HD”

Another technological milestone was achieved in June 2000 when WGEM became the first small-market television station in the United States to broadcast in digital television (DTV). WGEM DT broadcasts in both the standard 4 x 3 digital TV format and the 16 x 9 high-definition format (HDTV). The service provides superior audio and video, and duplicates programming carried on WGEM TV. The first sports programming televised in the high-definition format on WGEM DT was the 2002 Winter Olympic Games in Salt Lake City. The station also carries *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, and a number of NBC prime-time shows and special events in HDTV.



The new digital pathway will allow WGEM to deliver multiple video, audio, and data services into homes throughout the region. CGEM TV is also delivered over the air with the WGEM DT transmission. Eventually, the analog broadcasting spectrum occupied by WGEM TV, Channel 10 for the past 50 years will be returned to the federal government, and DT will become the conduit for all WGEM television programming.



The WGEM News Line truck sets for the live coverage of the Hannibal bridge dedication in 2002.



Jenny Dean on the set of WGEN News at Ten.

In September 2000, WGEN News broadcast the opening of another new vital transportation link for the area—the new Mark Twain bridge on Interstate 22 in Hannibal. WGEN TV cameras provided a dramatic perspective several months later when the abandoned Route 36 was imploded and fell into the Mississippi River.

Tri-State Crossroads, a regular news feature delivered by Ron Brown, began in 2000 and built on WGEN's recurring homage to area history. The series was honored with a number of broadcasting awards and featured unique stories of personalities from the viewing area—stories like Cliff Edwards of Hannibal, aka "Ukelele Ike" (the voice of Walt Disney's Jiminy Cricket); "Miss Ella" of Gorin, Missouri (the world's tallest woman); bootlegger Kelly Wagle of Maconly; and one-time Hannibal janitor and future music legend Scott Joplin.

WGEN TV added another platform to reach TV viewers in January 2001 when it took on sales and marketing responsibility for WEWB, the local WB station. The network targets its prime-time programming to the 18-to-34 year-old audience and is seen in close to 50,000 cable television households in the WGEN TV viewing area.



(Clockwise from upper left) *Passions*, antipathies, insecurity, and psychosis. A typical and very atypical relationship for Debra Messing (left) and Eric McCormack (right) in the hit *Will & Grace*.

Saturday Night Live was alive and well in 2003 (left to right) Colin Quain, Tira Fey, and Jimmy Fallon; "Carl Sagan meets the Marx Brothers" in *3rd Rock from the Sun*, starring (left to right) Kristen Johnston, John Lithgow, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, and French Stewart. No conflation, no parting gift. Anne Robinson was the cosmic host of the short lived sensation *The Weakest Link*. The cast of the critically acclaimed *The West Wing* (top row left to right) Rob Lowe, Martin Sheen, Allison Janney, Richard Schiff, and Duke Hof. (seated left to right) Stokara Channing, John Spencer, and Bradley Whitford.

Shawn Dickerman

Shawn Dickerman was born in Quincy, Illinois and attended Unity High School in Mendon. He graduated from Quincy University with a degree in communications. He began his career at WGEN as a studio assistant while attending college and was assigned to full-time duty as a commercial producer upon graduation.

He was named WGEN TV production manager in 1998 and was given responsibility for programming on WGEN TV and CGEM TV in 2000. He has served as producer and director for televised sports events, the Arthritis Telethon, *The Jerry Lewis Telethon*, *Tri States' Most Wanted*, and *Quincy University Academic Challenge*.

Dickerman was chairman of the Adams-Brown Cooperative Extension Council and was a president of the Great River Barbershop Chorus. He serves on the United Way communications committee and Quincy Regional Crime Stoppers.



Chris Brennemann

Christina Brennemann was born in Hull, Illinois and attended West Pike High School. She graduated from Pensacola Christian College and received a master's degree in communications from the University of West Florida.

She directed the broadcast department at Pensacola Christian College for five years before joining WGEN TV as a producer in 1995. She became promotion

assistant in 1998 and was named promotion manager for WGEN AM FM TV CGEM and WEWB in 1999.

She has expanded station promotional activities to include event and cause-related marketing as well as traditional broadcast promotion and advertising.

Brennemann serves on the Salvation Army public relations committee, the American Cancer Society Relay for Life, the Marion-Ralls County Chapter of the American Heart Association, the MS Walk, and the March of Dimes Walk America.



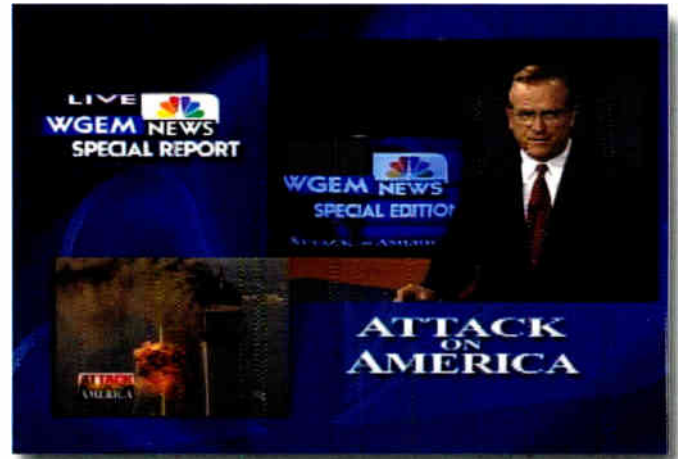
“An act of war, nothing less than that”

On the morning of September 11, 2001, managing editor Marc Magliari returned to the WGEM newsroom after his regular radio newscast. At about 7:54 A.M., he looked up at a newsroom monitor showing an MSNBC report that a plane had struck the side of the World Trade Center in New York City. He quickly returned to the studio and broadcast the information on radio.

Within seconds, WGEM Radio’s Beau Hicks switched over to MSNBC audio. A few minutes later, NBC’s Lester Holt announced that a second plane had hit the twin towers. Soon, *Today* switched to the NBC News feed, and the tragedy and panic of the attack on 9/11 began to unfold. Within an hour, NBC’s Jim Miklaszewski was on the air from his desk in the Pentagon press room reporting a tremendous vibration in the building followed in minutes by the grim news that a third plane had slammed into the side Pentagon in Washington D.C.

WGEM TV and radio suspended normal operations, staying with the broadcast for several days as national leaders and American citizens began to recover from the shock. Television was called upon to hold the region and nation together in a time of terrible crisis. Once again, it was up to the challenge.

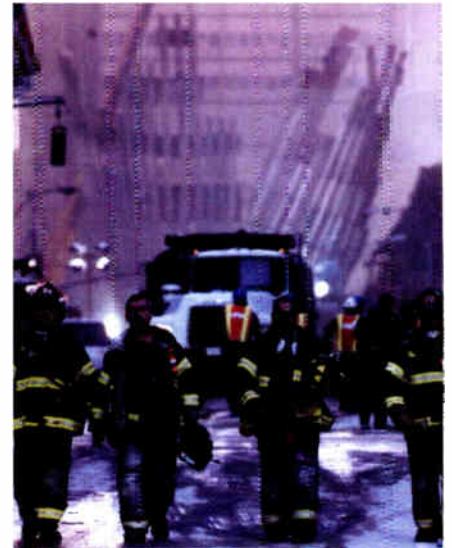
During the crisis, WGEM called upon all of its resources to provide continuous information on the attack on the United States. WGEM News brought a local perspective to the new reality of the post-September-11th world.



Les Sachs hosts a hastily prepared edition of local reaction to the September 11th attack before rejoining around-the-clock network coverage.



Smoke billows for over an hour before the twin towers of the World Trade Center collapse in front of stunned viewers.









"The people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon." President Bush at ground zero on September 14, 2001.

“Whig Link”

In 2001, the broadcast company that had its roots in FM Radio as “The Voice of The Quincy Herald-Whig” and the station that delivered its midday news for many years from *The Herald-Whig* newsroom came full circle. Whig Link, a microwave path between the newspaper’s headquarters to the WGEM studios, provides deeper insight to the daily news stories from *The Herald-Whig* editors and reporters. The added resource enables both the broadcast platforms and the newspaper to provide better coverage with a wider perspective to viewers, listeners, and readers.

The exchange is particularly useful with political and election coverage. During the 2002 election, the WGEM stations provided over 300 hours of coverage (often in long-form discussion programs) to political candidates at the federal, state, and local levels.

“Your Home, Your World”

Local news-gathering synergies were further strengthened when WGEM FM Radio changed to an all-news format in June 2002. The combined availability of WGEM TV, WGEM AM, WGEM News Radio 105, and CGEM TV has opened new pathways for the delivery of local news. The multiplatform delivery of WGEM News is designed for the convenience of a diverse and active audience. Its value was demonstrated once again during the extended coverage of the second Persian Gulf War and by WGEM’s response to the devastating tornados that ravaged the area in 2003.



(Left) A WGEM sponsored debate with Missouri Senate candidates Democrat Sam Berkowitz (left) and Republican John Cauthorn (right) at Culver-Stockton College in 2002. (Right) Missouri Ninth District candidates for the U.S. House, Republican Kenny Hulshof (left), and Democrat Steve Carroll in a live WGEM debate at Hannibal-LaGrange College in 2000.

Chief Engineers

In 50 years, WGEM has had only three chief engineers. A broadcast engineer is responsible for the installation, maintenance, and integration of all broadcast systems including studios, master control and transmitters. The task is more complicated at WGEM because systems cover TV and AM and FM radio. Chief engineers can be called out at any time of the day or night, often under emergency circumstances, to keep the television station on the air.

Frank Laughlin was chief engineer from 1953 until 1968 and took the station from sign-on through the transition to color.

James P. Martens, a graduate of Central Technical Institute in Kansas City, directed the WGEM plant from 1968 until 1996 and supervised the technical renovation of the entire WGEM facility from 1969-72, the integration of ENG and remote broadcast systems, and the conversion to satellite delivery.



H. Jay Sade

H. Jay Sade served WGEM TV longer than any other employee, starting at the station in early 1954. He attended the University of Kansas and graduated from Central Technical Institute. Sade has also been active in community affairs with the Quincy Jaycees, Evening Lions Club, Masonic Temple, DeMolay, and Quincy Shrine Club. He is a director of the Illinois Scottish Rite fund.

The WGEM chief engineers have guided the renovation of 10 different transmission plants and close to 40 different master control configurations in the past 50 years.



Frank Laughlin (left) and Jim Martens (right) back stage at the Cerebral Palsy Telethon in 1959.



The QNI Broadcast Group Operations Center showcase Studio H and the renovation of the WGEM campus are great additions to Quincy's central business district.

“A showcase on Hampshire”

In its anniversary year, WGEM TV moved back to the curbstone in a new state-of-the-art showcase studio at the corner of Fifth and Hampshire Street in Quincy. Studio H is home to *WGEM News at Sunrise*, a program that is now seen and heard weekdays from 6:00–9:00 A.M. on WGEM TV, WGEM FM Radio, and CGEM TV.

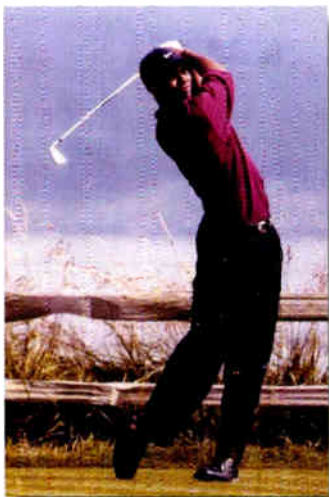
Studio H is located in the new QNI Broadcast Group Operations Center. This building houses centralized traffic and billing for a growing family of local television stations now owned and operated by Quincy Newspapers, Inc., including WREX TV, Rockford, Illinois; KTIV TV, Sioux City, Iowa; KTTC TV, Rochester, Minnesota; WSJV TV, South Bend-Elkhart, Indiana; WVVA TV, Bluefield, West Virginia; WKOW TV, Madison, Wisconsin; WAOW TV, Wausau, Wisconsin; WYOW TV, Eagle River, Wisconsin; WXOW TV, La Crosse, Wisconsin; and WQOW, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

The Operations Center building project preserved a historic 1871 building on the corner of the downtown square and restored it as a modern, efficient office space. The Operations

Center, along with new improvements to the entire WGEM campus, is a significant commitment to the vitality of Quincy's central business district.

Commitment has been the hallmark of WGEM from the start—a commitment to be the first choice of viewers and advertisers, providing high-quality programming to engage, entertain, and inform; to be responsive to the Tri-State community with proactive assistance and accountable action; to be an important catalyst for the economic, social, and cultural development of the region; and to be a successful business providing prosperity to our community, shareholders, employees, and families.

WGEM is rooted as a family business. This is apparent not only in the steady guidance and leadership of generations of the owning families, but also in the scores of brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews, who have formed the work force for this endeavor over the past 50 years. Behind everything they do is an intense love for the mission and their colleagues. They have a keen understanding that local television is an important commercial enterprise and can also be an instrument for great good.



(Left to right) The U.S. Open and the Ryder Cup headline golf on NBC and WGEM TV; Thoroughbred racing also returned with the Triple Crown and the Breeder's Cup; NASCAR came to WGEM TV and CGEM in 2001.



WGEM News This Week tackles the major issues affecting the area. Marc Magliari hosted the show from 1999 until 2003.



Beau Hicks delivers the morning weather on WGEM News at Sunrise before hosting the radio edition of the show on WGEM News Radio 105.



Chris Broughton joined WGEM News as sports anchor in 2001.



Rich Can assumed responsibility for weather forecasts on Live at Five, WGEM News at Six, and WGEM News at Ten in October 2001.



(left to right) Cary McCloskey, Shan Whiston, and Les Sachs present *WGEM News at Six* from the Macomb Balloon Rally in 2001.



Shan Whiston and Les Sachs get an update from Rich Cain on the Salvation Army Bucket Blitz, which is sponsored by WGEM.



Beau Hicks (left) and Shan Whiston (right) co-host the twenty-first century version of *Noon* each weekday.



The annual Easter telecast from the Salem Church in Quincy is part of WGEM TV's continuing commitment to religious programming.



Lathay Pegues was a producer for WGEM News before becoming a reporter and co-anchor of *WGEM News Weekend Edition*.



WGEM TV has provided exclusive live coverage of Quincy's annual Dogwood Festival Parade since 1975.



Rich Cain (right) and parade volunteer Cathy Early (left) co-host live TV coverage of the Macomb Heritage Days Parade in 2003.

Some critics and sociologists wonder what TV is doing to us. However, there is much less written and said about what free over-the-air local television is doing for us. The people of the Tri-State area have an intense, personal, and sometimes emotional relationship with their local station.

Because the medium has been so pervasive in our lives, it is a tempting target for anyone looking to identify a cause for the problems of modern society. Does TV homogenize thought? Does it exhort us to violence? Is it a mouthpiece for local government or a cynical critic of public service? TV evokes endless questions.

There is no doubt that the availability of free over-the-air television in the Tri-State region has had a profound effect on regional development. WGEM TV is a vital source of information and serves with distinction in times of emergency.

The station is a highly effective means of communication between area businesses and customers, and serves as a vehicle for the promotion of philanthropic and charitable causes. It provides insight into problems and needs, and creates a forum for the discussion of important social issues. It serves democracy by acting as a pipeline for open political discussion, debate, and voter education.



Descendants of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints re-enact their 1839 flight across Mississippi River to a winter sanctuary in Quincy during a live broadcast in 2002.



The 126th Maintenance Company of the Illinois Army National Guard based in Quincy was activated for Operation Enduring Freedom. WGEM organized the deployment ceremony for the troops and their families at the QU Pepsi Arena.

In granting the license in 1953, the Federal Communications Commissions directed WGEM TV to serve the “public interest, convenience, and necessity.” The station’s founders, owners, managers, and employees never needed the mandate.

Responsible individual and corporate citizenship has led them to continuous involvement in community affairs and leadership assistance to scores of civic projects and organizations.

In its first 50 years, WGEM TV has recorded living history and livened up routine days. Sports fans had the best seats in the house. Comedy, variety, and drama shows provided entertainment. For the first time in history, the people of the Tri-States had immediate access to the world, and, on occasion, the depths of space. The previously isolated privileged and the equally isolated poor met each other daily on WGEM TV.

Like a slowly turning mirrored ball in a dance hall, the station reflects every corner of the region and every individual who watches. It reflects our joys and sorrow, our needs and hopes, and those of the world beyond, making us more visible to ourselves. It is a cohesive force that allows for a mutual and simultaneous experience—something that has become rare in an increasingly fragmented world.

It is too easy to speak of the shortcomings of TV. It is, after all, a commercial venture and an instrument of mass culture. There are so many different kinds of people to consider, and balancing diverse interests is a continuing challenge as generations change and viewers become more sophisticated. The end result of the work is never perfect and not all needs can be fully satisfied. In order to entertain and inform, an audience must first be engaged. Programming changes must be made to meet changing times and tastes. Local news programs must earn trust everyday. WGEM TV is always a work in progress.

From the start, the people who built and sustained WGEM safeguarded its history, understanding that the past is pointless unless it serves as a beacon today and tomorrow. Local television in the Tri-State area was founded on the principle of community service. As long as WGEM stays true to its reason for being, it will continue to thrive as a regional asset in the years to come.



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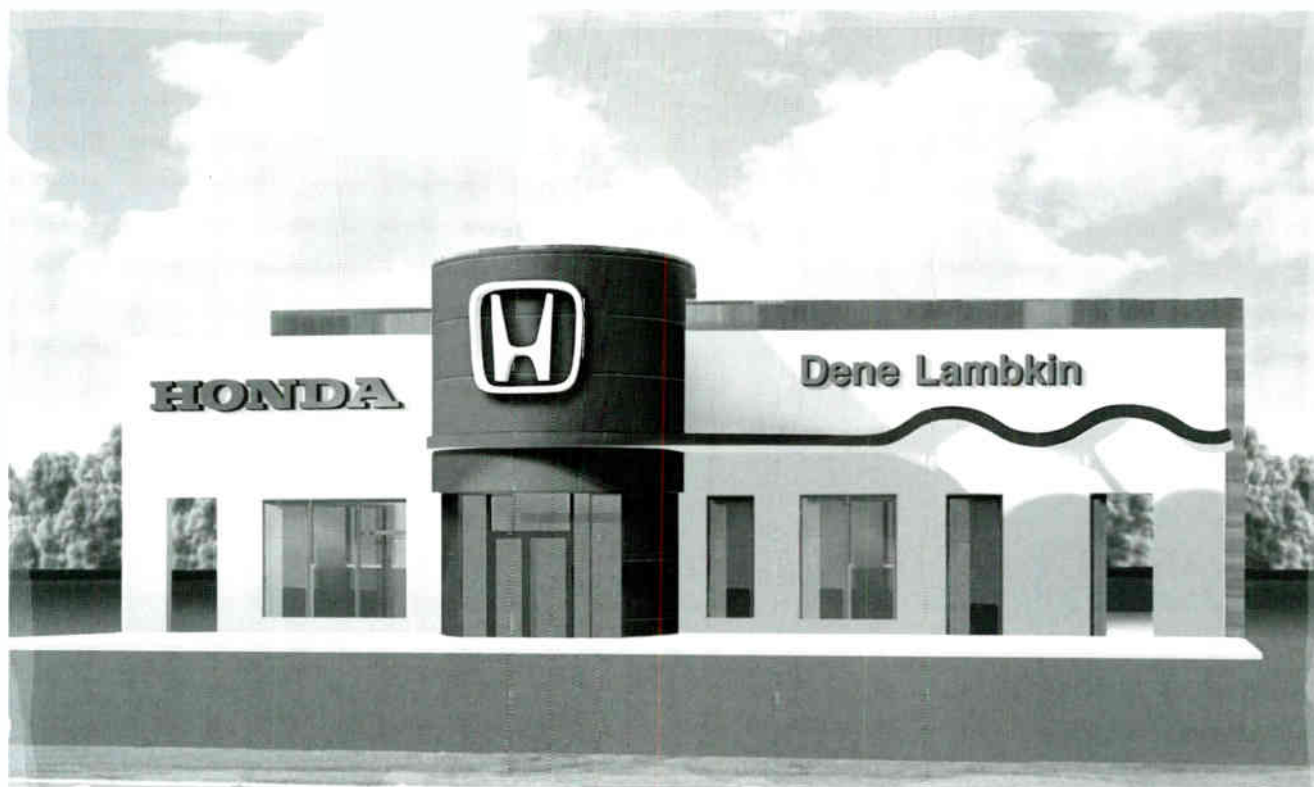
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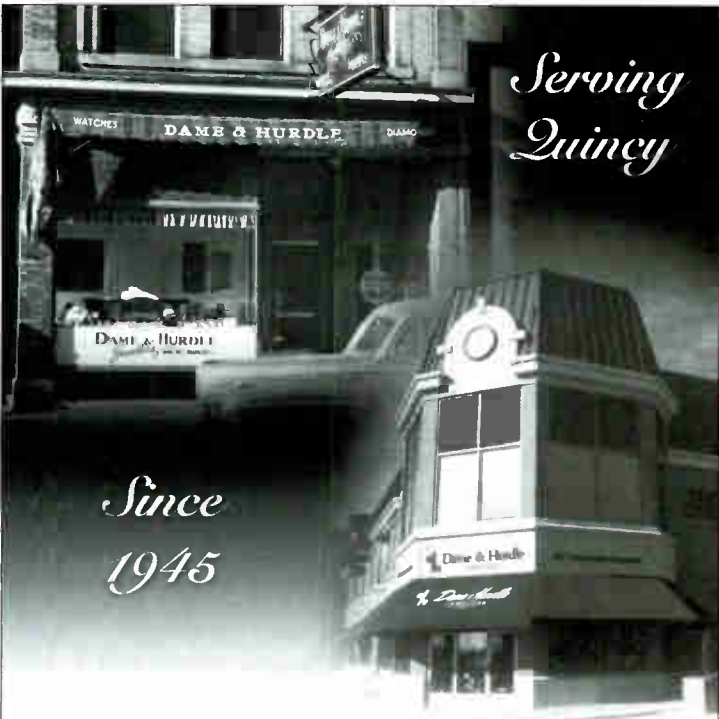


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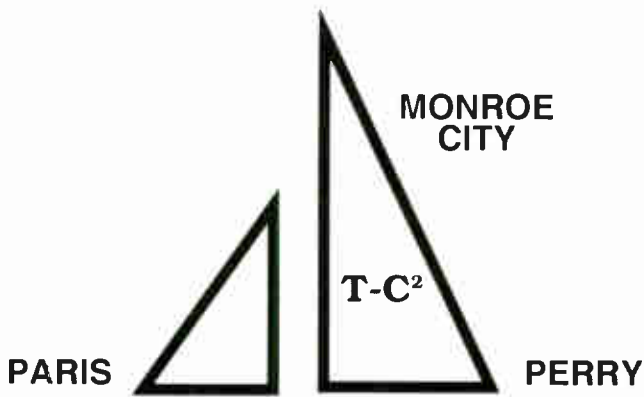
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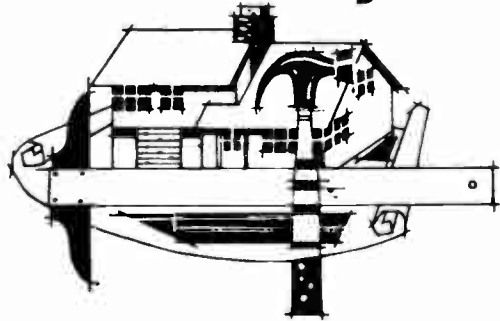
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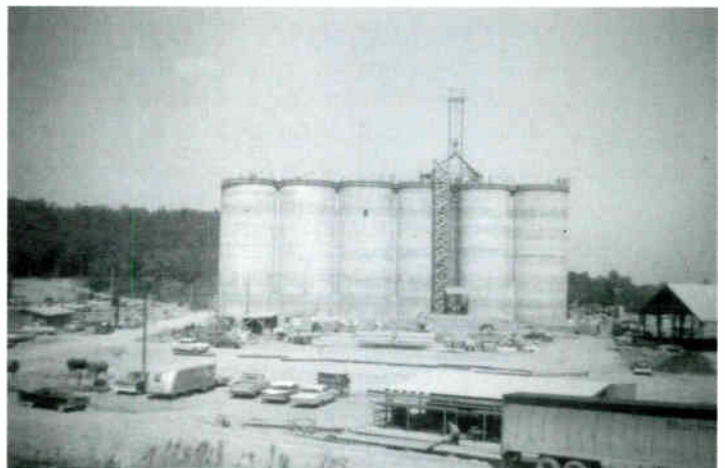
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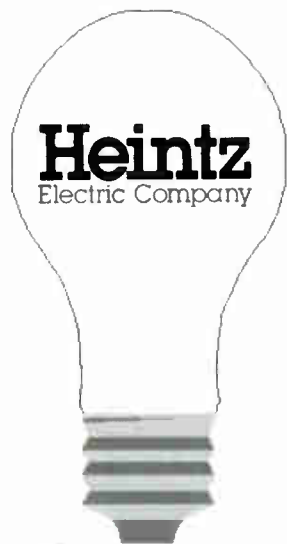
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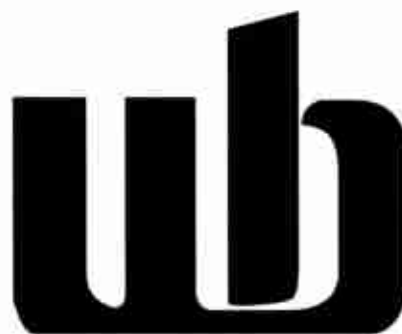
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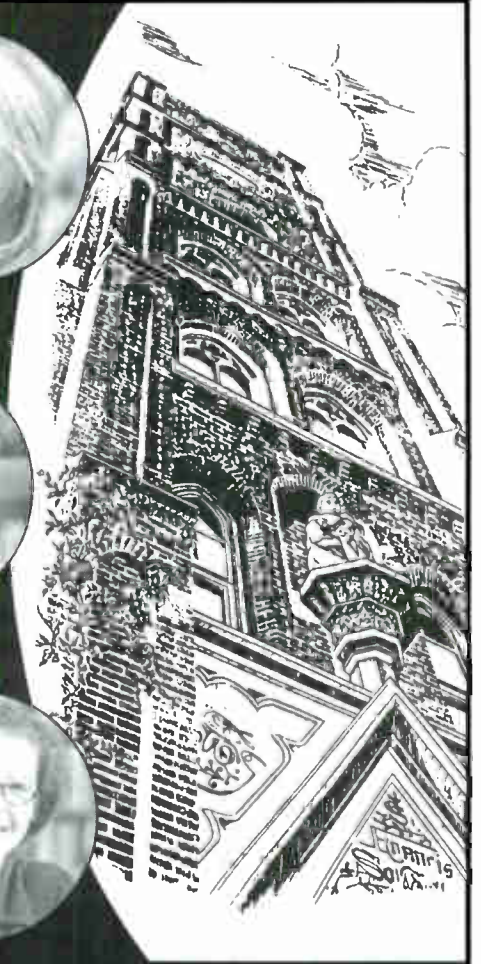
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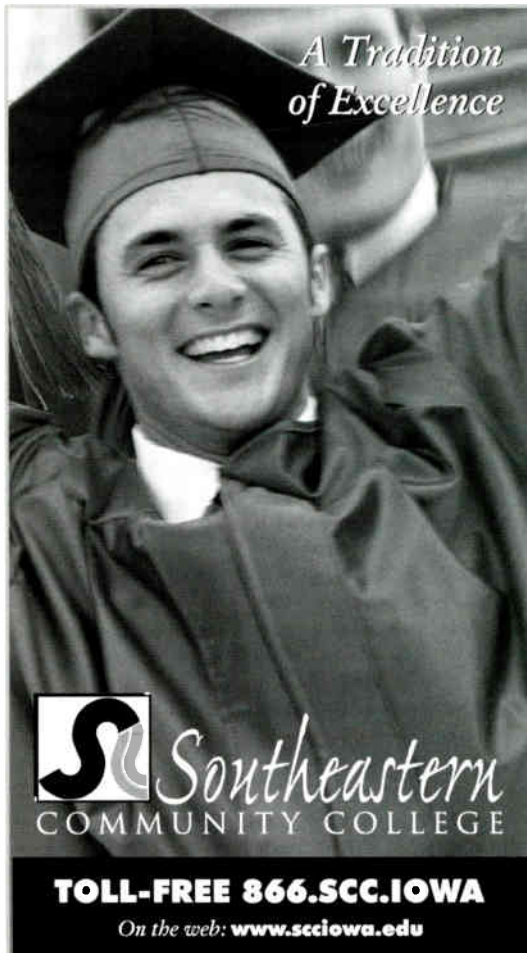
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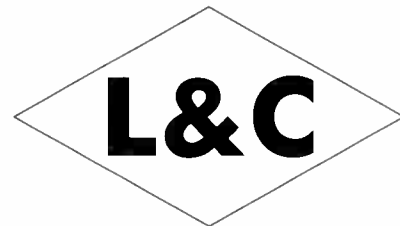


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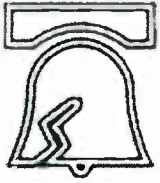
Wishing WGEM the best for
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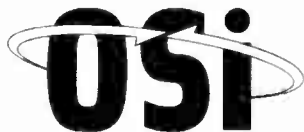
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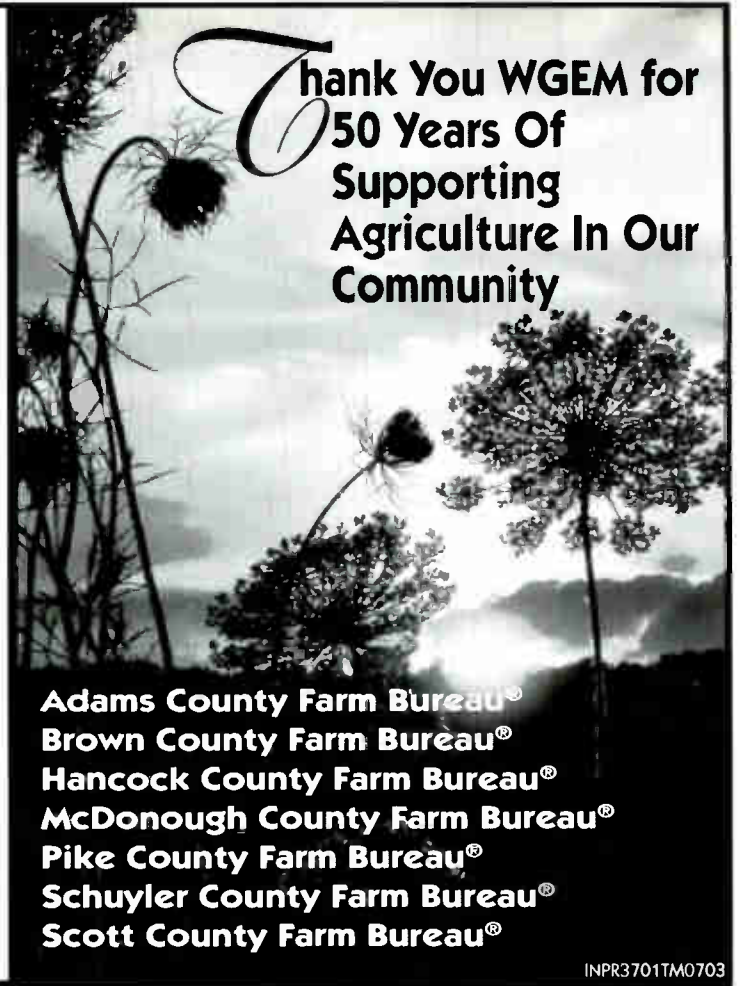
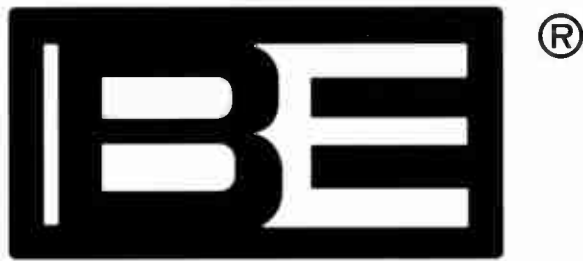


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1903

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2003



1903: First patients are received at Levering Hospital's original 26 bed facility



1915: First patients are received at St. Elizabeth's original 35 bed facility



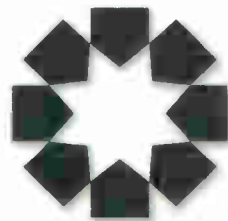
1954: St. Elizabeth's groundbreaking for new addition more than doubles the hospital's size



1960: Final Levering large addition and renovation completed making it a 150 patient hospital



1993: Hannibal Regional Hospital, the consolidation of Levering & St. Elizabeth's hospitals, moves from Virginia Street to newly constructed building on U.S. 36, two miles west of Hannibal



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looking toward a bright future!

