How Broadcasters Are Dealing With Continuing Shortages In Both Parts And Personnel – p. 5
President’s Message

Paul Schulins, BTS President

As I write this message in mid-December of 2022, I am excited, honored, and humbled to begin my term as president of the BTS on Jan. 1, 2023. Our newly appointed ExCom officers and members have already met and have identified initial goals and formed a vision for the new year. The ExCom plans to meet in person in February to spend two days forming new specific strategies and goals, and I want to thank them all for their enthusiasm and dedication to the cause of moving our society forward. I also want to express appreciation to our immediate past president, Ralph Hogan, for his steady hand in guiding us through some very difficult times during the last four years. Ralph has also been a great friend and mentor bringing me up to speed on so many important issues we have had to address, and some that we are going to be facing as we transition to a new ExCom team and welcome newly elected AdCom members. I also want to thank our newsletter editor-in-chief, James O’Neal, for his continuing work on this publication after more than a decade of service. I view O’Neal, for his continuing work on this publication after more than a decade of service. I view O’Neal, for his continuing work on this publication after more than a decade of service. I view O’Neal, for his continuing work on this publication after more than a decade of service. I view O’Neal, for his continuing work on this publication after more than a decade of service. I view O’Neal, for his continuing work on this publication after more than a decade of service. O’Neal, for his continuing work on this publication after more than a decade of service. O’Neal, for his continuing work on this publication after more than a decade of service. O’Neal, for his continuing work on this publication after more than a decade of service. O’Neal, for his continuing work on this publication after more than a decade of service. 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So, as we begin a brand-new year, I am full of optimism. The worst of the pandemic is hopefully in the rear-view mirror, and travel is starting to happen again. People are craving face-to-face meetings, because even though we have found that virtual meetings can be surprisingly effective (and can save a lot of money), there is another component to human interaction that is missing, and that is the realization that face-to-face meetings cannot be replaced entirely by Zoom meetings. A very healthy attendance for April’s NAB Show in Las Vegas, and the IBC in Amsterdam this past fall is clear evidence of that point. It is on that theme that I hope to bring back travel gradually, and responsibly, including some in-person AdCom meetings, distinguished lecturer presentations, and signature conferences.

We are also striving to bring in more revenue opportunities to limit our exposure to just a few traditional sources that have been demonstrated to fluctuate wildly due to unpredictable world events. Therefore, if our Society is to grow, we need to think outside the traditional box, and consider some new ideas, such as expanded services for our members, new conferences, and possibly forging new partnerships with allied organizations. All these ideas are on the table for 2023!

Broadcasting is changing dramatically with technology innovations, and at a more rapid pace than ever before. The increased data capacity of new TV standards such as ATSC 3.0 create huge new business opportunities. This is a great example of how our Society can and will participate to help provide more options for TV stations to thrive as they come on board with ATSC 3.0. Likewise, radio stations are facing new challenges every day. AM receivers are no longer always standard in new electric vehicles, and HD Radio in North America is facing new opportunities for higher power authorizations and expanded listener interactions. All BTS members can and should be a part of these important advancements.

We are a worldwide society and our representation in Regions 8, 9, and 10 today are under-represented. In 2023 we will seek to increase our chapter development across the

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From The Editor

The Continuing Importance Of The Broadcaster

By James E. O’Neal, Editor-in-Chief, BTS Life Member

We’ve just begun the new year as I write this, and typically this is a time for thinking about changing one’s habits, with resolutions to do better in the next 12 months, and planning out activities and things to be accomplished as we move along in our planet’s next trip around the sun. It’s also a time to reflect on the past. In this latter category, one big item comes to mind, the importance of the broadcaster in society.

Perhaps some of you may remember a “magazine” type of program that aired on the NBC radio network for nearly 20 years (mid-1955 to early 1975). “Monitor” as it was dubbed, had the distinction of being the world’s longest program, as it ran throughout weekends, offering in its original format some 32 hours of news, information and features spread over two days. It was created in an attempt to bring back some of the audience that radio had begun to lose to television in the 1950s, and did a very good job in attracting and retaining listeners due to its content. Most of “Monitor” was live, originating from the network’s New York headquarters, but it incorporated feeds from all over the world. During its run, this unusual program featured some of the world’s top celebrities, statesmen, newsmen, and interesting people. In December, “Monitor” always produced its share of Christmas-based features and stories, with one of them coming to mind in particular.

This was an explanation to a seven-year-old son of one of the NBC employees about “why Daddy won’t be home on Christmas Eve like other daddies.” As related by the Monitor host, NBC newsmen Frank McGee, in that Dec. 24, 1961 broadcast, the small boy was perturbed by his father’s continuing absence on such occasions. The father points to the family’s Christmas tree with its lights shining and explains to his son that this wouldn’t be possible without all of the hundreds of men and women who keep the electrical power plants going round the clock, and proceeds to enumerate a number of other professions such as health care, transportation, law enforcement, the military, fire departments, food preparation and distribution, and broadcasting, which all have to operate on a continuous basis. In closing the story, McGee notes:

“You know you never would have heard all this if it were not for the engineers, the producers, the announcers and writers, and the newsmen here at Monitor, and along the line in our NBC radio affiliates, so a special Merry Christmas to everyone who has to work on Christmas Eve and a very special Merry Christmas to all of you whose daddies and mommies are out working now to keep things going.”

I’m sure that a lot of us can relate to working Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and on other occasions when the vast majority of others were at home with their families. This was a sacrifice that we made so that people at home and on the road had access to news and weather information, as well as entertainment to keep them occupied and to perhaps show off a new television or radio set that received or given on the occasion. I know that I’ve certainly spent my share of
Christmas Eves and Christmas Days in control rooms and at transmitter sites so that this sort of “universal giving” (broadcasting) could be possible.

This particular Christmas Eve 1961 Monitor excerpt is interesting in other ways too, as it features an interview with retired NBC newsman H. V. (Hans von) Kaltenborn, a German-American, who was one of broadcasting’s earliest voices, first appearing behind the mic in 1921. In the interview, Kaltenborn relates what Christmases were like during his childhood in the 1880s in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He notes that there was no television, no radio, and not even the phonograph, so people had to create their own entertainment. What a different world indeed! Also included in the feature are Christmas greetings from NBC correspondents from a number of world capitals—including Paris, Buenos Aires, Moscow, Rome, and Tokyo. In listening to these greetings, one can’t help but notice that several are being conveyed via HF radio links, not the crystal-clear global fiber and satellite communications circuits to which we’ve all become accustomed.

Indeed, a lot has changed in broadcasting over the past 60 years or so!

This “Monitor” program excerpt—along with other “Monitor” samples—is available online (http://monitorbeacon.net/nbc-monitor/the-sounds-of-nbc-monitor/) and is certainly worth the time spent in listening. There’s a bit of trivia associated with the show that I find interesting also—the particular bit of “electronic music” that was used to go in and out of station breaks. These very unusual, and somewhat pleasing, musical bridges or fillers were certainly memorable to all hearing them for the first time, and as a youngster growing up with Monitor, I often wondered how they were created. The referenced website explains this also. To create something new and attention getting, NBC engineers turned to the telephone company and the special tones used for switching long distance circuits (the precursor to the DTMF (dual-tone multi-frequency) tones used for “TouchTone” telephone dialing. These telco tones were filtered, manipulated in frequency, and overlaid, along with a single-tone oscillator and someone sending the Morse code letter “M” for Monitor. (As an historical note, the origin of a popular Christmastime poem or a look into what was going on in the world on a particular date a few decades earlier); however, there’s a lot that I don’t really miss in terms of the technology that was at the disposal of the broadcasters then. NBC’s “Monitor” (and all such radio and television network programs) were distributed to affiliates via AT&T Long Lines terrestrial circuits. While the quality was usually very good, audio was invariably monophonic and the top end was rolled off at very close to 5 kHz. On the video side of things, the telco circuits could accommodate 525-line NTSC images, but that was just about it—no UHD (or even HD) possible. And a lot of the broadcasting infrastructure was driven by vacuum tubes, requiring a lot of preventive maintenance (and replacement expense) to keep the video and audio signals clean and to avoid on-air failures. (And I certainly don’t miss having to seek the assistance of a telephone switchboard operator or operators when placing calls outside of my immediate calling area (a “long distance” call), or the high prices associated with such calls, requiring one to constantly keep an eye on the clock to avoid some big bills at the end of the month or, in some cases, a reminder from the operator that “your three minutes are up, sir!”

We certainly are living in some wonderful (and interesting) times!

The Continuing Ascent Of ATSC 3.0 Television

Some of this wonderful technology around us involves ATSC 3.0 television or “NextGen TV” as it’s been branded. It seems now that almost every week (or even more often), I see a story in the online trade publications about 3.0 going on the air in yet another U.S. market. As 2022 came to a close, it was available in nearly 70 markets, with signals available to half or more of the country’s viewing homes. The availability of receivers capable of taking advantage of ATSC 3.0 continues to increase too, with some 70 models available from several manufacturers. Prices of these sets are starting to drop too, with entry-level models beginning at $500 or so.

I’ve been an adopter for more than half a year now that the service has been available in the Washington, D.C. market area where I reside, and even without yet being able to take advantage of all the things the new DTV transmission can offer (limited at present by lack of broadcast spectrum and the necessity for one broadcaster to host the NextGen TV signals from the rest), I certainly do appreciate what I’ve experienced so far, especially out at my country home about 45-50 miles (72-80 km) from the D.C. transmitter sites. ATSC 3.0 is able to consistently deliver a good signal, something that 1.0 failed at, especially in times of heavy precipitation or even moderately high winds.

I’ve noticed recently too, the reappearance of on-air announcements (at least here in the D.C. market) touting NextGen TV and what it means for the viewer. In the words of the owner of a small broadcast group that I worked for many years ago, “if you want to sell ‘em, you’ve got to tell ‘em.” This certainly applies to NextGen TV and the continuing need to make to public aware of what it’s all about. I continue to talk up 3.0 to anyone who will listen, and hope that you’re doing the same. (I’d really like to see the FCC draw a line in the sand for sunsetting ATSC 1.0, just as they did for analog TV, so that we can get past this “channel sharing” and roll out the service with all of its bells and whistles fully operable.

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