Vision keeps Williams at cable television forefront

By DEBRA BECK
ALUMNEWS Editor

Carl Williams (JD '56) wasn't looking for greatness in cable TV when a friend asked him to help negotiate a community antenna television system purchase, but that's what he found.

As Williams researched the issue for this client over several months, he began to catch a glimpse of great things to come in the industry. The deal fell through, but the 1995-distinguished alumnus discovered his professional calling.

"That ignited my imagination: about a very dynamic business," Williams explains. The Douglas, Wyo., native was so taken by the possibilities that he closed his Casper law office and moved to Denver, where he co-founded Televents, Inc., and a cable television brokerage firm. After about five years of buying, selling and managing systems, Williams decided he wanted to run one of his own.

"We were always selling out," he says of the brokerage business. "I wanted to get something and hold it."

Williams purchased a small group of cable systems in Colorado and the San Francisco Bay area, and he acquired franchises in Gillette and Lufkin. By the time he sold his company nearly 30 years later, it had expanded into a provincial empire with franchises in four states (He added systems in southern California and Florida along the way.).

In many respects, the growth Gillette experienced exemplifies the dynamic nature of early cable television. When Williams purchased that franchise in 1962, he anticipated no more than 800 subscribers in the sleepy northeast Wyoming town. What he didn't predict at the time was a national energy crisis that created high demand for the area's coal and oil reserves. Suddenly, Campbell County was booming and its new residents chomped for cable as a link to the outside world.

Gillette was a somewhat unique case, particularly in the type of clientele it produced for Williams' firm.

"I had the largest rolling cable television system in the United States — most of them were mobile homes and trailers," he says with a chuckle.

Changing Communication

Cable technology has been a boon to isolated rural areas like Campbell County, but it has had a significant influence on broadcast nationwide.

"I think it's been a profound influence, and I think it's going to become even more profound," Williams says, noting that as many as 500 channels could soon become available to the consumer via improved fiber optic technology. It's mind-boggling, especially for a man who can remember the days when five channels seemed outrageous.

"Five hundred takes my breath away," he says.

But it's possible. When Williams sold his company 6 1/2 years ago, no one could figure out how to make the fiber optics for such a system work economically. Since that time, the techniques to splice fiber have been developed, and the cost of the fiber itself has decreased considerably. Suddenly, it's a whole new world technologically.

Williams acknowledges that the average consumer can't take full advantage of what's about to become available via cable. He compares it to a library, filled with books. An individual won't watch every channel every day; but they're all there, like a library stack, ready when they're needed.

He is especially proud of the cable industry for providing C-SPAN, a channel that provides live and tape-delay broadcasts of sessions by both houses of Congress, committee hearings and other public affairs programming. Williams says this service, funded solely by the cable industry, brings government back to the people, encouraging them with the sense that the political process truly is accessible.

'Seeing Around Corners'

Though he only practiced law for 11 months, Williams finds tremendous value in the education he received on his way to a JD degree.

Williams originally entered UW as an undergraduate business major, but his interests turned to statistics, and he transferred to the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill to earn his BA degree (1950).

The Korean War broke out about the time Williams graduated, so he returned home and joined the Wyoming Air National Guard, where he flew Mustang and jet fighters until 1959. About midway through his military service, Williams realized that he was "inadequately educated" and needed to consider other career options. Law school was his choice, and he enrolled at UW after ending his active military service. The experience shaped the rest of his life.

"It was the making of me," Williams says of his law school experience. "It was the University of Wyoming Law School that really took my mettle and hammered it into something that had a point to it."

"It taught me to read, to think and to analyze," he adds.

Law school also helped him develop the ability to recognize potential problems before they arise, a skill that was critical to his professional success over the years.

"I always say going to law school helps you to see around corners," he notes.

Williams credits a law faculty that included such notable names as George Rudolph, Hal Blumthall and Frank Trelise as a significant influence on his life. They were "giants," real people of national stature, he says.

A longtime supporter — financial and otherwise — of the UW College of Law, Williams cites gratitude for his experiences there as a significant motivation.

(He is a major contributor to the Law Library addition, initial contributor to the Law Dean's Faculty Research Fund and a contributor to the Law School Centennial Distinguished Professor Fund. Williams was on the UW Foundation Board of Directors from 1987-91, and he served as president in his final year.)

Politic 'In the Blood'

Williams traces his interest in political activity to around age 14, when he accompanied his father to a rally at the Natural Bridge near Douglas. Milward Simpson, who went on to serve as Wyoming's governor and U.S. senator, spoke at that rally and made an impression on young Carl.

"I had no idea what he was talking..." (Continued on page 24)
Alum on LHJ editorial staff

By TOBY F. MARLATT
UW Journalism Student

It's a long way from Wyoming's Gas Hills to the publishing world of New York City, but former University of Wyoming student Charlene Johnson has made the jump with relative ease.

A native of Sheridan, Wyo., Johnson put herself through college and graduated in May 1990 with a bachelor's degree in English. It wasn't long before she was pounding the pavement of the concrete jungle, scanning the New York Times classifieds for her first job. "I sold everything I owned and took a chance and moved," she says. "New York is really the best place to be if you want to write for a national magazine, and that's what I always dreamed of doing."

After searching for a few months, Johnson spotted her first opportunity, an entry-level editorial position at the national periodical, Ladies Home Journal. In less than two years, she moved from the relative anonymity of an assistant-to-the-assistant position to become lifestyles and travel editor, one of the magazine's three associate editors. Her work day is filled with such duties as writing, editing, brainstorming with her staff and reading various article proposals.

"It's exciting and sometimes hard to do this job," Johnson says with enthusiasm. "But I started out in the editorial entry-level position and gradually worked myself up, so it's worth it."

Writing articles for the magazine is one of her most enjoyable tasks. In one issue, for example, Johnson went undercover to report on car repair and to test car repair practices. She is also working on an article about protecting children against violence. "It's nice to see your name in print," Johnson says. "But I've recently received letters on my car-repair article from readers, and that's even better."

As for advancement in the publishing industry, Johnson is satisfied with her position for now. But like others, she wants to keep her options free and her eyes on the horizon. "I do keep my eyes and ears open," Johnson says. "It'll probably always be curious and look."

Carl Williams...

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about, but it sure looked like a lot of fun," Williams says.

Politics is "probably in my blood." His grandfather served in the Wyoming Senate in the early 1900s. Williams worked on Simpson's gubernatorial campaign in 1954.

After law school graduation, he was one of the first attorneys hired by the legislature to write up bills and verify legality of various amendments as they were presented.

When he moved to Colorado, he maintained an active political life. Williams was elected to the Colorado State Senate in November 1968 and served until 1973. He also was Colorado Republican state chairman and a member of the Republican National Committee from 1975-77.

WyO Pride

Despite living in Colorado most of his professional life, Williams makes it clear that he is proud of his Wyoming heritage.

"A native son, he maintains close ties to his family in Douglas. Williams can trace his Converse County roots to his grandfather, who moved there in the mid-1880s. But the other side of the family was already established here," Williams says.

"This feeling that you get in Wyoming is really unique," he says. "It's an interesting feeling saying—like you understand your whole environment."

"You don't live in little cocoons in Wyoming," he adds. "You live with a cross-section of everyone. You know who's down, you know who's doing well, and you know when the tragedies come along."

Williams has two children, daughter Payne and son Mike. He and his wife, Roberta-diane, live in Cherry Hills Village, Colo., with their two Arab horses and a Missouri Foxterrier.

Coalition modifying telescope

An international coalition of 85 scientists and engineers has proposed eliminating the liquid helium bath from the next orbiting infrared telescope, enlarging the telescope and lengthening its life.

"Space is already cold, so why pay money to put liquid helium into orbit?" asks UW astronomer Harley Thronson. "And, in any case, we need more room in the spacecraft to hold a large telescope."

Thronson is one of the four senior writers of the coalition behind the Edison infrared space observatory, recently proposed to the European Space Agency (ESA) for launch in about 2005. Other UW researchers and students are also playing significant roles in the project.

NASA has supported preliminary studies of the project at UW with grants totaling about $100,000 over the past few years. This has allowed university students and faculty to work with space scientists at institutes around the world, including Rutherford Appleton Laboratory and Oxford University in England, the Institut d' Astrophysique Paris; the Royal Observatory in Edinburgh, Scotland; an handful of research groups in Italy.

"Our best students and faculty compete well with colleagues at some of the best research facilities in the world," Thronson says. "Also, I think that some non-U.S. team members are intrigued by a project led in part from an exotic location such as Wyoming. I believe that some team members expect that I will show up in Paris in cowboy hat, boots and duster. Maybe not a bad idea, as dressing for Wyoming weather is good preparation for weather anywhere."

Taking advantage of the extreme low temperatures in space is critical to the revolutionary design of the $800 million Edison satellite, Thronson says. "Everything warmer than absolute zero emits large amounts of infrared (heat) radiation," he explains, "including planets, newborn and dying stars, the sun.

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