

Vision keeps Williams at cable television forefront

By DEBRA BECK
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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 1993 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 Buffalo. By the time he sold his company nearly 30 years later, it had expanded into a profitable 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 clamored 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 broadcasting 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, empowering them with the sense that the political process truly is accessible.

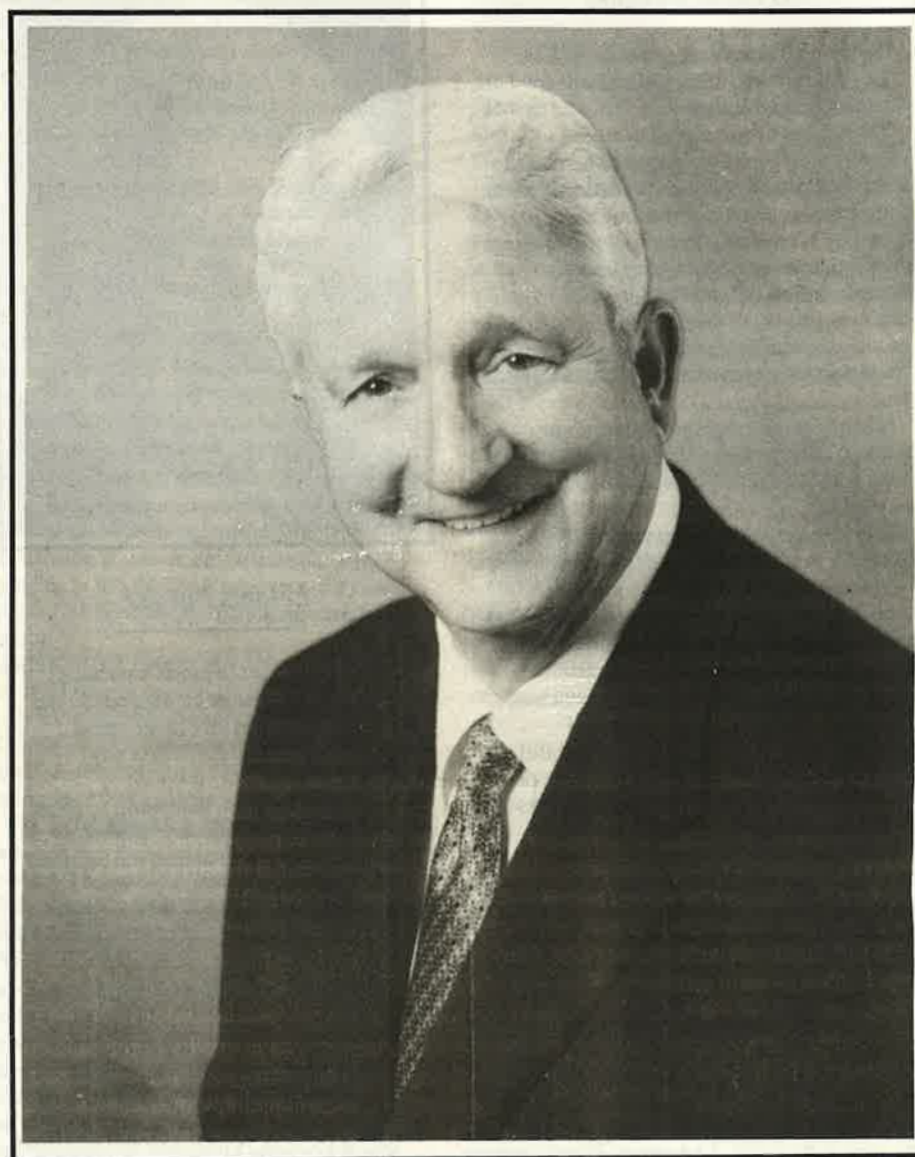
'Seeing Around Corners'

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



Carl Williams

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 Blumenthal and Frank Trelease 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.)

Politics 'In the Blood'

Williams traces his interest in political activity to around age 11, 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

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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 chairperson 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, though it was actually his great-grandfather, in 1852, who first saw the windswept prairie that would become the Williams home.

The entire state is like a giant "hometown" with an atmosphere unlike anywhere else, according to Williams.

"This feeling that you get in Wyoming is really unique," he says. "It's an incredibly satisfying feeling — 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 Foxtrotter.