

Fifth Estater

ARTHUR WILLIAM CARLSON

In a broadcasting world where the only constant seems to be change, Art Carlson has been a model of consistency for over three decades.

In the revolving-door world of radio, he has held essentially the same job for 31 years, first as vice president in charge of radio for Susquehanna Broadcasting and now as president of Susquehanna Radio Corp.

And for 25 years, he has had nearly perfect attendance at Radio Advertising Bureau board of director meetings, providing a steadying influence on an association that has had its share of ups and downs.

"I think of him as one of the real leaders of our industry," says Gary Edens, chairman and CEO of Edens Broadcasting. "He's been one of the real guiding forces of the RAB, and he's also operated stations in markets as small as York and Scranton [both Pennsylvania] and in markets as huge as San Francisco."

Along the way, Carlson has been at the forefront of several major developments in the radio industry, ranging from the evolution and application of radio research to the sudden rise of the Top 40 format.

Like many other broadcasters of his generation, Carlson's love affair with radio began at a young age. As a boy growing up in northern Minnesota in the late 1930s, he amused himself by charting the weekly changes on the Lucky Strike hit parade and scanning the AM dial for far-away signals.

As a college student, he worked summers at WXL(T)AM Ely, Minn., a startup where he did everything from sweeping the floors to calling baseball play-by-play.

Carlson soon abandoned his goal of being a famous play-by-play man, turning instead to radio sales after he graduated from college in 1950. He strayed from radio only once, and only briefly, when he took a job selling time for KEYD-TV St. Paul in 1954. "I learned something then that I think is true today: selling television is boring. It just isn't as much fun or as creative as selling radio."

Carlson owes his return to radio to



one of his early mentors—Stephen Labunsky, now executive director of the International Radio and Television Society, who was running WDGY(AM) in Minneapolis in the mid-1950s. "We were recruiting new salesmen," Labunsky recalls. "And Art Carlson didn't see the ad, didn't hear about it, but walked in and applied for the job. I hired him on the spot."

It was at WDGY, then a cutting-edge Top 40 station owned by Storz Broadcasting, that Carlson established himself as an expert in applying radio research. The industry then relied largely on research known as Hooper ratings, which were not easily converted into statistics that could be used for sales.

"I seemed to be the only one in the Storz company who could average a Hooper [rating]," Carlson says. "So they would send me the Hoopers from Miami, Kansas City, Omaha and New Orleans, and I would average them."

From Storz, Carlson went to the American Broadcasting Network, an ultimately unsuccessful ABC off-

shoot, where he served as a sales and research specialist. Although ABN failed, Carlson's research skills and familiarity with the Top 40 format impressed one of the affiliates: Louis Appell, then running WSBA(AM) York.

So impressed was Appell that he hired Carlson to run WARM(AM) in Wilkes-Barre/Scranton, and Carlson quickly made the station a success. "After 60 days we had a 40 share of the market," he says. "That was a little extreme, but that kind of growth was pretty common in those days if you were the first station in town with Top 40."

Before long, Appell had three stations under the Susquehanna banner, and tapped Carlson in 1961 as vice president in charge of radio—essentially the same job he has today. The group's holdings grew dramatically in the 1960s with the addition of stations in Providence, Long Island and Miami.

At Susquehanna, and at the RAB, Carlson has made his mark as a broadcaster who believes that an aggressive, enterprising sales staff drives a station.

"We honor great sales with probably more enthusiasm than we honor great profit," he says, speaking of Susquehanna. Of his philosophy on radio management in general, he says: "The underlying part, I guess, is to sell the hell out of it."

As for radio's future within the rapidly changing media mix, Carlson re-

mains resolutely optimistic. "No matter what kind of scenario you create, technologically, for the future, it's hard to imagine that, no matter what the form of transmission, there won't be an audio communication system." ■

President, Susquehanna Radio Corp., York, Pa.; b. Nov. 4, 1929, St. Paul, Minn.; BBA, University of Minnesota, 1950; salesman, WMIN(AM), Minneapolis-St. Paul, 1950; salesman, KSTP(AM), St. Paul, 1953; salesman, KEYD-TV St. Paul, 1954; salesman, WDGY(AM) Minneapolis, 1955; station services, ABC, New York, 1957; VP, general manager, WARM(AM) Wilkes-Barre-Scranton, Pa., 1958; VP, general manager, WHLO(AM), Akron/Canton, Ohio, 1960; VP, radio, Susquehanna Broadcasting, York, Pa., 1961; senior VP, radio, Susquehanna Broadcasting, 1978; president, Susquehanna Radio Corp., 1986; m. Linda Laputka, April 2, 1978; children: Kathryn, 23; Robert, 20; Terrence, 24; Jennifer, 21 (from previous marriage); James, 11.