

PUBLISHER'S Profile

BY ERICA FARBER

ron Ruth has done it all. He has worked with some of the true legends in the business and knows practically everyone who is anyone or is going to become someone. He is also one of the industry's great storytellers.

Acting as a sort of ambassador or official greeter for radio, Ruth is the first person one encounters when one joins the Radio Advertising Bureau. And he will be at RAB 2005 in Atlanta this week, in his red jacket, personally welcoming everyone who attends.

Getting into the business: "I was a gofer in high school for the McClendon station in San Antonio, KTSA. I was enthralled by the disc jockeys. Rock 'n' roll was just starting, and it was so exciting. They let me drive one of the mobile news units. I didn't get to report because I had such a terrible Southern accent.

"I worked my way through college as a disc jockey at WTAW/College Station, TX. WTAW stood for 'Watch the Aggies Win' at Texas A&M, but it was owned by a guy out of Waco, TX. I worked two airshifts and sold spots in the middle of the day at a 'dollar a holler.' The most exciting thing that had ever happened to me was when I got my business card that said Account Executive. I went to a business in downtown Bryan, TX and carefully presented my card to the receptionist, who then announced to the boss that Ron Ruth from the accounting department of WTAW was there to see him."

His career journey: "I went to Boston and became a disc jockey. I roomed with Jack Burns and George Carlin, who were also disc jockeys at the station. The three of us shared a small one-bedroom apartment on the seamy side of Beacon Hill. Jack worked mornings, I worked afternoon drive, and Carlin worked 9-midnight, so he slept on the couch or in the alcove, because he was the one who would come in late.

"I soon realized I had no talent for being on-air, so I talked the GM into letting me sort of get into sales. I would call on food brokers and put a bunch of them together to buy spots. I finally became a member of the junior sales staff. Then I went off to protect our country. I was in the Army in Augusta, GA, at Ft Gordon. I was introduced to a guy who owned a station there, and I became a disc jockey at night.

"After that I went back to Boston and continued to sell. I got an opportunity to move to Buffalo to work for Gordon McClendon as a salesman, I became Sales Manager under Gordon at WYSL and then was moved to Chicago to introduce WNUS, the first News station in the country, as Sales Manager and, later, GM. I then moved to New York as National Sales Director for the McClendon stations.

"I got tired of New York and went to work for Robert Eastman, who owned KAFY/Bakersfield. I met Gene Chenault during this time, and he suggested I talk to the fellow running RKO Radio at the time. I did and was hired to move WGMS/Washington, which was a Classical AM & FM, to Rock. About that time our attorneys were meeting with the FCC, and they came back and said, 'I don't think so.' So I had some fun for about 18 months or so.

"Then they moved me to New York to this thing called WOR-FM. It was an amazing rocket ride and going absolutely nuts as the No. 1 FM in the country. I decided to move to Europe. I took my wife at the time and our two young children and packed everything into six boxes and four suitcases and went off to London. We bought a van and struck out.

"Fast-forward 18 months, and I got a call from San Juan Racing. They tracked me down because of my supposed expertise in classical music and wanted me to go to WTMI/Miami, which I agreed to do. I was there about a year, and Storz contacted me to go over to WQAM, which was No. 1 in Miami at the time. I was there about four or five years and then went to Hawaii, where I got into ownership.

"Through Dwight Case I started to work for Transtar in Colorado Springs. Initially, I signed stations to air the product, or at least clear spots for us, and worked with advertisers and agencies. That was a 10-year experience, until the merger with United Stations into Unistar, which is now part of Westwood."

Joining the RAB: "Gary Fries was leaving Unistar to become President of the RAB, and he said, 'Why don't you come with me?' I said, 'Gary, you're out of your mind. There are only two things wrong with the RAB: perception and reality.' That was 13 years ago."

His responsibilities: "We all get involved with a little bit of everything because we are a small organization working for a lot of radio stations. We have 6,000 members and another 3,500 who think we work for them. My basic responsibilities are to get new stations and groups to join and make sure they are serviced, maintained and kept up-to-date on what we have available so they will stay with us."

The value of RAB membership: "I want radio to perceive us as a partner. If things are good, we're good; if things are bad, we'll hang in with you. If somebody is having a tough time,

it's not up to me to hold the line; we're in this together. We serve radio stations. We try to make them smarter, better, faster, quicker, etc. That's our basic mission. Our other mission, of course, is marketing, which has been beefed up dramatically in the last seven to eight months and is going full-tilt now. Those are the only two things we do — or should do."

Biggest challenge: "Probably retention in bad times. Twenty-two percent of our members are in markets 1-50; 64% are in markets 100-plus. So, we have an enormous number of small-market stations, and that's where our biggest attrition comes in a down economy. Even at the bottom tier of our membership dues, it's expensive, but we keep about even or creep ahead over the course of time. We will net add maybe 60 or 70 stations a year, sometimes more.

"It saddens me to lose a station. I will call to make sure it's not a service issue, because if what we're doing isn't working, we've got to fix it, because they are the lifeblood of radio."

What someone will miss by not attending RAB 2005: "It's the only true radio show for sales and marketing people, the only real place to network with other sales and marketing people and to sit in sessions aimed at all size markets and all kinds of formats and all kinds of problems and learn more about NTR and cause marketing.

"We get comments that say, 'I learned more in three days than I've learned in three years.' Attendees are exposed to people from similar-size markets with similar problems. The experience of being able to talk to a salesperson you've never met before and exchanging ideas is worth whatever it costs to get here — and you don't have to wear a red coat!"

State of radio: "I think it's quite healthy. The only negative thing is that Wall Street has a negative view of the sector as a whole, or else radio keeps turning in remarkable results in terms of bottom line and still the market doesn't acknowledge it or allow the stock to go anywhere.

"I am a radio fan; I am never without one. There are iPods, satellite radio, cell phones, WiFi in cars — it's competitive. But I don't see noncommercial entities making it. People need the interruptions of commercials, if for no other reason than to complain about them. I understand the advertisers' viewpoint that if there are six ads in a cluster, they don't want to be the middle one, but it must still be effective to some degree or they wouldn't keep buying time.

"I don't see the death of radio from a programming standpoint. Time will tell. The great thing about radio as an industry — and certainly as a programming vehicle — is that if something is wrong, it can be fixed quickly. That's the beauty of it. I don't think any other industry can do a 180 as quickly as radio."

Something about the RAB that might surprise our readers: "As embarrassing as it is, we have so much stuff, so much data and so many things that can be of help that I doubt there is a single person at the RAB who could start at A and go to Z. That is the most surprising thing to me."

Most influential individual: "Gordon McClendon, no question. He was a creative genius. To watch him think or listen to him think — because he did it mostly out loud as he

paced a room — was unbelievable. There have been many, but I would have to put Dwight Case in that room as well."

Career highlight: "WOR-FM would certainly be No. 1. In those days no one even knew what FM was, where it was or how it was, so I'm still very thrilled about it. Second would have to be Transtar — actually getting people to sign up for programming they could get out of the sky. Third would have to be the RAB coming from roughly 1,600 or 1,700 members to 6,000."

Career disappointment: "I don't think I ever had anything I would consider a disappointment. I have never not looked forward to coming to work each day, and there are not a lot of people who can say that. I don't mean that there have not been disappointments, but they are far outweighed by the ups."

Favorite format: "Oldies and News/Talk."

Favorite television show: "The History Channel."

Favorite song: "Anything by Ray Charles. He could sing the Yellow Pages and it would be a hit."

Favorite movie: "The Shawshank Redemption and Blazing Saddles."

Favorite book: "American Caesar by William Manchester."

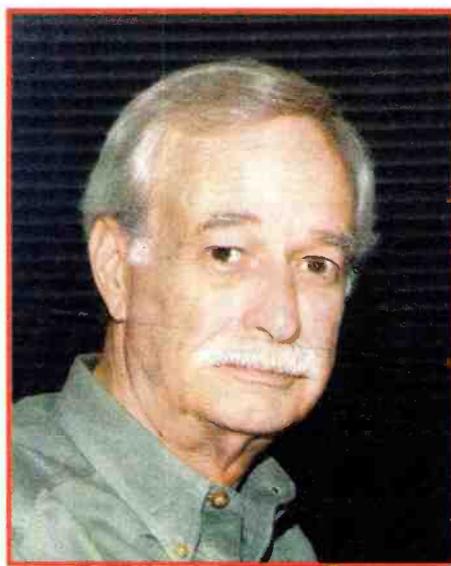
Favorite restaurant: "Piero's in Las Vegas."

Beverage of choice: "Rum."

Hobbies: "Golf. I am currently an 18 handicap, but who cares?"

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Advice for broadcasters: "Play some music and sell some spots."



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