



July 2, 2018

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WKNO'S RUSS ABERNATHY ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT

(Memphis, TN - July 2, 2018) Russ Abernathy announces retirement after 50 years in broadcasting, the last 27 spent at WKNO-TV/FM, the PBS/NPR affiliate in Memphis TN. A successful career that includes building and running mobile production units, serving on the PBS Engineering Committee through the development of digital television, executive producing Emmy-award winning television programs and designing WKNO's Digital Media Center, began in high school in Nebraska in 1968.

"Starting in the early 70's, I came to realize that my mentors in the television industry were the guys who actually BUILT the television industry," Russ said "and then we had to do it all over again with the switch to digital."

Russ served 12 years on the PBS Engineering Committee during the time they helped guide the PBS system through the digital transition, imagining and building technology that did not exist until digital television. He also served several years on the NETA Board of Directors as WKNO's representative and Chairman of NETA's Technology Committee. In 2008 Russ helped design and oversaw the construction of the WKNO Digital Media Center, a 40,000 sq ft facility that houses studios for television and radio. Since moving into the building in 2009, WKNO has added a third television stream and upgraded the radio station to HD. Working on behalf of the TN Public Television Council, he coordinated the installation of a statewide interconnection system for Tennessee's six independent public television stations.

WKNO's President/CEO Michael LaBonia said "Russ and I have worked together for over 35 years, a time that both of us have enjoyed immensely. He has exceptional skills that combine technology, administration, regulatory and legal knowledge, an understanding of television production and the development of television content. We are indebted to his vision and commitment for helping WKNO become a major player in the public media industry."

(more)

WKNO-TV Memphis

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While a sophomore in high school, Russ became interested in television production. Through a Junior Achievement program hosted by KMTV, the NBC affiliate in Omaha, Russ worked as a camera operator and director on the Junior Achievement TV series. At the University of Nebraska – Omaha he worked at the public television station KYNE and then moved on to Nebraska ETV in 1973. While there he ran master control for the 9-station state network, worked in the studio, became a video-tape engineer and editor and developed an interest in mobile production and engineering. He became the Engineer in Charge of their mobile unit in 1975.

Working with mobile units continued from 1980 through 1991, first in Houston at Mobile Color Inc., and then moving to WYES in New Orleans to build a new mobile unit for the station. He was named Director of Engineering a year later. When Michael LaBonia moved from WYES to WKNO as General Manager he asked Russ to join the management team in Memphis as Director of Television & Technology, where he remained for the next 27 years.

Between Nebraska, Houston, New Orleans, and Memphis, Russ was the technical manager on mobile units televising the Olympics, a Super Bowl, a World Series, a few national political conventions, several seasons of University of Memphis basketball and the live implosion of Baptist East Hospital in Memphis. This remarkable footage was the centerpiece of “From Baptist to Bioworks,” the documentary for which Russ won a Regional Emmy Award in 2005.

Reflecting on his 50 years in broadcasting, Russ looks forward to spending more time in his workshop building and travelling with Patty, his wife of 46 years. He will also continue to consult on future television projects.

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