

Former WUNC announcer describes evolution of public radio

By Christina Nifong
Features Editor

The 1952 Carolina graduate crossed the stage with an easy grace. His familiar, smooth voice crooned, "From National Public Radio in Washington, this is Morning Edition. I'm ..."

He paused. The audience knew who he was. The 60 or so people of all ages who gathered in Great Hall Friday morning at 10 listened intently as Carl Kasell recounted his journey on a road less traveled.

Beginning as a student announcer at the University's fledgling public radio station, Kasell is now the man who compiles and delivers the news of the world every weekday morning, in seven five-minute segments for National Public Radio's Morning Edition show.

After his introduction, Kasell cast off his objectivity and showed where his true sentiments lay. "I'm a Tar Heel born, I'm a Tar Heel bred and when I die, I'll be Tar Heel dead," he cheered.

He went on to say that he tries to get to North Carolina at least once a year, sometimes to visit his mother and sister in Goldsboro, his hometown, or his brother in Cary. Sometimes it's just to walk around Chapel Hill and take a look at the campus.

But Friday was the first time Kasell has ever formally spoken at UNC. Bill Davis, WUNC-FM's general manager,

said he spoke to Kasell in May at an NPR conference after Kasell had been awarded the Public Radio Regional Organization Award. Davis invited Kasell to speak, not realizing that the WUNC legend and graduate of Carolina's radio and motion picture department (television classes were added later) had never before spoken on UNC's campus.

Kasell told his audience of the good ol' days when WUNC had no budget and no money. The station's programs aired from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. with volunteer deejays broadcasting concerts from Hill and Memorial halls and with speakers such as Sen. Hubert Humphrey and poet Robert Frost, he said.

"And we did, believe it or not, what I believe to be the first stereo broadcast in the state of North Carolina and possibly the United States. The N.C. Symphony was giving a concert that afternoon, so we got together with the people at WCHL and said, 'let's try it.' So we broadcast that concert from both stations. We told the listening audience at home to get an AM and FM radio and put one speaker beside each ear. And it worked."

Kasell remembered one night when a man who had become disillusioned with teaching and moved to Chapel Hill to be an entertainer arrived at the station. He had a monologue that had piqued the interest of a local record label producer, Kasell said.

"So this is what we taped, this monologue, that night. Take out some of the laughing, applause and the rough spots



Carl Kasell

and maybe trim it to five or six minutes which would fit on two sides of a record. The monologue was about a country bumpkin going to a football game out here at Kenan Stadium.

"And the next time I saw Andy Griffith, his record was playing all over the state of North Carolina. The next time I saw him was on the Ed Sullivan show. And a few weeks later he came to Chapel Hill and did the monologue on the 50-yard line at halftime. Of course the rest is history."

Kasell then moved on to his days with Morning Edition. The show was born Nov. 5, 1979 after much planning,

many pilots and a switch in directors the weekend before airing, he said. Kasell, who had been doing his five-minute morning segments for two years, didn't have to change his format for the new show. "When Morning Edition came on, I was sitting there, in place."

NPR was an experiment, he said. Today, six million people tune in every morning, he said. More people listen to Morning Edition than watch Good Morning America or the CBS Morning News on television. Morning Edition airs on 380 of the more than 400 NPR affiliate stations across the country, up from 75 when it began.

Its success comes from performing a service not available anywhere else, he said.

Kasell, who has been a radio announcer since his high school days, is a man with a nose for news but without a hard edge.

He is humble. Talking about his classmate and a fellow volunteer at WUNC, Charles Kuralt, Kasell said, "He was a natural."

Commenting on the public radio award Kasell won last year, he said: "I was stunned. You know, newscasters don't get awards. The awards go to people who do in-depth pieces."

Kasell is content. "I'm quite happy doing what I'm doing. I've got one of the best jobs in broadcasting. Something will come along and get those juices flowing and you'll feel like you could never do anything else."

He has a sense of humor. Telling of a correspondent in the Middle East during the Persian Gulf War, he said: "She lost weight because they have no catering service there. She was out in the desert sometimes, eating nothing more than chocolates. She lost 10 pounds." Back in the newsroom they joked she had gone on the Kuwait-watchers diet.

Joking about the low wages paid by

National Public Radio, Kasell told of another Middle East reporter. "You know, when I was captured by the Red Guard, I kept wondering, should I put in for overtime?"

Kasell believes in public radio. A Jan. 1955 Daily Tar Heel article about WUNC quoted station manager Joe Young as saying, "Educational radio, which became public radio, is an attempt to provide a broadcast service not usually available."

"That was then," Kasell said. "This is now. And the same thing applies."

Kasell directly addressed New Hope Elementary School students in the audience. "I'm happy to know that you listen to NPR. In addition to listening to radio, I want to advise you to do one other thing. And that is to read. Read. Read. Read."

"Even at NPR, although we give an in-depth news service and ... perspective as to what's happening around the world, we cannot do it in the way that newspapers and magazines and periodicals and books can do it."

"We're limited in time. We cannot add minutes. Newspapers can add pages. It's one thing to know that something happened. It's another thing to understand why it happened."

David Brinkley tells a story when talking about the time restrictions of broadcasters, Kasell said. "If today, Moses went up to the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments from God, it would be the big story of the day certainly. And it would be the lead story on the evening news. You would probably hear Rather, Brokaw and Jennings open up by saying: 'Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Today God handed down the Ten Commandments to Moses. Here's a report on the two most important...'"

Kasell said he doubted the doomsday predictions of the end of print media. "I

hope it's still available. It's all economic."

Network news is suffering from lack of funds too, he said, now that news broadcasts must make money instead of being supported by the entertainment side of television. "We're giving the public what they want and not what they need."

After people express their appreciation for the news service provided by NPR, Kasell said, they always ask him when he gets up in the morning.

The first Morning Edition newscast is at five in the morning, and they must prepare the show before that, he said.

"So when I get in at 2:30, it's like a small city. Morning Edition is being put together with its hustle and bustle." People ask, "If you get in at 2:30, what time do you get up?" I get up about 1:05. I would get up at one, but that seems so early."

Inn from page 1

when the choice would be approved or when the company could begin operating the inn.

Ben Tuchi, UNC vice chancellor for business and finance, the UNC Board of Trustees, the Board of Governors and the Council of State must approve the operator, Elliland said. The Council of State includes the N.C. governor and his cabinet.

Campus Calendar

- MONDAY**
- 4 p.m. Chilean human rights activist Dr. Annabella Rebolledo Achevedo will speak on "Human Rights in Chile from the Military Junta through the Democratic Regime" in 569 Hamilton.
 - 5 p.m. The Campus Y is looking for people interested in gaining marketing, desktop publishing, and editing skills. Anyone interested needs to attend the organizational meeting in the Campus Y lounge.
 - 6 p.m. Footfalls, a committee of the Campus Y, will meet in the Campus Y.
 - 6:30 p.m. The Language Houses will have an international dinner on the second floor of Carmichael. If interested, call Karol at 933-0945.
 - 7 p.m. An All-Campus Majors Interest Fair will be sponsored by Granville Towers in their cafeteria. Everyone welcome.
 - 7:30 p.m. UNC Ballroom Dance Club will teach the "cha-cha" in 26 Woolen. Questions? Call 962-1814.
 - The Dialectic and Philanthropic Literary Societies will meet on the third floor of New West. Topic: "Does the Public Have the Right to Know the Private Lives of Public Figures?"
 - The French House will host a conversation cafe on the second floor lounge of Carmichael.
 - The CGLA will hold a general meeting in 226 Union. The speaker will be gay and lesbian activist Mandy Carter.
 - 8:30 p.m. The Fellowship of Christian Athletes will meet in the Kenan Field House.
- ITEMS OF INTEREST**
- The Black Cultural Center invites you to view Angela Medlin's "Background" in the BCC until Oct. 22.
 - Student Health Services is forming a Diabetes support group. Call 966-6562 for more information.
 - The UNC Math Contest is available in the mathematics library, 365 Phillips.
 - Register to Vote in the Pit between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. until Oct. 4. Bring a picture ID with your birth date and proof of local address (phone bill).
 - Free Tutoring in: French 1-4, Spanish 1-4, ECON 10, STAT 11, 23, CHEM 11, Biology 11, Math 10, 16-18, 22, 30, 31 at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday in Day.

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Anyone interested in the health professions should investigate what radiology has to offer. Call 966-5146 for more information even if you cannot attend this meeting.

- DATE: Tue., Oct. 1, 1991
- TIME: 7:00 pm
- PLACE: Rm. 211 & Rm. 212
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