

## Q&amp;A: RTNDA PAUL WHITE AWARD WINNER

# FRED YOUNG: A LIFETIME OF LOCAL NEWS

The highest honor bestowed by the RTNDA, the Paul White Award, now belongs to Fred Young, the recently retired senior vice president of news for Hearst-Argyle Television.

He is the first Paul White honoree since 1984 who has spent his career working exclusively in local news. Mr. Young's career with Hearst spans 47 years, beginning as a desk assistant and culminating in his managing news operations in 26 markets for Hearst-Argyle stations in 22 states, a station group that includes 13 ABC affiliates and 10 NBC affiliates.

The Paul White Award was established in 1956 to honor an individual's lifetime contribution to electronic journalism, which for Mr. Young includes a long history of recognition for quality programming and community service, with an emphasis on political reporting.

Mr. Young spoke recently with *TelevisionWeek* special correspondent Hillary Atkin about the landscape of local news from his perspective.

**TelevisionWeek:** Take us back to 1962, when you were starting out at Hearst Broadcasting Co. at WTAE-TV in Pittsburgh. What was the television news business like then?

**Fred Young:** The television news business then was what everyone wanted to be in. The newsroom was very small, about five or six people behind the scenes, and four or five on-air, about 15 altogether with a lot of camaraderie. There were a few newscasts, and everything was on film, which was rushed to get into the lab and back to the station.

The news business was competitive. There were three stations in the market. Everybody had their piece of the business. Each network had its own image and brand. Then UHF and public broadcasting came into the picture and began flexing their muscles, and then of course cable became an importer of other signals. In the earliest days, everyone went home happy. We were certainly sweating ratings but were enjoying the game.

**TVWeek:** In these past decades, what have been the biggest strides made in local newsgathering?

**Mr. Young:** Viewer acceptance of local news as the primary source

of news is the most important part. From the 1960s to 2009, it has become much more complicated. Technology has changed more in the last few years than in the previous 40—film to tape to digital to satellite—enabling us to be able to put things live on-air as they are happening, and that changed the expectation of the viewer. You have to be where it is [happening] or about to happen, or you're not as sharp as the competitors.

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Fred Young

**TVWeek:** Describe your journalistic standards and how—or if—they have changed from when you began your career.

**Mr. Young:** Whatever standards I have are influenced by the company I grew up in. We've always approached news as the face of



the television station, never frivolous, careless, sensational or haphazard. We do it fairly, objectively and carefully. Some of these are old journalistic clichés, but we are the stewards of information; we want to make sure we get it right. With the Internet, blogs and cable news—some days they operate in a different mindset than we do. As a colleague said, it's the "ready-fire-aim" school of journalism, to put it out and check the facts after. We still have our standards, and we're very proud of that. Hearst-Argyle just won two big awards for political reporting, one of our



**HIS WINNING WAYS**  
Fred Young, who retired from Hearst-Argyle last December, received a Walter Cronkite Award from the USC Annenberg School for Communication in 2007.

Our biggest job is not allowing people to talk down local TV. We have to talk up our medium, and be proud of what we do. There are a lot of people predicting doom and gloom who are agenda-driven. There is not a lot of original reporting outside of where it has historically come from. We have to sell ourselves better. Our audience may be smaller, but we ain't dead.

**TVWeek:** Let's talk about the Washington, D.C., news bureau you oversaw, which services the company's news departments.

**Mr. Young:** It started in 1989 and is a control point for a proprietary satellite system to share news content out of D.C. between stations. The political effort was a group-wide project that originated from all stations, starting in New Hampshire and Iowa. It turns out dozens of reports for morning newscasts and large numbers throughout the day.

**TVWeek:** What advice do you have for those just starting off in television news?

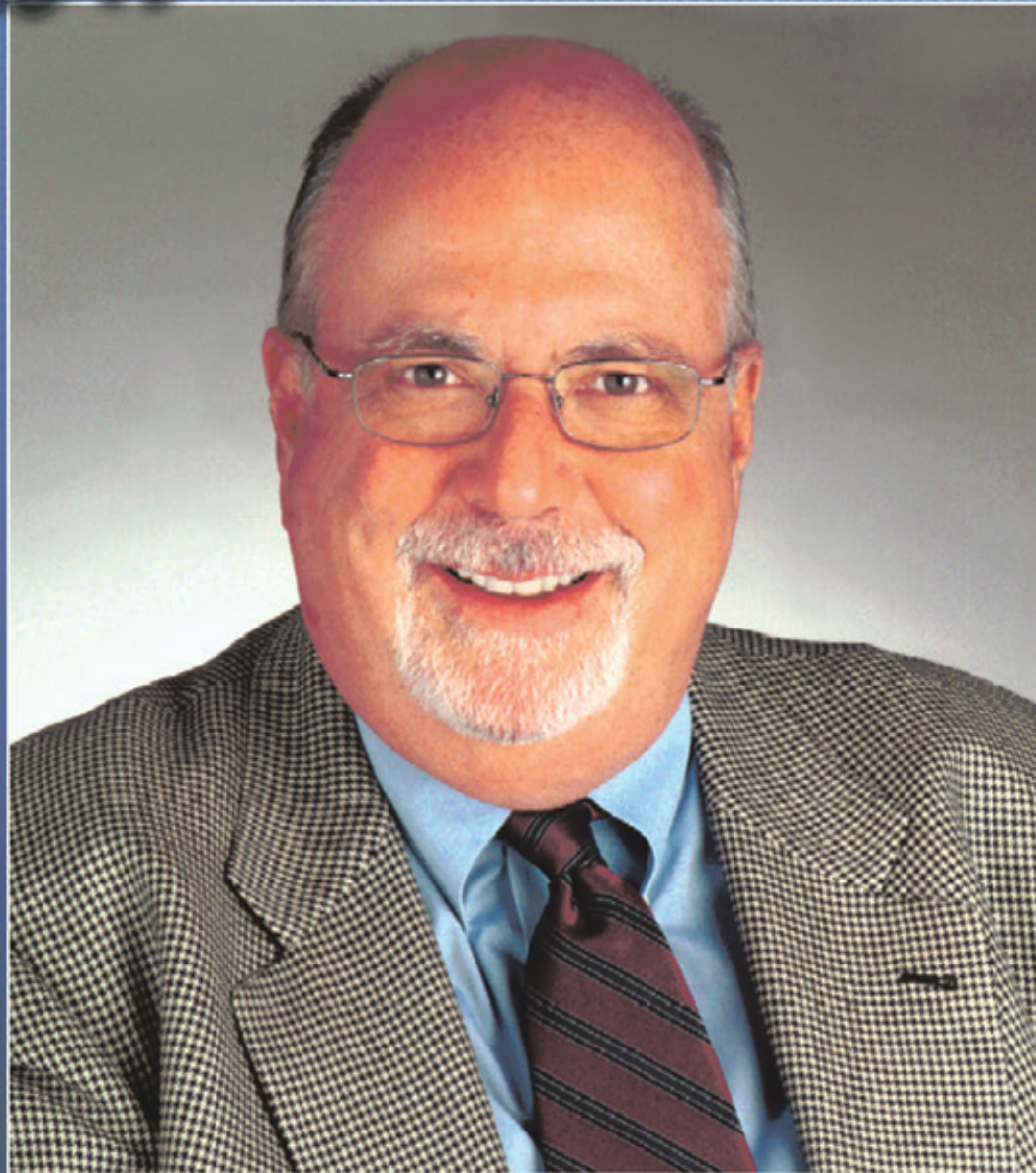
**Mr. Young:** Learn about everything in media you can, and know there's a lot more to TV than sitting in front of the camera. Learn everything about the Web, get your hands dirty and write for it, do TV and radio news, edit tape and use cameras. In a period of economic decline, a lot of bright people who recently got in lost their jobs. It's going to be a little crowded for a while getting in a window that small. ■

trademarks. We do it like it was intended to be done: Cover the candidates, issues, go behind the scenes and travel to communities.

**TVWeek:** What are the biggest challenges local television news directors face today?

**Mr. Young:** It's relevance. We do have a lot of new kinds of competition, so we have to do local news as best we can, deliver weather and do sports on the local level, as well as investigative reporting. We have to hire people who can multitask behind and in front of the cameras.

*Fred*  
*You're the Best!*



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