

# Peacock North

The Second Generation

DECEMBER, 2001



Volume 1 Edition 2

By Russ Tornabene  
NBC 1951-81

## ***NEXT STOP, KABUL, AFGHANISTAN***

was the order of the day. Now, 42 years later, that is a haunting statement.

But in December, 1959, on the first jet plane trip of an American President to foreign nations, it was a routine stopover, however exotic. President Dwight Eisenhower, the architect of World War II battle victories in North Africa, Italy and, most important, the daring D-Day landings in France in early June, 1944, was scheduled to make other daring invasions, this time of 12 nations (mostly one-day visits). Daunting, but it worked. Including that stopover at Kabul.

First, the overall plan. Ike would fly on Air Force One, and the media on a TWA Press Plane. Fifty-nine reporters and producers, plus 19 cameramen, film and stills. As the field producer on that trip, I had Don Meaney's survey trip memos and a detailed planning book of coverage. He was thorough and his book became my bible.

The stops were Canada (Goose Bay, for refueling only), Rome, Italy; Ankara, Turkey; Karachi, Pakistan; Kabul; New Delhi, India, with a side trip to Agra (site of the Taj Mahal -- the sublime mausoleum); Tehran, Iran; Athens, Greece; Tunis, Tunisia; Paris, France; Madrid, Spain; and Casablanca, Morocco. Aboard for NBC from an early hour on Dec. 3, 1959, were: Bill Henry, then a noted news commentator; Ray Scherer, the long-time NBC News White House correspondent; a go-along camera crew from Washington; and I as producer, time away from my day job as supervisor of the network news desk in Washington, DC at that time. Of course, bureau chiefs and noted foreign correspondents were on the scene, along the route, including Welles Hangen, Irving R. Levine, Edwin Newman, Frank Bourgholtzer and others less well known.

How were we to get our film on the air? To file radio reports? Telephone calls demanded long waits. And in those days, no easy satellite feeds, but we'd get our film developed and edited, and, with great effort, ship it to London, where "slow scan" there would mean frame-skip-frame-skip-frame on the undersea cable to NBC New York, for TV reports to

the world. (The first Telstar was launched later, in July '62.)

The Cold War was on. Ike's aides may have argued, "Let's drop by Russia's doorstep, at Afghanistan. The King there will be delighted to have the recognition." And so it was that Ray Scherer and I were standing on the tarmac of the Kabul airport, having flown in from Pakistan. Scherer was a superb reporter. After a chat of two minutes with one of the White House press aides, he'd come over to where I was lugging a 35 lb. tape recorder and he'd lay down three exclusives for later feed (after arriving in New Delhi, later that day).

We saw some uniformed troops at the airport, but shortly before Air Force One was due to arrive, a small number of fighter planes -- four to six -- buzzed the field in preparation for Ike's welcome. After Air Force One landed and was greeted by the King's equivalent of Secretary of State, the fighter planes zoomed by and the photographers took pictures. The bus drive from the Kabul airport to the capital city was a true adventure for two reasons. First was the road, that wound up and down, round and round through the short mountains, with no steel railings at the edges of the roadway. But on that day, something more dangerous: the local booze the night before had made our bus driver sleepy. I was midway in the bus, but thank God the CBS crew was right

up front, feeding that driver one cigarette after another, always lighting one up before he was offered the next. That kept him awake and we made it safely to the quiet city.

Kabul was then what it is now, what you have seen in recent TV coverage. Grim. Rundown. Like some of the hard-hit cities and villages I saw in Europe in '44 and '45. Nowhere did we see women on the streets. In fact, nowhere did we see ordinary citizens. Was there any time in its history when Kabul permitted ordinary people to celebrate anything for themselves along the dusty streets? Probably not, and only when the nation's leaders decided it was acceptable for their purposes. King Zahir Shah had become ruler in 1933, at the age of 18, and served until 1973, when he was replaced by his cousin who seized the throne while the King was on vacation in Italy. The one-time King has lived in Rome ever since. He is now 87. There was some wishful thinking after American Forces moved into Afghanistan that King Zahir Shah would return to power, but this will not happen. Of course, these officials, led by the King, had great halls and good foods for us.



**These colors don't run!**

**Bill Henry,  
Russ Tornabene and Ray Scherer.**



*Henry was a senior journalist who was a network star in the early '50's until 1956, when Huntley and Brinkley were paired. Ray Scherer was a long-time White House correspondent.*

*This photo was taken at Baltimore-Washington International Airport, Dec. 3, 1959, as our press plane was about to fly to Rome on the first leg, to accompany President Dwight Eisenhower on the first jet flight of a US president on a foreign mission, to 11 nations.*

**NEXT STOP, KABUL, AFGHANISTAN—  
Cont'd**

Inside, an Imperial Life. Outdoors, a ghostly feeling, back then and likely it is worse now.

After about five hours of chatting between Ike and the King, we drove back to the airport and flew out into a clear, cool sky. No jet fighters at the departure.

The Pakistan story: After landing, Scherer was on a press bus ahead of mine, and the going was slow, very slow, because of huge crowds which swarmed into the large open "circuses" or major intersections, or hanging out of apartment balconies. I looked at my two watches, one that remained on New York time and the other on whatever the local time was at that moment. I realized that the Today Show was already on the air, and my notepad said we had booked some feed time at that hour. So I asked our government-supplied English-speaking guide for the location of the Karachi Telephone Center. He said about a mile ahead. I gauged the distance, jumped off the bus, went inside, demanded my studio, and within 15 minutes was feeding a live spot into Today, and several more for later Hourlies. I spoke from scratch notes, with thankful sighs from Bill Fitzgerald coming back to me on the phone. I spoke only of the huge crowds, the balconies filled with colorful flags and clothing, the warmth of the day (it was December) and what was ahead for Ike in his 36-hour stopover.

I filled in Scherer when we gathered at the hotel, and we got more telephone linkage for his feeds later. At break time, our cameraman from Washington ordered the local version of a coke. He almost finished with his bottle when he noticed a little brown object at the bottom, a dead insect. From then on, we all drank hot tea.



**Ray Scherer and Russ Tornabene**  
*at the airport in Kabul, Afghanistan, Dec. 1959.*

A memorable work story is the Pakistani airplane, hired to fly from New Delhi, India, to transport a single can of film to Karachi, where it would, we hoped, connect with a plane bound from Asia to London (with a few stops along the way). No flights were scheduled for many hours after I took that can in hand, so I had to find the Pakistani charge d'affaires in Old Delhi, late at night, and convince him to write his permission on his letterhead, which I could give to our local Delhi bureau people, who would hire the plane and get that film can aboard. Without that letter, no Pakistani pilot would fly to Karachi, especially without a passenger. I found that charge d'affaires and he wrote the letter (we had been in Karachi only a few days before) and it all worked well. The film arrived in London before the competition's, it was edited and slow scanned and we had a beat. The story was Ike's visit to the Taj Mahal. Not a memorable moment in history, but one for our team, which got that film to London, with Chet Hagan awaiting in New York for anything from our side of the world.

We flew home after 20 long days of demanding but rewarding work, over 18,520 miles. You'd like more facts? Max. ground speed: 620 mph. Avg. ground speed: 555 mph. Total flying time: 37 hrs. 54 mins. Total fuel: 176,300 lbs. = 79,813 gals. Max. altitude 41,000, over Bulgaria and the Med, into Turkey.

The new age of jet travel for heads of state had begun. As well, satellite TV transmission was not far behind. Both developments would reshape how the world receives news of world events.

Again, in this new century, we have "Next stop, Kabul, Afghanistan", only this time it's coverage with high-tech and live pictures and sound, and, a very different story.



**PEACOCK NORTH****Your new contacts:**

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 Len Stucker  
 Jim Marshall

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*We Get Letters*

Hi folks,

Thanks for picking up the baton and running with what Pete Peterson, and all the others we know and admire, built to such a shining level. I trust Pete and the gang have their feet up, drinks poured and are enjoying their well-earned retirement although I'm sure they'll miss the big bucks they got for all they did!

I never did work in TV, but after joining the Peacock and network radio in 1974 many of them were migrating over to us and they became lasting friends. Staff announcers, in particular, were always coming in to do our "news line" feeds to affiliates or other radio work so we got to know Mel Brandt, Wayne Howell, Dick Dudley, Bill Hanrahan (a regular luncheon buddy in Darien for years) not to mention so many of the Today show cast from Jane to John Palmer, Gene Shalit and the loveable Willard Scott. Most of our radio producers and AD's had all been on the TV side and quite a few went back after GE unloaded us over a decade ago.

I can't believe I haven't paid my dues for this year. Pete was good a giving us hell when we forgot...but, on the other hand, I can't find any bank record that shows such a payment....so, check enclosed. Continued success doing what many enjoy and few ever come forward to help out with. I'll try to contribute the moment I recall something brilliant and even when I don't.

*Don Blair*

**Kudos**

**PEACOCK NORTH** received over a hundred letters and e-mails of support for the new generation's attempt at continuing our organization. Each message contained a special view of what our group means to the writer and a commitment of support to the new team of leaders. The following is a very brief example of the correspondence:

**"HOORAY, THE PEACOCK STILL FLIES!"**

I am very glad to hear the Peacock will fly again. I have enjoyed and saved every issue and was sad to hear that it was finished. Many thanks to the three stalwart individuals". Ed and Ann Leddy

**"A BIG THANK YOU**—for keeping PN alive and well—you have very large shoes to fill. An equally large **THANK YOU** to Pete, Heino, Frank and all the others who have become the "KEEPERS" of 'our' history—warts and all". Paul Winter

**"GOOD SHOW** Marilyn, Jim and Lenny! Everybody (who is anybody) rejoices that you three are carrying on". Gordon Mathews

**"THANKS** for a dandy "hello out there" edition of the new PN. I will mail a check today, if not sooner. We are lucky to have this trio (plus Mary makes four)". Russ Tornabene

**"GOOD LUCK** with the re-birth of PN. It has been such a strong communication with the past, that when it arrived, I would drop everything, sit down and read it from cover to cover". Clark Jones

**"HI FOLKS!** Just received the newsletter and I think it's gonna be swell". Joel Spector

**"TO YOU ALL.** Just a quick pat on the back for picking up the ball, flag, torch or whatever and running with it. I'm sure we all thought about doing it, but didn't. You thought about it and did it. As Kipling said 'you're a better man than I am Gunga Din'". Gene

**"DEAR TRIO COURAGEOUS.** You have the gratitude of a large membership for jumping in and saving a potential fizzle. If you don't feel it yet—give it a little time. A big sigh of relief was audible from everyone when you announced your commitment at our last gathering, so please have faith"! Stas Ryka

# Looking BACK

New York Times, February 3, 1949

## Radio and Television

4-Hour Ground-and-Air Video Program on  
Sunday Over NBC to Offer Nation's Sights

A four-hour ground-and-air television program giving viewers aerial sights of New York, Washington, Cleveland and Chicago will be presented next Sunday at 1 P.M. by NBC in cooperation with the Air Force.

Two Air Force transport planes, one flying over the two western cities and the other over New York and Washington, will carry NBC cameras and announcers aloft. Ben Grauer will be aboard a C-47 taking off from Washington's Bolling Field and Roy Michaels will report from the C-54 giving air views of Chicago and Cleveland. Air Force officers in NBC's New York studios will explain the significance of the program.

Special receiving antennas have been installed at NBC buildings in the four cities to receive the signals transmitted from the planes.

William Garden, director of NBC Television field programs, will be in charge of the telecast. Edwin C. Wilbur, NBC television field supervisor, is in charge of engineering preparations.

Grace and Paul Hartman will enter their first regular series for television on Sunday, February 27, from 7:30 to 8 P.M., opening a weekly situation comedy, "The Hartmans," on NBC's East Coast network. An "at home" atmosphere will be the setting for the program, sponsored by Textron, Inc.

The pair will not be newcomers before the television cameras, having earlier recreated their rolls in "Angel In The Wings" over NBC's facilities. They are now appearing in another Broadway musical, "All For Love

"Mary Kay and Johnny," the husband and wife television comedy featuring the Steanses, will vacate the WNBT stand on Sunday from 7 to 7:30 P.M., in favor of the wider circulation over five Eastern CBS stations, starting Wednesday, Feb. 23, from 9 to 9:30 P.M.

Scanning the TV schedule for early February 1949 we note that WNBD, the Dumont network, was the only station with morning programming. At noon WJZ did a news spot, then on the hour through 6 P.M.

NBT started its day at 2:30 with Bess Johnson's "Women's Club" and at 3:00 Gordon B. Halstead took us Traveling. The "Three Flames" had a 15 minute stint following "Travel." At 3:30 "We're On" aired with Virginia Gilmore and Yul Brenner, with guests William Eythe and Carol Channing.

By Frank Vierling

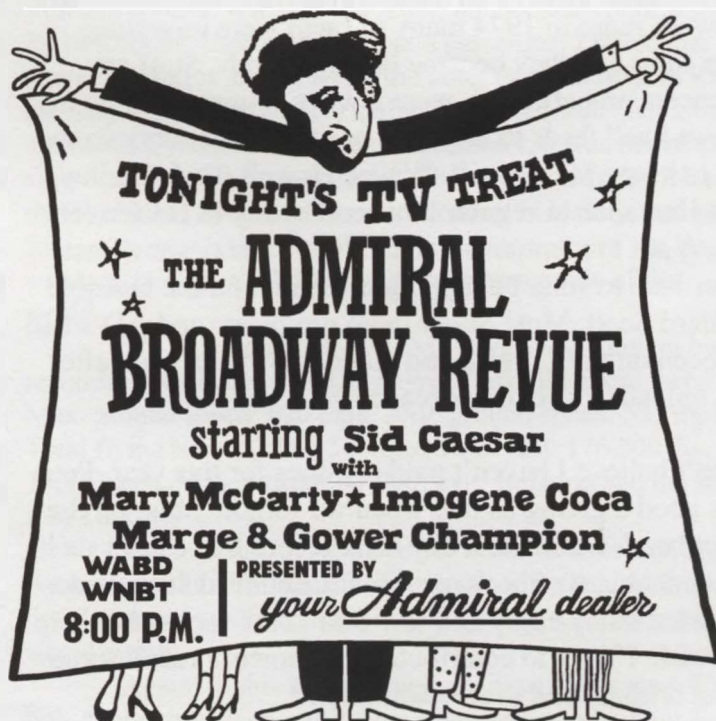
"Figure Magic" hosted by Claire Mann filled 15 minutes until Edward McGinley gave piano lessons at 4:15, followed by Story Teller Marie Cimino, which took us up to 5 P.M. and the *first* soap, "These Are My Children."

"What time is it?" - "It's Howdy Doody time," chimed in the peanut gallery at 5:30 with Bob Smith. At 6 "Easy Does it" featured Adele Girard and Johnny Andrews. Their 15 minutes came before Tex Antoine caught us up on the weather. At 6:30 there was the "Ed Herlihy Show" followed at 7 by "Kukla Fran and Ollie." (*No early news.*)

While Douglas Edwards was reporting news on CBS at 7:30, NBC aired a 50 minute film, "The Eyes Have It" and filled out that hour with "News Reel Theater. The "Phil Silvers Show" aired at 8, featuring Joey Faye, Jack Clifford, Jack Diamond, the Harry Salter Orchestra and the Mack Triplets.

Lanny Ross and the Harry Simeone Orchestra took the stage for an hour at 8:30 and at 9:30 Dunninger, with Paul Winchell mystified the TV audience with his mind reading act. (*Dunninger's famous rehearsal line to the director, "Where do you want me to stand, do you think I'm a mind reader?"*)

At 10, Dr. Roy Marshall brought us fifteen minutes of the "Nature of Things" followed by "NBC Presents," ending NBC's day.



ad from the NY Times, Friday, February 4, 1949.



# WE GET STORIES AND PICTURES

## LOTS OF STORIES OVER THE YEARS

By: Arnold Reif

There are thousands of stories, some real, some not so real, but usually close enough to make one wonder how we did many of the events and still lived to tell about them.



This picture, taken in 1980, shows a group of NBC employees (John Gonzalas, John Wendell, Carla Engelman, Ken Aagaard, Randy Wands and Arnold Reif) as they prepare to fly off to

Kruger National Park in South Africa after a wild one week stay in Johannesburg to air a heavyweight boxing match. The owner of the plane was Sol Kuraner who also owned all the Southern Sun hotels in South Africa. We spent 4 days in the game park and we literally emptied the wine cellar at the hotel where we stayed.

What should have been a fairly easy remote, turned into a very scary event since this was the first ever integrated sporting event in South Africa history that featured a black fighter, John Tate, against a white fighter, Gerry Coetzee. The actual event took place in the city of Pretoria, SA. We used a South African broadcast crew who knew how bad the situation could have gotten, so they made sure we were protected as we moved around the stadium. The security was so tight, you could not get from the truck to the ring without going through numerous security checks. There were guards with rifles all along the roof and in every aisle. A total of 86,000 fans came to see the fight. Richard (Dick) Auerbach was the producer and he would not leave the truck. Since no one wanted to be near ringside, I ended up stage managing the fight, working with Marv Albert, who was the announcer. It all turned out well and I am sure none of us will ever forget that event.

One last memory. John Wendell and I went to Johannesburg three weeks before the actual fight to do a survey. I bought my wife a bracelet and soon after I got

home, it broke. Three weeks later when we went back to do the actual broadcast, I took the bracelet back to the store. The saleswoman remembered me and asked if I had come all the way back from America to return the bracelet. I told her I did and not only did I get a new bracelet, but she felt so bad she gave me my money back.

Here are all of the 43 NBC employees that worked on the 1972 Winter Olympics held in Sapporo,



Japan. It may be hard to believe that NBC aired the Olympics that year with so few people when you realize they used over 800 in each of the Olympics since then. As you look at the picture, you will recognize many of NBC's long term employees. It was a small group, but they did not lack in their talent and willingness to

make it work. I will leave the names out, however, if anyone wants to make a list, I'm sure Peacock North will publish them in the next issue. Notice the jackets that NBC supplied us that year, real sheepskin. Once we got to Sapporo, it did not take long to figure out why we needed the coats. In one hour, it would snow up to 10 inches. Up on the mountains, the temperature was usually zero degrees. What a concept, doing the winter Olympics and it being cold. I still have my coat. There were many stories that came out of that broadcast, so I will only tell a few.

Curt Gowdy was the host and he worked out of the studio next to our control room. He spent the entire Olympics in front of the chroma key wall. What was strange, was the fact that Doug Skene, the production manager, went out and found a kid who was hitchhiking around Japan and made him the studio stage manager. For three weeks he never left the studio.

Richard (Dick) Auerbach was the producer and he never left the control room. Some of the 43 got so sick we could not use them during the broadcast. By the time the Olympics were over, we had a working crew of 36. We barely had enough video tape stock, so we had to erase some of the material in order to have enough to finish the Olympics. Many of our engineers, after spending months in Sapporo, ended up going to China to set up satellite coverage of President Nixon who decided to be the first president to visit China. It was our version of "around the world in 80 days".

## Silent Microphones

It is with the deepest regret that I inform you of the death of my father, **Anthony J. Dente** on July 23, 2001. After a five year battle, he finally succumbed to prostate cancer. Dad retired in 1985 after a 35 year career with RCA/NBC and in going through his stuff these last few weeks I couldn't help but notice the fondness he still held for his "other" family at NBC, keeping many mementos and photos throughout the house. I know now how much he cherished those memories of his teammates. You all must be very special. Tony Dente, Jr.

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**Gloria Settle**, manager of the Design and Art Dept., died July 5, 2001, of cancer at the Huntington Hospital (L.I.)

She retired from NBC after 28 years of total devotion to her job and was loved by all her coworkers. Here is how they put it: "lady of many wonderful qualities..." "kind, helpful, sensitive to others..." "our best and most interested friend..." "fun to work with and work for..." "don't know anyone who didn't love her".

Gloria is survived by her daughter Joan, four grandchildren, four great-grandchildren and Stas Pyka, her loving teammate.

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**Richie Phillips**, who's career took him from the studios of NBC at 30 Rock, to the Olympics in Norway, to Orlando at Nickelodeon and Lynqx Communications (a satellite service company) and then back to NBC News-Washington died Friday morning October 5, in Orlando from complications of lung cancer.

Richie had the rare distinction of having started in a technical job at NBC, becoming a shop steward, then a union negotiator. When he joined the ranks of management, Rich became one of NBC's negotiating team. Leaving NBC he worked in various places and capacities with the Olympics in Norway and Nickelodeon in Orlando.

Coworkers at Lynqx were privileged to have him as a colleague for four years before he went back to NBC as Director of Engineering and Operations for NBC-Washington. Rich was a charming man, his skills as an engineer were remarkable and the respect and affection he enjoyed were recalled by every man or woman who ever met him or worked with him.

He is survived by his wife Melinda and two grown daughters.

**Marcia Kuyper Schneider** of Clearwater Beach, FL formerly of New York City died October 17, 2001 at her residence. Born in Chicago, she grew up in Pella, Iowa. She worked as a television director for NBC Television Network for over 40 years, and retired to Florida. She had many achievements including directing "Sing Along with Mitch", "Christmas in Rockefeller Center", public service shows such as "The First Estate", and news for WNBC-TV. She was the recipient of 4 Emmy Awards, one of which was as the Associate Director for "S' Wonderful, S'Marvelous, S'Gershwin with Jack Lemmon". She also received an "Angel Award" for Religion in Media. She was also Associate Director of "Your Show of Shows", "Perry Como", "Hallmark Hall of Fame Specials", and "The Bell Telephone Hour". Later, she worked as a Producer, Director, & Associate Director for numerous NBC News events. She is survived by her husband of 45 years Francis Schneider a retired art director for NBC for 25 years, a daughter Pamela Schneider Butler of Ho-Ho-Kus, NJ and 3 grandchildren, Matthew, Laura, & Kristin Butler. A memorial service was held October 29 at Our Lady Queen of Martyrs Catholic Church in Forest Hills, New York..

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Local 11 lost long time member **Bill Steckman** in the attack on the World Trade Center, on September 11. He was on duty at the WNBC transmitter when the attacks took place. Bill, 56, is survived by his wife Barbara, five children and four grandchildren.

A memorial service was held for Bill on Wednesday, September 26, in West Hempstead, Long Island, New York. Dennis Swanson, President and General Manager of WNBC made a moving and eloquent eulogy. Also in attendance was Ed Scanlon, Executive Vice President for Employee Relations, and Jay Ireland, President of the Stations Division. A fund in Bill's memory has been established. All contributions to this fund may be sent to The William V. Steckman, Sr. Memorial Fund, PO Box 671, Baldwin, New York 11510.

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In other sad news, Local 11 member and current employee of NBC, **George Hug** suffered a heart attack on September 11, and passed away on September 21. George, 56, is survived by his wife Kathy, his daughter, and granddaughter. George served Local 11 as a counselor on the Membership Assistance Program (MAP), assisting members who were in crisis. In March of 2001, at the annual Shop Stewards Dinner, a Local 11 scholarship was named in honor of George in recognition of his long and valuable service to NABET-CWA. George was present to select the first recipient of the George Hug Scholarship.



# NABET-CWA

NABET-CWA and NBC recently concluded its third round of bargaining for a new Master Agreement. The current one expires on March 31, 2002. It is hopeful that these early limited issue negotiations will result in an agreement that can be unanimously recommended by the Network Negotiating Committee (NNC). The going has been slow but Lou Fallot, Local 11's representative on the NNC is cautiously optimistic.

## Cameraman Published



Longtime NBC News cameraman Charles (Charlie) Ray has written a book, "The Life of a Network Newsreel Cameraman." In it he describes the assignments he covered during the 60's, 70's and 80's for NBC. Filled with anecdotes and pictures he took during that time, it will bring back memories to anyone who worked with Charlie, who is retired and now lives in Florida.

The book can be ordered by mail for \$22.00 per book, including tax and shipping, at P. O. Box 449, Sanibel Island, FL 33957. Telephone (941) 472-4736.

### Peggy (Conroy) Weber recalls:

In the late 1940's when I was working as a secretary to O.B. Hanson, he called Jean Bissell and me into his office to witness an "historic TV event". It was a live pickup from BOSTON! Quite exciting at the time.

***Spring Luncheon being planned.  
Don't miss it!***

*Bud and Bobbie  
Laing on their 52nd  
Anniversary. Bud  
retired from NBC in  
1984 after a total of  
27 years of service.*



## Peacock North Dues and Membership

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

At NBC from \_\_\_\_\_ 'til \_\_\_\_\_ Dept. \_\_\_\_\_

New Membership ☐

Renewal ☐

**Dues: \$20 Per Year  
Year 2002 IS DUE NOW**

Additional \$10 donations (if able) appreciated this year to cover new operating expenses.

**Make check payable to Peacock North.**

**Mailing Address:**

PO Box 16755

Stamford, CT 06905

Open to NBC Employees with 15 Years or more service.

# From the Staff

The response from the membership to our first publication was overwhelming. This second publication was made possible by the dues monies collected and also enhanced by the additional \$10 that many of you included in your payment. You have encouraged us to keep the Peacock "flying", so we are arranging a spring luncheon next May and ask that you make plans to attend.

On January 1, 2002, annual dues will again be due and with your continued support, we will publish quarterly newsletters. The articles you submitted to us have been great and those that were not included this time, will appear later. To keep publishing and mailing costs down, we needed to limit the number of pages we produced. As we increase our membership, we will be able to print unlimited amounts of pictures and stories.

A big thank you from the bottom of our hearts! Hope to see you at the luncheon in May, 2002.

*Marilyn Altman, Lenny Stucker and Jim Marshall*

## JEOPARDY QUIZ

Answer as seen on Jeopardy  
March 2001

### Sports Category

CAMERAMAN  
LOU GERARD  
CAPTURED  
THIS MAN'S  
GESTURES AT HIS  
GAME-6-WINNING  
HOME RUN IN 1975

Question: Who is Carlton Fisk?

Peacock North  
P.O. Box 16755  
Stamford, CT 06905



**First Class Mail**

Dues are due—  
January 1, 2002