

# Flashback 30 years

February 12, 2012

by Joe D'Aleo

In 1980 I left teaching and joined John Coleman, Senior producer Pete Kouris, artist/producers Jeanne Sokol, Pam Peniston and Claudia Watson to produce the award winning Good Morning America weather shows working out of the WLS studio in Chicago. I took that chance because John shared the dream they had of doing something much more important and exciting – a cable TV Weather Channel. We worked from before midnight to early morning putting together the morning segments and features. After the last show we would retreat upstairs to the office or down to the restaurant for breakfast to discuss the kind of product, technology, people and programming this new 24 hour 7 day a week non-stop weather show would require. John would often then fly off to some distant city to talk to venture capitalists about funding this idea, returning in time to go home, shower, change and go back to work. A lot of VCs shut the door in his face although a few showed some interest including one that had us beginning to look for housing in nearby Naperville. Just about a year later, after I began feeling like Sancho Panza following Don Quixote on his impossible dream quest, Landmark Communications jumped on the idea and we suddenly found ourselves in Las Vegas in late summer 1981 with Tom Skilling, Joe Witte and John Milan doing a video sample that would be used to sell this idea with a launch set for the NAB May 2, 1982.



By December, over 30 years ago I was fortunate to be part of the advance team that put together the Weather Channel meteorological staff. In December 1981 and January 1982, John Coleman and I with the help of two initial former students (Peter DiAngelo and Brian Durst) began interviewing and hiring the 64 meteorologists that put together what became a cable success story with a launch May 2, 1982. Other 'pioneers' were assembled to do the same for other departments. Hugh Eaton came on board with Doyle Thompson and Doug Holliday. Meanwhile it was recognized to displace the radar and voice over NOAA Weather Radio, we needed to provide a very local forecast. Alan Galumbeck, other consultants including Todd Glickman from WSI worked to develop the STAR and with the NWS to reformat local forecasts, watches and warnings so they can be addressable. No small task to turn the NWS oceanliner around in 3 months to service a private company. It met with a lot of internal NWS resistance but we succeeded.

These early TWC staffers and many other people in other critical support departments (engineering, master control, traffic, production), deserve enormous credit taking a chance on what most in the business said was a sure to fail idea - a 24 x 7 weather network. Many left secure positions at local weather companies or TV stations to take a chance on this cable idea, many at least in meteorology because of their respect for John Coleman. They worked long hours and rough schedules to build this non-stop service, a continuous weathercast that has run for what will soon be 30 years. TWC survived and thrived while 'sure things' like the Satellite News Channel, the Travel Channel and others failed.

JC knew that most people were not going to watch all day long like they might other long form programming but would come to us whenever they needed a weather update or when weather threatened. Many say it has lost a lot of the original charm and value.

I still have the story boards for the initial weather features/segments of the network. I know the graphics and video capabilities have come a long way since then but many at the expense of the meteorology and the initial enthusiasm and charm and personality of the original staff. It has become entertainment and PC weather/climate reporting.

I found a few images you might find interesting. See how many of the names you can attach to the faces.

Here was John Coleman and I at the WLS studio in Chicago at State and Lake Street where we prepared the Good Morning America weather segment.



Above are some photos from an early get together. JC top left and with Charlie Levy top right. My LSC students Peter Diangelo and Andre Bernier (now FOX 8 Cleveland) bottom left. The late great Norm Sebastian, another student of mine and ALB TV met leaning over. Vince Miller and Peter Diangelo again bottom right.

Below John C, Ron Gonsler, Gary Ley, Dale Bryan, Al Lipson, Matt Crowther, Bruce Edwards, with Betty Gewin and Bill Schubert.



And so many familiar faces below again from the party and picnic. Pete, Jeanne, Hugh Eaton, my wife. See who you can name from the bottom row.



Here I am in the met lab with the hanging fax maps. You may recognize the late, great Charlie Welsh. In partial view are Craig Weber and Bill Keneely front



This was me in my back yard in Marietta in the spring. Those were azaleas not snow.



Here I am today. I don't think I changed much?

