

Tad Felts - 2

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Where is your student's classroom? Down at the school, first hall on the right? Maybe there is a different kind of classroom outside the school where students can also learn. Today, in the conclusion of our two-part series on a legendary Kansas broadcaster, we'll meet a man who has accompanied students on an annual educational trip for three decades. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Last week we learned that Tad Felts is the long-time news and sports director at radio stations KKAN and KQMA in Phillipsburg. In addition to his regular duties at the radio station, each spring he accompanies local students on a school-sanctioned educational trip back east. The first trip was in 1984 and it went so well that Tad has gone every year since.

Students and teachers ride a bus to Gettysburg, New York, and Washington DC. Tad does broadcasts for the folks back home. "I'll say, 'We're walking down Broadway' or 'Here we are at Times Square,'" he said.

One year when the Iraq war had just begun and security was extremely tight, Tad and the students were walking by the Saudi Arabian embassy when he spotted an interesting design on the embassy wall. Tad wanted to take a picture and sent the students on ahead, but when he stepped off the sidewalk for a closeup, two Secret Servicemen in black suits immediately approached him. Then three Arab security guards came out. They interrogated him for a half-hour before letting him go. "I had visions of being flown off to Saudi Arabia," Tad said.

Ironically, just two weeks previously Tad had done an interview with a Phillipsburg-area Air Force pilot who was flying KC-135 airplanes to Iraq. As a souvenir, the pilot gave Tad some Saudi currency which Tad put in his wallet. He was still carrying that currency while in Washington DC. "If those security guys had checked my wallet and found Saudi money, I might still be there," Tad said.

Tad is now 81. He still works 60 or so hours a week at the radio station, reports on news and sports, and does his daily morning radio show.

"I get up at a quarter to four every day," Tad said. "I've never been late to work in all my years."

"I've had chances to go elsewhere, but I just love the area," Tad said. "There are so many friends I've made."

Two years ago, Tad had surgery on his back. The doctor said, "No more sitting for hours doing play-by-play at game after game." But the doctor said Tad could still go to the games as long as he moves around, so Tad keeps going to the games and helping out.

"If you're ever in Phillipsburg and you mention the name Tad Felts, you won't find anyone who doesn't know him," said Steve Smethers, associate director of the A.Q. Miller School of Journalism and Mass Communications at K-State. "Tad is a well-known broadcaster and community leader who has spent most of his life working for the betterment of Phillipsburg and Phillips County. Tad and I crossed paths in the broadcasting business back in the day when I was part owner and general manager of another station in the region," Steve said. "KKAN-KQMA Radio has played an integral

role in the lives of people in the Phillipsburg area, and Tad has always been a driving force behind that station's programming and its scope of community service."

That's part of the reason that Tad has won so many awards, including numerous Phillips County Extension Council Distinguished Service Awards and a three-time Kansas Sports Broadcaster of the Year – quite a record for someone from the rural community of Phillipsburg, population 2,602 people. Now, that's rural.

Where is your student's classroom? Down at the school, first hall on the right? Tad Felts has been part of a different kind of classroom, where students learn with a first-hand trip to Gettysburg, New York, and the nation's capitol. We commend Tad Felts for making a difference with a remarkable career in radio and service to students and community. This classroom goes from Phillipsburg to Gettysburg and beyond.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.