

Richard Baker

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

Perspective. One's perspective on how he or she sees things can make all the difference. Today we'll meet a Kansas broadcaster who has shared an educational perspective with hundreds of students and thousands of listeners across our state. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Richard Baker is a longtime news director for the K-State Radio Network where he produced daily news plus a weekly radio program called Perspective. Richard is also an instructor in the Department of Communications and Agricultural Education.

Richard's father was career military and served in World War II and Korea. Richard was born in the rural community of Seneca, population 2,039 people. Now, that's rural. The family later moved to Manhattan when his father served at Fort Riley.

Richard went to Manhattan High. As a kid, he mowed lawns, and that's how he met a man named Ralph Titus who would become a lifelong mentor. Ralph worked for the K-State Radio Network.

Richard went to K-State but was unsure of his career choice. "I had not a clue," Richard said. "I didn't enjoy studying and I didn't enjoy tests, but I loved learning things," he said.

One day a fraternity brother said to him, "You talk all the time. Have you ever considered radio?" With that inauspicious encouragement, Richard decided to give radio a try. He found he enjoyed it. He took some classes and in the summer, got his first radio job at KGNO in Dodge City for eighty-five dollars a week. He later worked for KVGB in Great Bend.

Richard came back to northeast Kansas to take a job with KJCK in Junction City, where he was also able to finish his degree. He went on to graduate school at K-State and got a job as a student reporter doing news for the K-State Radio Network.

His next career step was a fascinating one. He went to work for a historically black music radio station in Omaha. "I've always loved soul music," Richard said. He was typically the only Caucasian in the room, but he got to emcee concerts for groups such as The Spinners and Earth, Wind, and Fire.

In 1977, he returned to Manhattan where he joined the K-State Radio Network as news director. The university's public radio station was called KSAC and was later called KKSU.

At this station, he was re-united with his mentor, the late Ralph Titus. "Everything I do was influenced by Ralph," Richard said. "He had a way of asking thoughtful questions which really helped me improve."

In addition to the one o'clock and five o'clock news on each weekday, Richard produced a weekly half-hour program called Perspective. This allowed a more in-depth exploration of key issues of the day.

Of all the interviews he has done through the years, which is his favorite one? “Every time I do an interview, it’s my new favorite,” Richard said. He has never lost that zest for learning.

In 2002, he took on the additional responsibility of teaching a communications class. “I try to incorporate diversity, management, and ethics into my classes,” Richard said.

In December 2018, Richard is retiring from K-State after 41 years. At 41 years times 52 Perspective programs produced weekly, that means he has produced more than 2,000 of those programs.

“There’s probably no one who has touched the lives of more Kansans than Richard Baker,” said Dr. Steve Smethers, associate director of K-State’s A. Q. Miller School of Journalism and Mass Communications. “Whether through local broadcasting or through Extension’s radio outreach, Richard has been a longstanding voice in Kansas community journalism and he has provided information that has affected the lives of every man, woman and child in this state,” he said. Dr. Smethers concluded: “Just as so many who have been part of K-State’s radio legacy, Richard was a valued voice of the KSAC/KKSU radio station, and he will never be forgotten.”

Perspective. It makes a huge difference in how we see issues. We commend Richard Baker for making a difference by keeping listeners informed and students enlightened about the key issues of the day. Through the years, his programming has provided a very important perspective.

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