

Interviewee: Dr. J. Wayne Reitz

B: This is an interview with Dr. J. Wayne Reitz on WUFT history. Dr. Reitz, could you please give us your recollection on the beginnings of Channel 5, WUFT?

R: May I ask you first of all, what was the year it started broadcasting?

B: 1957.

R: O.K. When I became president on April 1, 1955, it was not long thereafter when John Allen, who was the executive vice president, mentioned that we should start thinking about a T.V. station for the university. I told him that I thought it was a good idea and for him to pursue it. This he did very effectively and very diligently. First we looked for a location, which we decided would be in the stadium, as a part of the journalism school. Then, of course, the problem was to get the license and the funding. I do not remember the details, but John, as I recall, did a very effective job in bringing it to fruition. Our first broadcast was in 1957.

B: It appears that at the beginning, both under your administration and Dr. Miller's, the university did not seem to be making an all-out effort to obtain Channel 5 and put the station on the air.

R: Well, this I do not recollect. I do not know about Dr. Miller's administration at all, but I know John Allen brought it up and I said, let's move. Maybe we did not move as fast as some people thought we should, I do not know. But if we did not, it was probably because of the necessary funding or the possibility of getting a channel assigned and a permit in an expeditious fashion.

B: When Channel 5 went on the air, programming plans included college-level credit courses broadcast on WUFT. What changed that original concept, do you have any idea?

R: I think it was just a plain case of demand and the lack of interest on the part of the professorial staff and perhaps students. At the time we started broadcasting, there was a great national movement afoot thinking that educational television was just going to be the solution to the shortage of university professors. The Ford Foundation, for example, set up that national T.V. broadcasting unit out of Purdue University that covered all of the Midwest. They were giving courses by television. Our own John Baxter in chemistry here was chosen and financed by the Ford Foundation to develop a national beginning course in chemistry, which he broadcasted every morning for a year. There was another person nationally, I forget where he was, but chosen to do the same thing in a physics course. So we had nationally running the chemistry course and the physics course. Many universities set up methods whereby students could listen to them and take examinations and get

credit. John Baxter, as a result of this effort, spent year in Brazil for the Ford Foundation and also went to India. There was a great surge. Governor LeRoy Collins thought that educational television was going to be the solution to a lot of our teaching problems. But with the passage of time, it just sort of faded away. It is just one of those things--I do not know if it has ever been carefully analyzed as to why that happened, but it happened. The programming of WUFT is quite different than it was in its beginning.

B: Looking at the original concepts of WUFT and educational television, did you think that WUFT was meeting the role laid down by the Board of Control when they authorized University of Florida Television?

R: Frankly, I do not recall just what the role was that was laid down by the Board. It was probably one, though, that we wanted to make as great a use of it as possible as an instructional device. That was probably inherent in it, and probably the most motivating force in our getting state funds to the extent that we were able to get them. If that was the chief function as laid down by the Board, then the program has changed tremendously.

B: You mentioned funding. Was funding of WUFT a problem for you as university president? And did some of the funding come from other than regular budgeting, such as budget items for other departments, or discretionary funds?

R: In those days, budgeting and getting funds was a difficult proposition regardless, but particularly for something that was new. I presume that we got some state funds, possibly we had some allocated through our discretionary funds, and I believe we also got some funding from the Ford Foundation in the initial phases--particularly for equipment. This I am not sure of.

B: As an educator, do you think that WUFT could better serve the needs of the Florida public and university during the early period and now? And if so, how?

R: When you consider the way it has evolved and the shift away from direct instruction--which was contemplated--I think it is now more responsive to the general wishes, desires, and market demand of the listening public than was the original design. I do not listen to it a great deal, but I listen to public television a great deal more than any other station, and it seems to me that WUFT has done a good job of meeting the needs of the people from what you might call a general education--a general extension-type of function--a service function of the university to the general public, rather than being an instructional arm to students. Perhaps the latter--being an instructional arm to students--could be given some further review here after twenty-five years to see if we may have neglected an opportunity. I do not know. I know that there has been this transition and I know that the general public supports it. In terms of high-quality programming where you do not have to put up with a lot of advertising--most of advertising is just such nonsense anyway--people appreciate and like this type of programming. It is a laudable function that the university is rendering. The only thing I would suggest is to take another look at it as an instructional factor to undergraduate and graduate students.

B: Along that line, do you think that WUFT should reinstate high school or college-credit courses; or operate more in competition with commercial stations in such areas as news?

R: I think, as I indicated a moment ago, that we ought take another look at the validity of it as an instructional medium. From the standpoint of news, other than to let journalism students get some practice, I would just as soon take my news someplace else. I frankly do not think that this is a great contribution. I do not see any point in WUFT competing with the news media insofar as news items are concerned, except as it might apply to university matters.

B: In reading the material in the archives, it appears that there was much support for the concept of E.T.V. among the state's broadcasters. Do you think this is true, or did some of the broadcasters attempt to shoot down E.T.V.?

R: I just do not know. I have no feeling insofar as that question is concerned.

B: Was the Florida Educational Television Commission active in the beginning of WUFT? And in what way and what happened to the Commission?

R: Here again, I do not recall. I did not even know that we had a commission. As to whether it was an influential body, John Allen could have answered that if he were still alive.

B: Do you think that WUFT should produce more local programs of an educational nature for distribution to other state stations, since that was part of the original purpose as outlined by the Board of Control? Or has the need for in-state production of programming disappeared?

R: Frankly, I do not know how much in the way of producing local programs that WUFT is now involved in. I think this should have been a continuing function and I would assume that it has been, providing certain educational programs of the adult extension type. From the standpoint of instruction, I think this needs to be reviewed to see if there is an opportunity for networking certain types of instructional programs for community colleges--and maybe even high schools--wherein the University of Florida could render a service. Incidentally, in speaking of the early purpose of WUFT as announced by the Board of Control, there was, in addition to using it as an instructional medium, the idea that it would be a training ground for our students in journalism. I do not think I mentioned that. That is, of course, a continuing part and function of a state university where there is a journalism school--to use the T.V. station as an opportunity for students.

B: Ray Weimer said one of the problems of putting Channel 5 on the air--and I am paraphrasing here--was that the entire concept of E.T.V. was a new ballgame and that nobody knew the rules. Do you agree?

R: Well, I guess you could say that nobody knew the rules because we did not have any to

speak of. I think in terms of concepts, there was a considerable amount of uniformity--as a training device for students, as an educational medium, as an opportunity to get high-quality programs broadcasted to the citizenry without their having to be confronted with a lot of advertising. I think oftentimes we do not realize just how acceptable educational television is, for the simple reason that you do not have advertising. But, of course, basically it is the quality of the programs that people enjoy and appreciate--educational lectures, music, etc.--that is so superior to what we normally find on regular commercial television.

B: Prior to your administration, it was suggested by President Miller that WRUF attempt to get the license for Channel 5 and operate the station as a commercial station. Did any thought of this carry over to your administration?

R: Not that I recall. I recall that John Allen's philosophy and position was that this was to be a pure and simple educational television station, and there was to be no commercialization of it whatsoever.

B: If you had it to do all over again, what would you do differently concerning Channel 5?

R: Frankly, as I have observed Channel 5 in its evolution, I do not recall anything I would have done differently, except possibly that we should have moved more quickly. We may well have moved as fast as we could under budgetary and licensing restrictions. If you look at the evolution, I think it has evolved appropriately and in response to the will and wishes of the people. But, as I said, we need to take another look at its role, particularly from the standpoint of its being an instructional medium. I am not saying that it should move into that direction, but I think that we ought to look at this to see about the possibility.

B: Who would you suggest to do this review and look at the situation as far as educational programming is concerned?

R: I think the president of the university, perhaps along with the commissioner of education, might sit down and appoint a high-level committee of five good educators to look into this matter. To do so, I would assume they would have to get a little funding.