

Charlie Braico Interview – July 2, 2024

Communications Workers of America Oral History Project

Interviewee: Braico, Charlie

Interviewer: Jeff Rechenbach

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Jeff [00:00:00] Today we've got Charlie Braico with us. Charlie's at his home in the Washington DC area. We've also got Hannah Goldman in Brooklyn and Debbie Goldman in Washington DC as well. Charlie is the vice-president of the National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians [NABET], president of that and vice-president of CWA. Charlie, thanks for agreeing to do this. Today is July 2nd, 2024 and it's a little after one in the afternoon. [Jeff Rechenbach was in Cleveland, Ohio. The interview was conducted over zoom.]

Charlie [00:00:35] Thank you for inviting me. I'm happy to help out and contribute whatever I can to the to the project, so thanks.

Jeff [00:00:42] We really appreciate you doing this. I think it's important for us to capture as much of CWA history as we can and this is a great way to do it. It's been a lot of fun for us as well so there's a selfish motivation to this, too. Charlie, let's start off. Talk about your childhood. Where were you born and when and talk a little bit about that.

Charlie [00:01:09] Thanks, Jeff. Born and raised in Chicago, Illinois back in 1957. I'll be 67 years-old in October. Had a great childhood and upbringing on the southwest side of Chicago, White Sox fan.

Jeff [00:01:28] I'll be watching the White Sox play the Guardians tomorrow night.

Charlie [00:01:32] Okay. Are you going to be at the game or just on television?

Jeff [00:01:35] I will be at the game.

Charlie [00:01:36] Okay. Well, good luck to the Guardians.

Jeff [00:01:39] Thank you. I think the White Sox have cashed in the season already.

Charlie [00:01:43] Yeah, I think so. But anyway, born and raised and lived all my life in Chicago until about eight years ago when I relocated to [Washington] DC. I went to college originally on a track for pre-med or research biology and shifted toward photography and broadcast television. I was going to minor in them but I became so excited with television studios and the technology behind broadcast television that I changed my major and made that my career. And so, in 1979 I started working for ABC television in Chicago. As a requirement of being a technical engineer, we needed to join the union. The union at that time was NABET, the National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians. It was a standalone union at that time in 1979 and 1980. So I joined and became a happy dues-paying member and enjoyed all the benefits of the collective bargaining agreement and the many protections and benefits that the union offered. I was approached about 8 or 10 years into my career by a couple of the union leaders who asked me if I wanted to get involved with the union and at a low level, become a steward or an alternative steward. I had some very limited experience with that when I worked for the postal service. I was an alternate steward in my shop working for the United States Postal Service, but didn't have a really broad base of experience. It was very low level, very introductory. But in any case, I was approached by some of my colleagues at ABC who were active in the union and asked me if I wanted to become a shop steward. I kind of reluctantly said yes because I was newly married and just starting a family and pretty busy with my career and my home life. But I knew the union had been good to me and so I

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wanted to give a little something back by becoming an alternate steward. So I served in that capacity for a few years, and then --

Jeff [00:03:51] Okay, let me put the brakes on you because we're going to go way back. I'm going to put the train in reverse a little bit here. Talk about your education growing up. Public school? Parochial school? What was your schooling like?

Charlie [00:04:08] Yeah. Thank you. I'm sorry if I skipped over that.

Jeff [00:04:10] No, no, no. That's fine.

Charlie [00:04:12] Raised Roman Catholic on the on the southwest side of Chicago. [In] Chicago you're identified by a couple of things, territory and regional. Obviously north side, south side for the baseball teams. But on [a] more granular level, if you're raised Roman Catholic in the Chicago metro area, you tend to associate with the parish that you grew up in. Otherwise, if you're of different faiths or not faith-based, you often identify with the neighborhood or the park, Gage Park, Humboldt Park, Lincoln Park, different geographical areas of the city. But I was raised on the southwest side in a parish named Little Flower. It was a Catholic parish, and they had grade school, junior high, and high school. So my educational background was based in my parish school. Eight years of grade school at Little Flower Parish and high school. Midway through high school, the archdiocese made the decision to close that particular high school. And so I transferred to Marist High School, which is a Jesuit, all-boys school on the southwest side and finished my high school period and then went on to college at Saint Xavier's College, a Catholic college on the southwest side of Chicago. And as I indicated earlier, my original interest was in biology and medicine and science. But when I got hooked on photography and television production and electronic media, I changed and I transferred to Columbia College Chicago. That's where I got my degree in broadcast communications.

Jeff [00:05:57] And what did your parents do for a living?

Charlie [00:05:59] My mom was a homemaker and raised our family and my father was a court reporter. Although not the typical court reporter in the courtroom with stenography. He had a private business and did a lot of affidavits and interviews and legal work for insurance companies and private law firms. He would go out in the field and record testimony and affidavits and that sort of thing. So he had his own private business.

Jeff [00:06:30] Siblings?

Charlie [00:06:32] One sister, three years younger. She had much of the same background in the Catholic schools. She went on to work for Oprah Winfrey's company, Harpo Productions, originally as a tape librarian. Then she graduated, was promoted to the human resources department, and ultimately finished her career with Harpo Productions as the vice-president of human resources for Oprah's parent company, Harpo.

Jeff [00:07:01] Wow. So you both migrated into broadcast communications of one form or another. That's remarkable. So did she look up to her big brother? Is that what drove her there?

Charlie [00:07:17] She did. Yeah. She had started a family also in the early [19]80s. And she was working for an apartment complex as leasing manager. And, honestly, she called me one day and said, I, I can't take this job anymore. I'm through with apartment leasing. If I have to do this one more week, I'm going to pull my hair out. Is there anything in television at all that you can refer me to? She had taken a couple of courses in radio production at Columbia College, but never finished because she was starting a family and the load was too much. So she had a little bit of exposure to radio broadcast, but never finished her degree. So she called me and said, is there anything you can find for me in television anywhere? And I said, let me make a couple of phone calls. Oprah and her team had just left our TV station to launch her new production company. They used to produce the show at our television station at ABC in Chicago. But Oprah moved her operation. She bought her own studio complex on the west side of Chicago, and decided to move her operation to a new studio so she could have more control. They really picked up and moved the entire operation wholesale to a new facility and then they were looking to staff up. And so the timing was good for my sister because she had it with the apartment leasing and she called me and I said let me see if I can do something for you. So I made a phone call and got her an interview, and then they liked what they saw in her. They appreciated what she had to offer and they hired her. The rest of her career track was really all on her own. She impressed all the right people and checked all the right boxes and enjoyed a very successful, thirty-year career with Harpo.

Jeff [00:08:58] That's a good big brother. So, you mentioned that you worked for the post office for a while. What can you tell us about that experience? And you were an assistant steward in that role as well?

Charlie [00:09:12] Yeah. I took a summer relief job or vacation relief job with our local post office in the suburb of Chicago where we lived, Oak Lawn, Illinois. My father had seen a posting for a letter carrier job for summer relief, and he thought it would be a good opportunity for me. The pay and benefits were excellent. I was trying to help with costs associated with my college education, trying to help the family out. So I took the job and became a member of the American Letter Carriers first. I did a one summer stint with the post office and enjoyed the work and enjoyed the pay and the benefits. So I transferred to an indoor facility, a center where they did bulk sorting and processing of mail for the southwest suburbs of Chicago. Then I transferred to the American Postal Workers Union. It was a different union for the inside workers. I spent about 3 or 4 years there. During that time, again, somebody approached me and said, hey, you want to get involved in this union thing. So I signed up to be an alternate steward. I worked there at the post office on the overnight shift to help put myself through college. And so it was very good experience. Then when I transferred to Columbia College to start studying broadcast and television, [that] was when I left the post office and went to work for ABC.

Debbie [00:10:47] Can I jump in? Maybe I'm shortcutting a question Jeff that you were going to ask. I wanted to learn a little bit more about the name Braico, B-R-A-I-C-O and your parents ethnic background. You said you grew up on the southwest side of Chicago. Chicago is a very segregated city by neighborhood, by race, by ethnicity often. So tell us a little bit about your parents' ethnic background. You told us the parish [where you lived]. What was the name of the community and what was its ethnicity?

Charlie [00:11:31] The parish was Little Flower. The name of the community is Gresham. My father was Italian-American, and he grew up on the near south side of Chicago, what is now Chinatown in Chicago. But when he was a young guy, he was born in 1922, so when he was a

young man growing up there, it was predominantly Italian-American in that neighborhood. And then Chinese families began to move in, and through his young adolescent life into his teens before he went to World War II it was really a blended community of Chinese-Americans and Italian-Americans. And according to him and the rest of the family, very harmonious. It was really lovely mix of a neighborhood. It's now predominantly Chinese. In fact, it's Chicago's Chinatown. But that's where he grew up. My mother is of Polish-American descent. She grew up in the in the deep south suburbs south of Chicago, in a town called Momence, Illinois. She was Polish-American, and in her early adult life, worked for Johnson and Johnson making bandages and medical supplies. Then when she and my father married and started a family, she chose to work from home and raise the children and take care of the household. My father was a World War II veteran and when he came back from the war and married my mother, he began his own business. But for a while he was a member of IBEW because he worked at Sportsman's racetrack in Chicago. He was a bet taker and worked at the betting windows printing out the betting tickets. That was an IBEW job. So he was a member of IBEW for a while. When he went on to open his own business he didn't have an association with the union. So, there isn't a strong, deep connection to unions in my family. A little bit of a connection, but not a very deep connection.

Debbie [00:14:01] And the southwest side, that was not people who worked in the steel mills? This was first, second generation, mostly a white working- and middle-class neighborhood?

Charlie [00:14:13] Yes, a middle-class, working neighborhood. Lots of different trades. Chicago is one of those cities that requires that city workers, police, fire, streets and sanitation all reside within the city limits. So the southwest side, the neighborhood I grew up in, were a lot of school teachers, police officers and fire department workers, first responders, manufacturing, blue-collar, middle-class, some professionals. We had some doctors and attorneys that lived in the neighborhood, but mostly working-class. The folks that worked in the steel mills tended to be from the southeast side, which was closer to where their work was. Debbie, you have a connection to Illinois, don't you?

Debbie [00:15:00] Yeah. I grew up in the suburbs of Chicago.

Charlie [00:15:03] The northern suburbs?

Debbie [00:15:04] Yes.

Charlie [00:15:05] Okay. Yeah. And I remember that.

Jeff [00:15:10] Okay, so you've graduated from Columbia. Do you get hired right away by ABC Chicago?

Charlie [00:15:19] I was very fortunate in my senior year they were offering internships at various television stations. A couple of the instructors that I had in my junior and senior year at Columbia College were actually directors and producers at ABC television. And so I got a little bit of a help from them when I applied for the internship. I mentioned to them that I was applying for an internship at ABC and they helped to put in a good word for me. So my first entrance into professional television was as an intern at ABC in early in 1979, and I worked as a sort of a clerical and an intern in the editorial department. Back in those days television stations, you may recall, used to run editorials where the general manager of the television station or some senior management person would get on and give an editorial about the price of gas or the transit line or

the teachers' strike or something happening in the community. So I worked in the editorial department for six months and then there were some jobs opening up in technical engineering, which was one of the things I was interested in, and so they hired me as a summer /vacation relief camera operator in the studio. In those days, in the late [19]70s, it was typical that you'd get hired April through November for the vacation season, and then you'd be furloughed in November. If you were lucky, you were brought back the next year for another tour of vacation relief work. That sometimes happened two or three or four or five times before you were hired permanent. I was very fortunate in 1979 and 1980, there was a huge explosion in electronic news gathering. Electronic news gathering was sort of outpacing the old film crews in the field. There was big growth at ABC and other television stations in Chicago to bring on more staff. So as my summer tour came to an end and I was about to get furloughed, they offered me a full-time staff job. And so I went, really quite fortunately, seamlessly from the internship to the summer relief job to the full-time job, and forty years later, I was still working for ABC in Chicago. So my career path was quite fortunate.

Jeff [00:17:51] We haven't interviewed anybody else from NABET at this point. Talk a little bit about what some of those jobs are like. What is a camera job like in the late [19]70s, early [19]80s and then beyond, wherever your trajectory took you in terms of work life?

Charlie [00:18:07] I have to say it was just terrifically exciting and I was really very fortunate for the opportunities that came before me. I started out, as I mentioned, as a studio camera person and, even though I had training at Columbia College and a lot of studio and control room training, and they gave us a really broad educational experience, you learn so much more on the job as I'm sure all of you know and understand. I had very good training at the college and the internship was beneficial. But when I first stepped onto the studio floor and put on the headset and stood behind the camera for the first time as a professional at the top television station in Chicago, it was pretty exciting. I worked a while as a studio camera operator and then expanded into other areas -- videotape, film projection, audio/sound management, studio lighting, and then started to work out in the field. I think my first or second year on the job, I was assigned to Monday Night Football, which at that time aired on ABC. You may recall it was the only primetime football show at the time with folks like Howard Cosell, Don Meredith and Frank Gifford. The assignment on Monday Night Football was pretty exciting. I also had the opportunity to work in the field for ABC on Wide World of Sports. And then in 1984 had the opportunity to go to the summer Olympic games in Los Angeles and spent six weeks working for ABC there which led to my first National Emmy Award, my only national Emmy Award. The technical crew was awarded an Emmy for technical excellence in 1984 for putting on the summer Olympics. So, it was those sorts of experiences that really built my career foundationally from 1979 to 1984,[19]85. And then when I returned to Chicago, I did some electronic newsgathering in the field, a lot of field production work and of course a lot of studio work, primarily local news broadcasts. Eventually [I] become a Technical Director (TD) at ABC, which was sort of the top level of the technical engineering crew. When you make it to TD, you've sort of hit the top tier. And so, a really very fortunate, exciting and fun career path. I had the opportunity to work with lots of different television personalities and politicians over the years on lots of different broadcasts, sports, news, special events, parades, and telethons., It really ran the gamut. It was pretty exciting.

Jeff [00:21:00] So, talk a little bit more about all the sort of behind -- And I apologize earlier, for years I've been saying the National Association of Broadcast Engineers and Technicians and you

corrected me today. But you're the first person that's corrected me. I've done it wrong all these years.

Charlie [00:21:21] I apologize for doing that.

Jeff [00:21:26] Oh, no. I should have been corrected years ago. But talk a little bit more about that work. You mentioned you were a technical director. So, for a lot of us outside of the studio, we may think of those as being supervisory jobs and would be outside of a bargaining unit per se. What was the structure inside the studio in terms of its representation?

Charlie [00:21:49] It was supervisory in nature.

Jeff [00:22:36] Yes, sort of the overall structure behind the camera in a studio environment.

Charlie [00:22:43] So a typical television crew is -- of course a lot of things have changed with technology and consolidation and automation. But in those days, a typical television crew was three or four camera operators on the studio floor, a lighting director, some utility folks that would help manage things on the studio floor, hand out microphones, make sure the cable was dressed, make sure that the studio was operating and functioning. Then up in the control room you'd have an audio engineer who would mix the sound, a director and producer who typically were not in the NABET bargaining unit. They may have been in other bargaining units, the director, the producer. There was a teleprompter operator that rolls the script for the person reading. The teleprompter job was covered by NABET at that time. Then you had support people in other areas, editors that would put together the video and the audio for packages. We had videotape playback. We actually still had in the early [19]80s film playback. There were still some things shot on film for news. We hadn't converted all of our afternoon and evening movies. The 10 PM movie, the 11:00 movie on Saturday night. Those were all still on 16 millimeter film and those were operated and run by NABET technicians. People in the graphics department that would type up the lower thirds, you know, Charlie Braico, Jeff Rechenbach, sort of the graphics that you see. So, a whole cohort of people that would contribute to the broadcast. The technical director, to your point, was sort of a working supervisor, but remained in the bargaining unit. Everybody on the technical crew would report to the technical director. The TD is considered the crew chief. In the early days when I would work camera and then they trained me on some audio work and videotape and on the field, all of those were building blocks to eventually become a technical director. I was always taught, and I still believe, that to be a supervisor in that capacity, overseeing all of those other job functions and personnel, you have to know a bit about all of those things if you're going to be successful in becoming a supervisor or in this case a technical director. The background that I had, the opportunities that I had to do those different things was beneficial and eventually station management recognized that and I was promoted to technical director.

Jeff [00:25:20] Very cool. I do want to talk a little bit about some of these remote assignments that you did over the years and what that would be like. But let me ask you, what the evolution of the studio has been like over the past 40 years? I've done a couple of in-studio things here in town with some of the work I've done volunteer over the past few years and it doesn't seem like there's -- I mean, there was an automated camera. So talk a little bit about how that's changed.

Charlie [00:25:54] Yeah. The automation, and the advances in technology have certainly been one of our biggest enemies to the people that we represent, the work we do, and our trade jurisdiction.

Probably the earliest iteration of that was automated cameras, the robotic cameras in the studios. They developed the technology where a central control point could drive cameras around the studio floor. In the early days it was a little bit primitive. It was really a matter of just moving cameras to different positions on the studio floor. There was still an operator at the control console that would have to frame the shots and make framing adjustments. But over time, the automation advanced and then you could build in a series of templates so you could have for any camera or multiple cameras a single shot of a person, a two-shot of the anchors, of the desks, a wide shot of the studio. All these things could be programmed into a macro and at the touch of a button, the camera could fly across the floor and grab the shot needed and make the necessary adjustments. You might have had to do a little touch-up from the robotic operator, but that really compressed four jobs into one just as soon as that technology was reliable. Those four-studio camera persons that stood behind the cameras and moved them around in front of the shots, it all went into automation. You had only one person driving automation, so that was a huge change.

Debbie [00:27:24] What decade was that?

Charlie [00:27:26] That really started probably in the late [19]80s, early [19]90s, maybe 1989, 1990, [19]91, around that time.

Debbie [00:27:35] And what was the name of the ABC station in Chicago?

Charlie [00:27:40] WLS-TV, ABC-7 Chicago. It's funny, that's sort of another change, not really the technical aspect, but it used to be both in television and radio you were always identified by your call letters WLS-TV, WBBM-TV, and then it started to shift just to the channel numbers. So, even though WLS are still the official call letters, people refer to it now as ABC-7.

Debbie [00:28:13] And you always worked for the local station, never for the national ABC?

Charlie [00:28:18] I was based at the local station, but was called to duty for network operations frequently. So my work at the Olympics in 1984 was for ABC Sports, for the network. I was on assignment many times for ABC news and gathering news in the field, traveling around the country as a two-person news crew, gathering stories. The way the network news is set up is they have bureaus around the country. Chicago was a primary bureau for ABC News, and they would have electronic news crews that would be dispatched all over the Midwest, Des Moines, Iowa, Cleveland, a number of different cities. So I did some work for network news, a fair amount of work for ABC Sports. But primarily the local station was my main employer.

Jeff [00:29:13] How were those assignments made for sending somebody out, for example, to do the Olympics? I mean, obviously Channel 7, is still operating in Chicago while the Olympics are going on. Who decides who goes and who stays?

Charlie [00:29:29] In those days we didn't have what we now call freelance or daily hires. In those days, it was all staff employees at ABC. We didn't see daily hires on the scene until 1992. A little bit earlier at NBC, but at ABC, not until 1992 or so. So for something like the Olympics, the network had a large staff or large cohort of staff engineers out of New York, some out of Chicago, many out of Los Angeles that would do things like Monday Night Football, golf tournaments, Sunday Night Baseball. But when something big like the Olympics came along, they had to tap the stations for help so they could staff up something much larger, like the Olympics. And so in 1984 when the

summer games were coming up, the network called stations like WLS in Chicago and said, hey, we're going to need 18 people or 25 people from your station. We'll need five videotape people, seven camera persons, two audio technicians. They'd give them the list, and then local station management would look at the staff at WLS and say, all right, Charlie, does audio. He's not assigned to a regular show, he kind of floats between a couple of shows. Let's send him to the Olympics. We've got 3 or 4 camera people that we know do a lot of sports. We'll send those folks to the Olympics. And here's a couple of videotape engineers. We can spare them and backfill in other ways. So the request would come from the network for the number of people and then the station would make the determination. I drew a lucky straw and was assigned as Senior Audio at the Rose Bowl for international soccer games during the Olympics and spent six weeks in Los Angeles working for the network.

Jeff [00:31:26] So when that happens, are you covered under a national contract or are you still under your Chicago contract? And how are travel expenses, that sort of thing arranged?

Charlie [00:31:36] The arrangement between ABC and NABET, similar to NBC and NABET, is we that have a master collective bargaining agreement that covers terms and working conditions for our folks at ABC and NBC. The Master Agreements cover network operations, news, sports, entertainment and the owned-television stations. So, Channel 7 in New York, WABC, the news bureau in Washington, D.C -- Coincidentally, WJLA is not an owned-station of the network, and it happens to be a NABET shop but it's not covered by the ABC master agreement. But WLS in Chicago was, KABC Channel 7 in Los Angeles was covered by the master agreement, as well as KGO in San Francisco. The owned-stations and the network operations are all part of the master agreement. When New York called and said send us some people in Los Angeles, our terms and working conditions were covered by the same agreement whether we worked at the station or worked for the network. That's why there was the ability to move between those operations pretty seamlessly.

Jeff [00:33:16] So you've got this career in the broadcast industry. Talk now a little bit about getting tapped on the shoulder and being asked to become a steward for NABET.

Charlie [00:33:35] So, I'm sure the name is familiar to you Jeff. Ray Taylor was the president of NABET Local 41 in Chicago. Although when I met him, he was vice-president and grievance chairman. The president of Local 41 at that time was a gentleman by the name of Dan Delaney. Dan was president, Ray was vice-president and grievance chairperson for WLS and we had a cohort of stewards. Mr. Delaney was retiring and Mr. Taylor was about to move up to assume the presidency of the local, and there was some shifting around in the steward ranks. Someone else had to be promoted to grievance chairman to fill Ray's spot. So there was some internal movement and Ray and a couple of people literally cornered me in a hallway one day as I was walking through the studio complex, said, "come here, we want to talk to you." They pulled me over in a corner and said, "your union needs you. We'd like you to consider becoming an alternate steward for the studio group." And I said, "well, fellas, that's very nice of you, but I'm pretty busy starting a family and pretty busy with my career here. I'll help you guys out any way I can, I'm just not sure that I can make the steward commitment. I know there's a lot involved." They said, "well, we know you have a little bit of a background from your work in the Postal Service, you were an alternate steward there." By the way, how they found that out, I'm not sure, but they did. So they put the lean on me, if you will. They reminded me how beneficial being a member of the union was. I certainly

couldn't deny that. And I liked these guys. I was friends with these guys. So when they ask you to do them a favor, you comply. I got involved as an alternate steward for the night-time studio group, which was the shift I worked most frequently. Then the steward for that group moved on to do something else and shortly thereafter I became the steward. At that point in time, we probably had approximately 200 NABET technicians at a Channel 7 in Chicago. Technicians in field news operations, studio operations, morning shift, night shift. There was an overnight shift of master control people, videotape, graphics, etc. We also, and still do, represent news writers, desk assistants, and producers on the editorial side. So the folks that work in the newsroom are also members of the union. They have a separate contract within the master agreement and different stewards that represent them, but they're all part of the collective of Local 41 at WLS. And so, probably nearly 250 members altogether, but 185 or so technicians. I was an alternate steward for a brief period and then became a full-fledged steward, which gave me a seat on the executive board because in Chicago Local 41, if you're a steward, you are an executive board member, the two go hand-in-hand. I did that representational work for a few years, and then, Mr. Taylor tapped me on the shoulder and appointed me to the Local by-laws committee. That was a project I really had no experience in, but I enjoyed it immensely. One thing leads to another. You're on the executive board, you're on the by-laws committee, you're on the election committee, and then at some point, somebody put their hand on my shoulder and suggested I run for vice-president of the local. So that's sort of the trajectory for my work in the union.

Jeff [00:37:24] And just to understand a little bit more about Local 41, did 41 represent all of the network affiliates in the Chicagoland area?

Charlie [00:37:35] Local 41 represents ABC/WLS NBC/WMAQ, a number of smaller affiliate stations and production companies, about 9 or 10 in total. Places like the local Fox station, both Spanish language stations, Telemundo and Univision, as well as some local cable channels and a couple of production/crewing companies. At that time, the Local 41 membership base was approximately 1200 members.

Jeff [00:38:18] Well that's nice. So, you're now vice-president of the local. What does that job entail? Are you working full-time for the local union? Are you still working at ABC? What's that experience like?

Charlie [00:38:36] All officer positions at Local 41, with the exception of the president, are part-time positions and paid on a stipend. So, a part-time officer continues to work in their craft job full-time, and then helps out the local where they can. Like any vice-president, you're at the direction of the president. Whatever duties the president assigns you to is the work you are responsible for. Ray Taylor, as you may remember, was a terrific leader, a great mentor and somebody who liked to make sure that the union was going to grow internally with younger people. He was very focused on bringing new people into the fold and grooming them and giving them lots of different opportunities. When the next tap on the shoulder came and they asked me to become vice-president, Ray was terrific in bringing me on board with lots of things, organizing drives, first contract negotiations, grievance meetings, of course, arbitrations. He fully supported and mentored me for the 12 years that we were together as president and vice-president. I'm forever indebted to him. He was both my mentor and sort of a father figure through those growth years. He shared with me every trade secret, opened up all the books, made sure I had access to everything and had exposure to as much as possible. He was very gracious and generous in that way. And when he retired, he strongly encouraged me to succeed him as president.

Debbie [00:40:14] What year was that?

Charlie [00:40:17] I became Local 41 President in 2010. I first became VP in 1998, sort of reluctantly. There's a whole story behind that. I didn't really want to be the vice-president. I was happy in my career job at ABC and I knew the pressures that Ray was under because we had worked together on a lot of projects. I knew what the pressures of the job were. But, I got recruited to be VP and won that election and then Ray spent the next 12 years grooming me and mentoring me so that when he was ready to retire, he wanted to hand it over to me. And again, I was reluctant. I said, hey, listen, I'm happy as the vice-president, I think I'm doing an okay job in that role. But Ray, I don't want to be the president and I don't want to leave my TV job. I don't want the headaches that you have. We'll find somebody else to be the president and I'll support them fully. But I'm not inclined to take that offer. And he said, well, you're the natural choice. I said, no, no, there's nothing natural about it, my friend. I'll support you any way I can, but I don't want to be the president. And of course, that didn't last long and he wasn't going to take “no” for an answer. So I'm sorry, Debbie, vice-president in 1998, and then, local president in 2010.

Jeff [00:41:38] Are you still technically an employee of ABC-7 on leave, or how does that work when you become president?

Charlie [00:41:45] When I became president, I went on full-time leave. And then just a couple of years ago, deciding I wasn't going to return to television, I exercised my option to retire, and so with respect to ABC, I'm retired now.

Jeff [00:42:03] You mentioned one of the tasks that you helped out on was organizing. Can you tell us a little bit about organizing in the broadcast industry in your era?

Charlie [00:42:14] The particular project I referenced was one of the Spanish language stations in Chicago, Univision, which had previously been unrepresented. The technical employees there were pretty dissatisfied with their conditions. The other Spanish language station in Chicago, Telemundo station, was under NABET representation. So the employees at Univision were comparing working conditions and salaries to their counterparts at Telemundo and said, “hey, those folks are doing a lot better and they've got a union, so let's call up these people at NABET. They contacted us, and of course Ray was interested and then pulled me in right away and asked me to help with the organizing drive. I knew very little about organizing at that point, but I learned a lot. We worked with that unit, brought them on board, held an election, and we were successful. Ray immersed me in the initial contract negotiations so I could see how a new collective bargaining agreement was developed. That was beneficial and educational. I'm still very close with that group. Univision Chicago was the first group that I was actively involved in organizing, the first group that I was able to help deliver a new contract to, and so that one for me is very special.

Jeff [00:43:41] Sure.

Debbie [00:43:42] And what year was that?

Charlie [00:43:44] 1996.

Debbie [00:43:46] And by then you're part of CWA, correct?

Charlie [00:43:49] Yes. We merged with CWA in [19]93 and [19]94.

Debbie [00:43:55] Okay. I'm sure Jeff will ask a lot about that. In terms of the organizing, did the District 4 organizer assist you or was this all driven by the NABET local?

Charlie [00:44:08] We were definitely in contact with District 4 and made them aware. I'm pretty sure Seth [Rosen] would have been the VP at that point. No, I'm sorry, Jeff, I guess you were.

Jeff [00:44:18] Yes I was. Seth [Rosen] was my organizing director.

Charlie [00:44:20] That's right. Ray and Seth had a close working relationship, so Seth was aware of the organizing drive, but I think we handled it internally for the most part. It was a relatively modest-sized unit, I think, 40 employees total. And we had a pretty good handle on it in Chicago, but I know that we stayed in contact with District 4 and your team there.

Debbie [00:44:49] You said in the [19]90s there were 1200 members in the local. When you took over in 2010, how many?

Charlie [00:44:59] By 2010, Local 41 had probably dropped to about 900 members.

Debbie [00:45:03] And when you moved on to the NABET presidency. When you left the local?

Charlie [00:45:13] In 2015, I think at that point, Local 41 measured 750 or 800 members. There had been some contraction because of automation and other operational changes.

Jeff [00:45:30] You mentioned earlier that your father was briefly an IBEW member. I seem to recall IBEW making some forays into broadcasting. Is that still an issue out there?

Charlie [00:45:46] IBEW represents workers at the CBS television network, and a number of the owned stations, similar to our master agreement. IBEW also represents workers at Fox Sports nationally. So when you're looking at an NFL game on a Sunday afternoon on Fox, the technicians behind the scenes are IBEW members. IBEW has a big presence with Fox Sports, FS1, CBS and CBS Sports. I'm not sure about their overall size, but I would estimate they're probably comparable to the national NABET membership, probably somewhere in the 10,000 member range. We compete here and there, but we haven't had the sort of skirmishes that we've had with IATSE [International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees] who has a foothold in some broadcast operations. IATSE and NABET square off frequently over new organizing opportunities.

Debbie [00:47:00] Particularly in New York?

Charlie [00:47:03] New York and nationally. Yes. IATSE has primarily been a theatrical and film union, that's part of their name. They started out in stage production, then expanded into film and motion picture production, and then when the film industry began to change, they wisely set their sights and their goals on broadcast television. That's where some of the conflicts with IATSE have come up, in their effort to break into broadcast television.

Debbie [00:47:48] Those membership drops are pretty significant. You talked about it in terms of automation. What were other factors that led to the decline?

Charlie [00:48:03] The other factors that led to the decline was the introduction of daily hire and freelance employees at both ABC and NBC in the late [19]80s and early [19]90s. Prior to that time, if you worked for the networks or the owned television stations, you were a full-time staff employee, or vacation relief. There were only those two categories of employees, full-time and vacation relief, which is how I started in the business. Ultimately those vacation relief jobs led to full-time employment. The networks in the late [19]80s and early [19]90s tried to adopt a business model similar to motion picture production companies on the west coast. ABC and NBC adopted policies to not employ as many full-time staff personnel. They would hire freelance or daily hires for a project, whether it was episodic television, sitcoms, variety shows, drama shows or sporting events. Many of these productions weren't in production full-time, so the need for full-time staff was diminished. Particularly the entertainment shows, you may recall, The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson at a point was really only produced two or three days a week. Johnny liked to have Monday and Friday off, so it wasn't a full five-day commitment. They would tape shows on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday along with the live broadcast so they could fill a five-day schedule, but they weren't in production five days a week. So the networks decided to move toward a model where they could employ more freelance or daily hire employees and that caused a reduction in staff. And now I would say NABET is 80% daily hire.

Debbie [00:49:43] Oh my goodness.

Charlie [00:49:44] Only about 20% of our members are full-time staff. Daily hires don't work every day and some don't work every month. Some are seasonal workers. That has changed the dynamics of our membership a lot. The automation, the change in employment status, with the introduction of more daily hires is responsible for the shift. We very much appreciate and fully represent our daily hire members, they're an important part of our union, but it has changed the overall makeup and density of our membership base.

Debbie [00:50:14] Talk a little bit more about what NABET has done to try and improve the situation for daily hires and the obstacles you've faced in doing that.

Charlie [00:50:26] The daily hire challenges came at the outset. Obviously when the company changed the model from staff to daily hire, they also tried to change things like benefits, scheduling, wages and those sorts of things. In the early days, daily hires had very limited benefit entitlements. There was no retirement security. There was no 401k. There were some limited medical benefits. Compensation was the same because they were working under the terms of the master agreement. So if you were a daily hire camera operator, you were on the same pay scale as a staff camera operator. But your work commitment was much less. They could use you on four-hour calls instead of a full eight hours. They could employ you one day a week, or three days a week. They didn't have to give you a full-time, forty-hour per week commitment. Several provisions in the master agreement that covered staff, daily hires were excluded from. So it really was, I hate to use the term, "second-class citizen" status, but that's the best parallel I can give. It was certainly a substandard set of terms and conditions. That's something that NABET has been very focused on over the decades -- to give parity in the daily hires. And we've achieved a great deal of it. Daily Hires now have retirement security, a full portfolio of health care, their benefits and working conditions are very, very parallel to full-time staff, with the exception of a full-time commitment.

They're not guaranteed 40 hours a week, but we've made a lot of strides in lifting up the working conditions for daily hires. We still have some work to do, but I would say we're at about 80 or 90% parity now with staff.

Debbie [00:52:28] And I would guess given the 80%, the political pressure at the bargaining table has a lot to do with that.

Charlie [00:52:38] Absolutely.

Jeff [00:52:41] Is there a hiring hall kind of an arrangement, or is it just the stations have a call list and they determine who gets hired and who doesn't.

Charlie [00:52:51] There is no hiring hall structure within NABET, unfortunately. We can refer people for employment opportunities and we often do. But, in hindsight, I think that's probably one of the mistakes we made when we moved to the daily hire model. The national leadership at that time didn't want to get involved in the hiring hall structure. And I understand that in the perspective of favoritism and patronage and that sort of thing. They didn't want to get into the weeds in that area, so they didn't. The employers are really in charge of how they handle the daily hire population. And of course, that comes with its own challenges. I'll just take an example of Sunday Night Football, which is now an NBC property, but still a NABET show. The producer and the director and the production team are in charge of who they hire. And it really is a system of favorites. By the way, they're all very skilled technicians at what they do or they wouldn't be on that show. But if the producer says, we want Debbie Goldman to be our lead playback operator for slow-motion playback, Debbie is going to get the call. Debbie is going to be on the crew for as long as that director and producer want her there. So that's worked out, fine, but we don't have hiring hall control. We can make recommendations, and we often do refer people, but the hiring of daily hires is in the purview of the employers.

Jeff [00:54:28] I guess at the time there was some resentment of the daily hires among the existing [staff]. So I'm sure that probably contributed to not wanting to set up some formalized structure for bringing these daily hires in. Let me ask you, so evolving off of that, is there within NABET any kind of a training component for getting daily hires or getting people trained up to the point where they could potentially be a daily hire or even a full-time?

Charlie [00:54:57] Absolutely. We offer training. We've done lots of unique, specific training on particular equipment as new technology comes on the scene, and we want to make sure that the skillsets of our members is relevant and sharp. We offer many different training programs. We partnered with CWA NETT Academy a variety of training programs. Kevin Celata, who's now in charge of those programs, has been a terrific partner for NABET. We've done non-linear editing training in cooperation with CWA NETT. More recently, we've done drone training with flying cameras. Kevin's been great in those areas. And yes, we take feedback from our members. If there's a technology out there that they're interested in getting trained on, we try to help offer that specific type of training. Back in the good old days of television, it used to be that the companies and the manufacturers would offer the training. If they brought in new camera systems, the company would be responsible for training the workforce. If it was a new audio console, a new piece of equipment or a new technology, the company and the equipment manufacturer would provide the training. That shifted over the years and became more of a cost for the company and so the amount of training

was reduced. And that's where the unions stepped up and said, we've got to make sure our people keep their skill sets relevant. So we're far more involved in that now.

Jeff [00:56:26] Is there a way for somebody who's not trained at all to access that training, become a NABET member in hopes of getting hired?

Charlie [00:56:38] The short answer is no. Our bylaws require that you work under a collective bargaining agreement for at least one day before you can join the union. You know, our forefathers didn't want to have a system where people paid an initiation fee to get them into the union and then couldn't find employment.

Jeff [00:56:56] Right.

Charlie [00:56:56] Because we're not a hiring hall, we couldn't offer that second piece and so we don't want to take somebody's money and give them a union card and not be able to follow through with job.

Debbie [00:57:07] Is there an initiation fee?

Charlie [00:57:10] There is.

Debbie [00:57:12] That's different than I think a lot of the other units in CWA.

Charlie [00:57:16] It is very different. And it is a pet peeve of mine. Our financial structure in terms of financial obligation union is sort of bifurcated. The membership dues are really driven and governed by the Sector, by the national union. The initiation fees are the purview of the locals, pursuant to our national bylaws. Initiation fees are totally determined and managed by the locals. For many years, we had a standard initiation fee platform. But then, over time, many locals went to a different model. And so it's a particular problem for us now, especially with the larger locals. The network locals in New York, on the west coast, and in Washington, have been able to manage their initiation fees the way they wanted to. And it's become expensive to become a member in this union. In some cases, on the west coast and the east coast, a new member is required to pay essentially 15 days of base salary to join the union. I understand that type of model back when we were all staff and folks were bidding to get into a full-time job, and looking at a potential career track that could go as a full-time employee over many years. Someone getting a staff job with the guarantee of 40 hours and maybe a 30 or 40-year career with the network, then an expensive initiation fee was more understandable. But with our population now 80% daily hire, to ask somebody to surrender 15 days of their salary just to join "the club", seems to me to be excessive.

Debbie [00:59:09] So are a lot of those daily hires, not union. They can still get hired, correct?

Charlie [00:59:17] A lot of daily hires try to hide behind the "right-to-work" rules in the states they reside in. We have members literally in every single state around the country, even though we don't have locals in every state, because daily hires who work for ABC and NBC in news and sports, might live in Oklahoma [for example]. We don't have a local in Oklahoma, but they may get picked up to do work for ABC sports or NBC sports. And so when they're in right-to-work states, they sometimes try to lean on that as an avenue to get around the initiation fee.

Debbie [00:59:50] But if they're in a non-right-to-work state, do they have to be in the union in order to work?

Charlie [01:00:06] Yes.

Debbie [01:00:06] Under something that's covered by the NABET contract?

Charlie [01:00:11] . They are required to meet their financial obligation to the Union. . Even those that are in “right-to-work” states, we pursue because the headquarters of ABC and NBC are both located in New York City, and that's where these crews are hired and dispatched from. We all understand that the lines between “right-to-work” and non-right-to-work are a bit blurry and has more to do with where you do the predominance of your work. So for the most part we've been successful in pursuing folks, even if they're in right-to-work states by demonstrating if they work for the networks and a lot of their work is done in non-right-to-work states they must fulfill their financial obligation to the Union. Most of these folks travel around the country and are working in California, working in Illinois, working in New York state. And if the majority of their work is in normal states, is in good states [e.g. non-right-to-work states]. [they] are encouraged to join the union, or at least fulfill their basic financial obligation to the union. We've had a number of cases where folks have claimed that they live in a right-to-work state and do most of their work in a right-to-work state, and if they can prove that, we tend to back off., but we pursue daily hire members who work under our national contracts. I would say the majority of the time we're successful, and we have good cooperation from the networks in helping us with that. We have provisions in both master agreements that if an individual goes into bad standing, we can ask that the employer removes them from the employment rolls and that person is placed on a “no-work” list. NBC and ABC have been cooperative with us in that area.

Jeff [01:02:01] And is there an accommodation to pay an initiation fee over a period of time or is it paid upfront?

Charlie [01:02:08] Most locals offer payment plans. They offer a discount if you pay upfront, sometimes they'll knock off as much as 40 or 50% if you pay upfront, so there's an incentive for that. But there are payment plans with most locals. And these high initiation fees really become a problem at the big network locals on the west coast, the east coast, Chicago, and Washington DC. A number of our independent locals in places like San Diego, Buffalo, Cleveland, and Erie, Pennsylvania, have more modest initiation fees, 50 or 100 bucks to get into the union and then your standard membership dues. The large network locals have been more aggressive with initiation fees. I'd like to see it changed. I'd like to see it standardized. I think it's wrong for us to charge that much money to join the union. I think it leaves a bad taste in the mouth of a member who's just coming in that they have to surrender that much of their money to join “the club” and then continue to pay dues. We got a lot of feedback from our daily hires and a lot of pushback about that. I'd like to see a much more modest initiation fee standardized across all the locals. I've haven't been successful so far.

Jeff [01:03:34] And what is the current dues structure for a NABET member?

Charlie [01:03:39] 1.33% of gross earnings. So different than a lot of other divisions and sectors within CWA. It's 1.33% of total gross earnings, including all overtime and penalties. I It's a fair dues structure for the member. I think it's very beneficial to the union. That part works out fine.

Jeff [01:04:06] Very good. So let's turn the clock back a little bit now. You've become vice-president, you're president of Local 41, and from there you're elected as president of NABET and vice-president of CWA.

Charlie [01:04:30] While I was vice-president at Local 41 and up until 2010, I sat on the NABET sector executive council as the regional vice-president for Region 4. NABET has six regions internally, and Region 4 is the Midwest. So I sat as regional vice-president coincidental with my duties as Local 41 vice-president. So, I had two roles. When Ray Taylor retired in 2010, I became Local 41 president by succession. At the same time, John Clark, who was our sector president, was retiring. Jim Joyce was our national vice-president, serving under Sector President John Clark. When John retired, Jim succeeded to sector president. Then from a vote by the members of the Sector Executive Council, I was elected to serve as Jim's national vice-president. At that point, I ceased being a regional vice-president and became NABET's national vice-president. Jim and I served together until 2015. Unfortunately, Jim took an extended period of sick leave in early 2015. In his absence, I assumed his duties as Action Sector President for NABET-CWA. When Jim returned from leave in May of 2015, he made the decision not to seek re-election. I ran for Sector President that year and was elected at the NABET Sector Conference in Detroit in June 2015.

Jeff [01:06:40] Okay. Let's talk a little bit about the CWA-NABET merger. You were still in the local at that point, but can you talk about your experience with that and how that came about and what the perception of the members were when those two unions merged together?

Charlie [01:07:04] In 1992/1993, I was just starting to work for Local 41 as steward. I wasn't yet an officer. I recall when the initial discussions about the merger started, there was a good deal of excitement both at the national level and at the local level. At that time, Jim Nolan was the international president of NABET. John Clark was the international vice-president of NABET. Ray Taylor was the president of Local 41 in Chicago. The prospect of merging with a larger union, especially a large democratic union like CWA, was pretty exciting and well received. Jim Nolan and John Clark were working with Larry Cohen, and of course, CWA President Morty Bahr. I think Larry Cohen at that point might have been in charge of organizing for CWA. Larry was the initial contact with NABET. There was a good deal of excitement about joining with the parent union. The main concern was maintaining NABET's identity and autonomy and not losing our presence. So, there was a committee formed on the NABET side comprised of a couple of regional vice-presidents and, of course, President Nolan and Vice-President Clark to work through and negotiate with CWA over the details of a merger agreement. There was a point in time, as I recall, that there was a concern about the autonomy, that NABET would lose its identity. There was some internal concern about that, but eventually things worked out. At the end of 1992 NABET and CWA executed the merger agreement. The original merger agreement gave the parties a one-year period of time to get acquainted, kick the tires and feel things out. After that one-year period we were fully a merger partner. Jeff, you probably recall that in those early days, the president of NABET had a voice on the CWA Executive Board, but not a vote, because NABET maintained its own secretary-treasurer and its own finances. That arrangement was part of the original merger agreement so that NABET would manage its own funds and finances. As a result, we weren't part of the CWA budget process and so John Clark didn't have a vote on the CWA Executive Board. In 1998 or 2000, there was a vote by the NABET executive council to fully participate in the CWA budget process. The NABET secretary-treasurer then became an assistant to the president and John Clark had a full vote on the CWA Executive Board.

Jeff [01:10:25] Yes, I think it's interesting. Gradually, I think CWA leadership has recognized the value of maintaining the integrity of the identity of the merger partners as a way to help with organizing. I mean you're much more likely to have resonance trying to organize workers at a Telemundo or Univision or wherever it happens to be. If you're talking about NABET versus a more generic CWA. I think that's true with AFA [American Flight Attendants Association] and a lot of other merger partners as well. So kudos to NABET for insisting on maintaining that integrity. I think that made a lot of sense.

Jeff [01:11:07] So once you're president of NABET, can you talk about what that has entailed for you? What are some of the great accomplishments and frustrations that you've experienced as president of your union?

Charlie [01:11:25] With respect to frustrations, I think, the dynamics in the business, the seismic shifts that have happened in television and radio broadcasting, the automation that has led to job loss or consolidation have been the biggest challenges. When I first started in the business, if you were assigned to gather news, you put a big, heavy camera on your shoulder and you went out into the field for newsgathering. One had to be pretty specialized in operating equipment at that time. Today you have reporters, producers, production assistants, all sorts of folks -- even citizens -- running around with a television camera in their cell phone, and not only are they able to capture video and edit it, they can transmit it back to the end point operation. That sort of seismic shift with the advancement of technology has been cool and exciting, but it also hit our industry hard and negatively impacted the work that we do and diminished the value and the specialty of our craft. When I first started in the television business, people didn't have video tape recorders in their homes plugged into their TV. There was no VHS or Betamax. That technology was just coming on the scene in the late [19]70s and early [19]80s. Prior to that time, a video tape machine was a specialized piece of equipment. A television camera was a specialized piece of equipment. So producing media content for consumption was not something that just anyone could do. Now it is something that anybody can do. So that's been a big challenge. Then supporting our daily hire population in a way that is meaningful to them is always a challenge. But I'm proud of the accomplishments that we've made at both networks in bringing more parity to the daily hires. In terms of accomplishments, I think we've done a good job with organizing, especially in the past two years. We've have a new full-time organizing coordinator at NABET who just came on board a couple of years ago and is having great success. We went for a long period of time, about 20 years, without a dedicated organizing director or coordinator. So we have one now and that person is doing great work. The organizing that was accomplished in the 20 years when we didn't have a dedicated person, was really organic. It was driven by locals picking up a lead here or there and pursuing those leads. So, we had some success in organizing, but we've had a lot more success lately.

Debbie [01:14:06] What is the focus of the organizing now?

Charlie [01:14:13] Anywhere there are unorganized workers in broadcast media, we're working to organize them. We don't set artificial limits. We reach out wherever we can with production companies, television stations, even small radio stations. We just organized a pair of public broadcast radio stations in the Kansas City market. We identified the group and were successful in organizing them. So we'll start to bargain the first contract for them soon. In terms of other accomplishments, I'm proud of the work we've done for our daily hires. We've also expanded our

reach in sports at both ABC and NBC. There were decades where ESPN, which is a division within Disney and ABC, was unorganized and employed only non-union workers. In the past ten years, we've brought thousands of new ESPN employees under the terms of the ABC Master Agreement and the ABC-NABET Sports Event Agreement. We've negotiated with both ABC and NBC for a much larger presence in cable and streaming work, two areas where we don't enjoy exclusive jurisdiction. The primary jurisdiction for NABET has always been in over-the-air television and radio broadcast. NABET historically had far less density in cable programming and streaming distribution. But we've actively pursued jurisdiction on those platforms in recent years and we've been quite successful.

Debbie [01:15:59] I just wanted to be sure I heard what you said about ESPN, which I think in terms of numbers, that probably is one of the biggest achievements. Did you get that through a negotiated agreement with the network that they backed off?

Charlie [01:16:17] Yes.

Debbie [01:16:17] Was it neutrality? Was it card check? Was it something else?

Charlie [01:16:22] It was largely neutrality. We had been trying to organize ESPN through traditional organizing drives for a long time and were unsuccessful. ESPN's main operation is located in Bristol, Connecticut. For decades, ESPN was adept at holding off any union organizing drives, and they wouldn't allow any union representatives on the Bristol campus, and certainly not on the shop floor. We just couldn't break through the citadel of their main operation in Bristol. Attempting to organize the field workers was even more challenging. ESPN had in their Rolodex, if you will, probably 5000 potential employees residing in all 50 states. Camera operators, sound technicians, slow motion replay operators, utility workers and so on, people in all different markets all around the country. Attempting to reach out to these people and organize them was an insurmountable challenge.

Charlie [01:17:59] So, with respect to ESPN, it's been a long journey. As I said, we tried the traditional organizing route, and that process was very challenging because of the size and structure of the potential membership base. In 2014, we sat down with ABC and told them that NABET really needs to represent the folks who work at ESPN, especially when they cross over and do work on the ABC television network. You may remember a day when ABC Sports was the gold standard of sports broadcasting. Events like the Olympics, Wide World of Sports, Monday Night Football, were all produced and broadcast by ABC Sports and sports was a big division within the ABC television network. When Disney bought ABC in 1995, they decided to move a great volume of sports programming over to ESPN. NABET didn't have representation at ESPN, so we watched more and more of that work drift away. And so with a sort of neutrality agreement, we chased ABC and Disney to capture some portion of the ESPN work. In 2014, we arrived at a mutual agreement whereby any time ABC was responsible for providing the technical crew and payroll for an ESPN event, NABET would have partial jurisdiction over that work. We don't have full jurisdiction over all of ESPN, but anytime ESPN and ABC interact, then NABET is involved. Through the ABC-NABET Sports Event Agreement, and we enjoy a minimum commitment of 35,000 person-days on many ESPN-produced events. Every calendar year, ABC and ESPN must guarantee at least

35,000 days of work or more under the NABET agreement. Incidentally, and to our benefit, that number has been exceeded every year in the last ten years. We have a significant presence on hundreds of ESPN-produced sporting events such as, Monday Night Football, the NBA Playoffs and Finals, US Open Tennis in Flushing, New York, and lots of other work on ABC and ESPN. The college football season is huge for us. Prior to the establishment of the sports agreement in 2014, we would get 3 or 4 events on a college football weekend because those were airing on the ABC television network in afternoon timeslots or the Saturday evening primetime show. On a typical college football weekend, NABET members would be assigned to 3 or 4 events. Everything else airing on ESPN was non-union and unrepresented. Once the Sports Event Agreement was negotiated in the summer of 2014, and we rolled into the college football season that year, the amount of work that was NABET-represented expanded exponentially and was almost too much to keep up with. We went from 3 or 4 events to 8 or 10 events every Saturday, nearly tripling the amount of work we did for the network. The expansion was terrific. All of these folks that had been working non-union on ESPN platforms suddenly were exposed to NABET and nearly instantly represented by NABET. That was very beneficial for these freelance employees, and equally beneficial for NABET, and it continues to grow. That's why I say we literally brought in thousands of new members through that arrangement with ESPN and ABC.

Debbie [01:21:38] And what's the situation at CNN?

Charlie [01:21:43] We don't represent workers at CNN currently. There was a newsgathering subcontractor in Washington, DC called Team Video Services (TVS). TVS had a staffing partnership with CNN to supply news crews in Washington, D.C. and in New York, where they would hire freelance news camera operators and audio engineers and then feed them into the CNN ecosystem. NABET was successful at organizing Team Video Services employees and achieving a good collective bargaining agreement. All employees of Team Video Services were NABET-represented, and by extension, when they worked for CNN they were covered by that collective bargaining agreement. In 2003, CNN terminated its business relationship with Team Video Services. They canceled the contract, and terminated the crewing services relationship, taking all that newsgathering work in-house. The folks who worked for TVS were welcome to apply for jobs with CNN, but would be evaluated for future work opportunities on an individual basis, but with no guarantee that anyone would necessarily be hired. Because NABET had a contract in full force and effect with TVS, we challenged the action. NABET-CWA filed charges with the National Labor Relations Board, and stayed determined to pursue the fight for the next 17 years until we finally prevailed in 2020 and won a landmark settlement of \$74 million. CNN was compelled to settle that case and give backpay to those workers that were adversely impacted by the 2003 action. That's another point of pride for our Union. I'm proud that NABET stayed in the fight and never gave up on those workers. There were many steps along the way where we could have withdrawn from the litigation, thrown our hands up and said, "this is simply not worth pursuing." But, under John Clark's administration, Jim Joyce's administration, and my administration, we remained in the fight. Some of the member discriminatees came out of that litigation with life-changing settlement money. Some back pay awards were in the high hundreds of thousands of dollars. A couple of people received close to \$1 million in back pay. It was a long, brutal fight, but in the end, we prevailed. I believe the \$74 million settlement is one of the largest in NLRB history.

Jeff [01:24:42] Kudos. And during the brief moment that AT&T and Time Warner [2018-2022] were together, there wasn't an ability to get any kind of neutrality down at CNN?

Charlie [01:24:55] No, unfortunately. (laughs) CNN is a little bitter towards NABET after they were compelled to write a \$74 million check!

Jeff [01:24:56] Okay. I know that that romance didn't last long, but I was hopeful when that came about that that might be the case.

Charlie [01:25:05] No. In fact, we tried to extend the neutrality agreement to some DirecTV units on the west coast. As you're well aware, Jeff, Debbie and Hannah, many DirecTV field technicians are currently represented by CWA in many locations. The DirecTV broadcast and distribution centers were never recognized by AT&T in the neutrality agreement. So, a few years ago, we identified two broadcast centers in Southern California about and started organizing drives in those ships. We successfully organized one unit began contract negotiations on their behalf. Two years into contract negotiations, and ultimately dissatisfied with the progress we were making, that unit filed for decertification, and we lost the group. We tried hard, but in the end we were unsuccessful.

Jeff [01:26:10] We talk about how this industry has changed. Can you talk a little bit more about the impact that cable and streaming has had on the work you're doing now?

Charlie [01:26:22] As I said, it's been challenging. We've made good inroads. ESPN is a great example. NBC Sports is also a huge success story for us, with our penetration into the streaming and cable channels. Our representational participation extends to the NBC Olympic Channel, the USA Network and of course the Peacock streaming platform. Those are platforms where we don't enjoy full, ironclad jurisdiction, but we have a significant stake. Our primary jurisdiction with both ABC and NBC is also limited to the Continental United States. So when sporting events such as the Olympics or the British Open are staged overseas, we have to pursue the networks and work out project agreements to make sure that the work is union-represented. We've been largely successful with NBC. The Olympics are covered largely by NABET jurisdiction. The British Open (or the Open Championship, as they now call it) are NABET shows. We have good penetration in cable and streaming now, and it's getting better all the time. However, there's plenty of cable networks and streaming platforms out there that we haven't been able to embrace as union operations. We will continue to pursue those opportunities. One can think about dozens of different streaming platforms and cable channels out there and trying to organize them and convert them to union-represented. It is a challenge, but one that we aggressively pursue whenever and wherever we can.

Jeff [01:28:02] Univision, is that owned by NBC?

Charlie [01:28:08] No, Telemundo is owned by NBCUniversal.

Jeff [01:28:09] Telemundo is NBC Telemundo. And so is when they cover a sporting event are those our technicians as well doing the Telemundo work?

Charlie [01:28:20] Some of the local programming in certain markets is our work. If it's national programming, by extension with NBC, some of that work ends up in our hands.

Jeff [01:28:35] Do you miss being a technician covering some of these events?

Charlie [01:28:40] (laughs) I absolutely do. Even today, 14 years after I left active employment with ABC, I get excited when I walk into a television studio, control room or production truck at a sporting event. I see the equipment, especially the equipment I used to operate, and I want to jump back in and start doing the production work that I performed for more than 35 years at ABC.

(Charlie exits)

Debbie [01:29:11] I know there was a lot of push to try and connect NABET with the cable organizing and I don't think that really happened.

Jeff [01:29:18] No, I don't think it did either.

Debbie [01:29:20] Not that it was successful.

Jeff [01:29:22] But I also think, this would have been more interesting with a John Clark. At the time of the merger, I think the notion that Morty and Larry had was bringing all of the entertainment unions together. And so IATSE and -- I think they were in discussions with them as well.

Debbie [01:29:44] And SAG-AFTRA? [Screen Actors Guild, American Federation of Television and Radio Artists]

Jeff [01:29:45] And SAG-AFTRA.

Debbie [01:29:46] Well, they were SAG and they were AFTRA.

Jeff [01:29:48] Right. Right. So we were going to be the umbrella for all of those. And NABET was sort of the linchpin, the first one, and we were going to hope to parlay that into bringing the other unions in as well.

Debbie [01:30:04] And that never happened?

Jeff [01:30:05] No. I know there were discussions with SAG and AFTRA. Those were pretty extensive, but never really came to fruition, unfortunately.

Debbie [01:30:18] Yeah. I remember one year when I was chairing [correction: staffing] the [convention] resolutions committee. This was still when [executive assistant to the president] Dina Beaumont had the rule that you [the members of the committee] got your per diem at the highest rate of the person on your committee.

Jeff [01:30:36] Everybody wanted a NABET person on the committee. Yes, I remember well.

Debbie [01:30:43] Because they were making, this is ten years ago, \$100,000.

Jeff [01:30:51] That's right. And because of the travel they did for work, their per diem rates were pretty good.

Debbie [01:31:02] I'm curious to ask him, though, whether they've been successful to get women and people of color in the leadership.

Charlie re-enters.

Jeff [01:31:26] So we were just talking. One of the things we'd like to talk a little bit about is the role of women and people of color in NABET and how that has progressed over your career. I mean, I'm sure you've seen some pretty dramatic changes as I did in the telephone industry over my time there.

Charlie [01:31:49] Absolutely, significant, important, in most cases too late -- but the changes have occurred. When I started in the business, in the late 1970s, it was a male-dominated industry, both in front of and behind the camera. Over time, that's changed and improved a great deal, but, I know that when I came into the technical ranks, there were a very few women in advanced positions. There were a few women assigned to operations and productions in the field, but not very many. In studio operations, women were mostly relegated to keyboard jobs; the character generator that displays names on the screen or graphic arts devices that have keyboards associated with them. I guess that's a tie-back to the old days of typewriter keyboards and clerical work. But there was definitely a barrier for women in the broadcast business, certainly in the 1960s and 1970s. It began to change in the late 1970s. And I'm happy to say that it has really accelerated in a very positive way over the last few decades. But there was a barrier there for a woman to achieve senior positions like senior audio engineer or technical director. Those assignments were rare, and not met with a great deal of inclusion. I remember when I started working at WLS-TV in Chicago, all the technical directors were men. No women were employed or assigned as technical directors – one of the top job classifications in the bargaining unit. There was a very skilled, very talented woman who worked her way up through the ranks and demonstrated her skills and was eventually promoted to be a technical director, at least on a part-time basis. Some of the guys assigned to that crew resented her advancement and told management that they didn't want to take orders from, or report to a woman. That attitude was shocking and disturbing to many of us who had a more progressive mindset. But unfortunately, that was part of the culture at that time. I also remember some of those camera guys gathered around in the break room saying, I don't know what's going on around here, but we've got a woman at the TD position and I'm just not going to take instruction from her. So, unfortunately there was some of that. In terms of persons of color, there were some problems in that area as well. Most of that has been washed away and we don't see that anymore either in front of or behind the camera. There's a great deal of diversity. It's long overdue. But there was a dark chapter when the broadcast industry wasn't open or progressive.

Jeff [01:34:34] Could you give us a sense of what the makeup is today of membership?

Charlie [01:34:39] I don't have that type of data, Jeff. I'm sure we could do some research, but I would say, by and large, it's much more balanced. There are lots of females and people of color in senior leadership positions. Station managers, vice-presidents of the network, vice-presidents of the stations. In electronic news gathering (ENG) it's a balanced mix, men, women, people of color. Studio operations, the same. Sports production, I would say is probably less diverse. If you look at a typical football crew or a golf crew, it's probably still largely a male population, at least a higher percentage of men than women. But the sort of technical barriers on different jobs and assignments, has largely washed away. We have many female producers, directors, and technical directors and lots of women in senior leadership positions. There's always room for improvement, but the industry is much better than it used to be.

Debbie [01:35:46] What about within NABET among local presidents, vice-presidents?

Charlie [01:35:52] We're very diverse across all those positions. Our general counsel is a woman, Judi Chartier. We have a number of female leaders as local presidents, and elected to other officer positions. We participate actively in both the CWA Women's Committee as well as the Civil Rights and Equity Committee. Lots of women serving as local presidents, local officers, stewards, representatives -- all over the place. I'm very pleased with the diversity within NABET.

Debbie [01:36:27] People of color also?

Charlie [01:36:29] Yes, absolutely.

Jeff [01:36:34] We have sort of a tradition in these. We ask Hannah to ask a question, somebody who has nothing to do with CWA other than this particular project, and she tends to come up with the questions that, Debbie and I, because of our biases, would miss. So Hannah, what have you got for us today?

Hannah [01:36:59] Sure. I was just curious, Charlie, you spoke about, when you were kind of rising up in the union and becoming the local vice-president and the local president, that you had some reluctance. I'm wondering, either becoming vice-president or president, what was it that changed your mind?

Charlie [01:37:23] It's a great question. You save the tough ones for the end, Jeff and Debbie. I think, Hannah, it was a combination of things. One was, I was really having so much fun in my television career job. Doing television production in the studio or in the field is really exciting and fulfilling. You get to meet a lot of interesting people in this business. You're exposed to a lot of unique things that you might not otherwise experience. When I assigned to sports production, it was the behind-the-ropes access that I had, whether it was a football stadium, a baseball park or a golf course. You get exposure to things that you wouldn't get as a viewer or as a spectator. You get some really interesting opportunities in the of work we do, especially in live television. I think live broadcast probably excited me more than other forms of television. I It is really exciting to work on these shows and to be a part of these productions. And so the sort of charge I got every day out of producing live television, whether it was sports or news or entertainment, was great. And I think I perceived the union work as more, I don't want to say a desk job, but more routine work and certainly a lot more involved and a lot more time-consuming. The beauty of live television is you prepare for the show, you execute the show, there's a huge adrenaline rush when you're live, and then when the show goes off the air and it's been successful, it was a great feeling of accomplishment. And then you put that one to rest and you move on to the next production. So that sort of excitement drove me. My observation of the union work was that it was much more labor intensive. Whether negotiating a contract, organizing a group of workers, pursuing agreements or an arbitration hearing, it seemed to be fraught with lots of frustration, a lot of heavy lifting, a lot of thinking, and a lot of headaches. And so I think for me the excitement in television production was more attractive than the nuts and bolts of union work. But that changed once I really got involved in the union work, and I think what really changed it for me was helping people out, resolving a problem for somebody, resolving a workplace issue, an overtime issue, a problem with a crew, somebody who was eligible for benefits that wasn't getting the benefit, somebody whose pension was calculated improperly and we were able to change that and really make a significant change in somebody's life. Awarding a union-sponsored scholarship to a family and seeing them be able to

put a child through college. Those things that are real world and maybe weren't as flashy or exciting as producing a football game but meant something important in somebody's life. The fruits of labor in pursuing that sort of thing paid off. Even though contract negotiations, whether on a local or national scale, can be frustrating and really hard work, but when you come out on the other side and you achieve a good contract, that is rewarding. And so those things changed my perspective.

Hannah [01:40:59] It is. You mentioned a bunch of examples of ways that the union made a difference in people's lives. And I'm wondering if you have maybe a favorite story that really exemplifies that, that you'd like to share.

Charlie [01:41:15] Well, the CNN story, even though it was a very long path to get there, the CNN story in the end became one of those things that you can really hold up and be proud of. Because it really changed a lot of people's lives in a positive way. Some of those folks that were laid-off by CNN and Team Video Services in 2003 never went back into the business. They got laid-off and ended up going in an entirely different direction, and in many cases didn't have the same career and didn't make the same sort of money. And so, when we were able to land settlements that put tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of dollars, into the pockets of people after a fifteen-year battle, that was very rewarding. And then, things like ESPN, negotiating those first sports agreements that brought all those people who had previously not been represented by a union and didn't enjoy the full benefits of what the union had to offer in terms of pay and benefits and things like that. We were able to negotiate those. There was initially a little bit of pushback by some of those people. "What's this?" "I have to join the union?" "I have to pay dues. Why is that?" But when they realized that they were getting 401k contributions, a health and welfare benefit package, increased pay, and if they didn't get their lunch on time, there was a penalty against the company. They achieved better travel pay, better working conditions. Those people came back to us and thanked us. So that sort of stuff is rewarding when we're able to achieve significant improvements for people that pleases me. It's rewarding.

Hannah [01:43:16] I just have one more question, which is you mentioned your mentor, Ray. Do you have any stories you'd like to share about him or your relationship? Any moments where he really inspired you?

Charlie [01:43:29] I could spend another couple of hours talking to you about Ray Taylor. By the way, Ray is still around, and he was pretty involved in those early days in the merger agreement with CWA. Jeff, I know that you know Ray very well. [Ray died just a few weeks after this interview.]

Jeff [01:43:44] Yes.

Charlie [01:43:45] He is just a man of great integrity, very selfless. Like me, he absolutely loved the broadcast side of the business. He worked at for decades at ABC. In fact, he started at ABC as a studio and field technician the year I was born, 1957. He walked through the doors of ABC, and remained working there until he became the full-time president of NABET in 1993. His integrity, his love for the business, his passion for people and his gold standard of always trying to do the right thing. He always wanted to make sure that no matter what we were doing, negotiating with the company, resolving a grievance, representing a member, organizing a new group, negotiating a first contract, any of it was always done with integrity and balance. He taught me early on that in this game of labor relations, you have to be mindful of something -- and that is your word is your bond.

When you make a commitment to a business partner, even if it's an adversary, even if it's a labor relations attorney across the table or a vice-president of a network, when you make that commitment that the union is going to enter into this bargain, you hold up your side of the deal and you never stray from it. It's one of the standards that he taught me, and he exemplified it every day in what he did. I've known, frankly, a lot of people in leadership roles within the union that haven't comported to that same standard. Ray did. So, I think one of the takeaways for me in learning from him was integrity, professionalism and always keeping to your word, just really being true to the mission. And, of course, a strong work ethic. He wasn't a 9 to 5 guy. He was available after hours, on the weekends, and always made sure he was there for the members. He'd take a phone call at any time, take a meeting with a member at any time. I guess the other piece that was so important for me was there were no secrets between Ray and I, whether in my capacity as a steward or Executive Board Member, later as his vice-president – he opened up every book and showed me everything. There was nothing that he kept from my view. There was no secret that he wouldn't share with me. He gave me all the tools of the trade.

Hannah [01:46:27] Thank you.

Jeff [01:46:29] Well, we've asked you for two hours, and we're running a little bit over that right now, but you've mentioned a couple times that in your job in the studio in particular and out in the field, you've run into lots of interesting and famous people. So I have to ask you, give me the top five hit list that you would put in that category.

Charlie [01:46:53] Barbara Bush, was one of them. You talked about people in the business or outside of the business?

Jeff [01:47:00] No. Just who you would categorize as particularly interesting or famous that you encountered as a result of the work?

Charlie [01:47:08] Yes, I'd say Barbara Bush. Barack Obama, of course. You know, Barack, we did some television shows, and productions with Barack. In fact, I remember when he was still a state senator in Illinois, he was in the studio for one of our talk shows, it might have been after the 2004 Democratic Party convention. I think he was a keynote speaker in 2004. He was certainly rising to prominence on the national stage, even though at the time he was just a state senator. He was doing a talk show segment, a political show at our station. And after the show was over, he was leaving the studio with his wife, and there was a gaggle of news cameras and reporters around and they were very aggressively asking him questions. There were 8 or 10 reporters, cameras, microphones. It was kind of chaotic. He was very polite and gracious about it all. But Michelle was less happy about it and sort of scolded the press for being in their face all the time and not giving them any privacy. She was a little bit exercised about it, but he handled it with grace and answered every question asked. But I remember she was a little agitated. Then, of course, he went on to become a United States senator and ultimately the president. So, certainly he was one of the great ones that I had the opportunity to meet. Al Michaels, who's the was the voice of Sunday Night Football, is now the voice of Thursday Night Football. He's a pretty remarkable guy. I enjoyed working with him, and Howard Cosell, but for different reasons. Howard was an interesting character. Not always the gold standard of integrity. But it was interesting to work with. I would say those are my top four or five.

Jeff [01:49:10] Very cool.

Charlie [01:49:10] A quick, funny story about Barbara Bush. Part of the reason I had a chance to meet her was we were doing an Oprah Winfrey show with Mrs. Bush, and she was coming to the Chicago studio. She was still the First Lady, and had a full secret service contingent around her. When they booked her for the show, they identified who the crew was going to be because we all had to have background checks the Secret Service performed a studio security sweep the day before. On the day of the show, there were Secret Service agents in plainclothes in the audience. They had Secret Service folks in the wings. Even in the control room where the director and I were working, there were a couple of Secret Service agents. I remember during preproduction for the show, the director and I were putting together a couple of promos for the affiliate feed which is a pretty exciting time. The director's calling the cues : “stand by camera one, roll the tape, ready camera two,” all the sort of excitement in the control room. When we took a brief break before we went on the air, the Secret Service guy standing behind me leaned over my shoulder and he said, “Man, you've got a really stressful job.” (laughter) And I looked up at him and said, “What?” He said, “Your job is really stressful.” I just laughed at him and said, “you're protecting the life of the First Family and you think what I'm doing here, making a TV show, is stressful?” He said, “Yeah buddy, I couldn't do what you're doing!” I just found that very humorous, the perspective of looking at somebody else's job and thinking, that's more stressful than what I do. I.

Jeff [01:51:18] Well, that's a great note to wrap it up on. I can't tell you how much we appreciate you giving us these couple of hours today, Charlie. It has really been fascinating and delightful. So thanks for doing it.