

## 'The Last Interview: In Memory of John McBreen'

Written by By Patty Lundstrom  
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A Gallup icon and treasure has passed from us. He was also my longtime loyal friend. And I was his last interview.

Local radio reporter and personality John McBreen – a Philadelphian-turned-Gallupian – covered the Gallup political scene for locally-owned radio stations and conducted thousands of taped interviews with local, state and federal leaders for over half a century as “Gallup’s reporter.” John died earlier this week, and my heart is saddened by the loss.

Back in 1985, when I became the new young executive director for the McKinley Area Council of Governments (it became the “Northwest” COG a few years later), John came by and introduced himself, and then proceeded to share with me stories from the initial start-up of the COG – of its first director Jeff Myers and later Elizabeth DiGregorio, David Carter and Keith Landolt. He offered to tell me anything I wanted to know about the COG! I think he must have interviewed me hundreds of times over the years since then. He always made sure to get to know my staff, whether at the COG, at the Legislature in Santa Fe, or in my current Economic Development office. And when Jeff Kiely took over as COG Director, he kept up the practice of including the COG on his beat.

The exchange of news and information went both ways with us. I could call him anytime for “the scoop,” and I found that he always knew more about what was going on in Gallup than anyone else around. But he never bad-mouthed anyone, and he never betrayed his sources. He was always a gentleman, full of honesty and integrity, but also good-hearted. He was really smart – more so than many people recognized – and he had an absorptive mind and great memory. He

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would ask very pointed questions, which sometimes were very hard to answer – depending on who you were, and whether you were being straightforward with him! But he always used to tell me that his line of questioning was never personal. He considered it his profession and his social contract to have the right knowledge, to ask the right questions and to report the truth of things.

John was definitely an “old-style” reporter, and he didn’t let new-fangled technology distract him from his task. How many of us remember his old clunky tape-recorder and microphone that he hauled around with him for his interviews! And he always did his homework. He often knew more about a given issue than the elected officials did! He was always calm, and always kept a light smile on his lips – even when asking the tough questions – as though he already knew the answer but just wanted to hear what you had to say about it. He was a gentle and thoughtful person, but was never afraid to expose the actions of those who broke the law or violated the public trust.

One time I was meeting with the late Senator Pete Domenici at his office in Washington, and in concluding our meeting the Senator apologized and said he had an “important news conference” to get to. When I asked him what it was about, he said it was his weekly interview with John McBreen! He said that John McBreen was New Mexico’s very best small-town reporter.

John had a tough go of it in his last years, and we friends of his worried about him. Some said he had no family, but I think all of Gallup was his family. He kept us informed, he listened to our stories and reported them well, and he lived his life here as an important piece of the Gallup fabric. Three generations of Gallupians woke up each morning listening to John’s breaking news. I know I did!

John McBreen was a Gallup icon, and a Gallup treasure, and he will be greatly missed.

Godspeed, John, and thanks for giving us the time of your life.

By Patty Lundstrom