

Ha-doo

Sonny Eliot, 72, nabs Ability is Ageless Award

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"Ha-doo, Sonny Eliot here."
And so he is, after all these years — the affable, wisecracking legendary voice of Detroit broadcasting who started in the business back in 1946, some 53 years ago, after flying bombing missions in World War II, getting shot down and captured by the Germans.

Of course, so long as he is able, he plans to keep on doing what he loves — broadcasting — which is largely why Operation ABLE of Michigan recently presented the Farmington Hills resident with its 10th annual Ability is Ageless Award.

Eliot, 72, was honored at a luncheon Oct. 28 at the Hyatt Regency Dearborn, along with more than 125 outstanding employees 50 years of age or older.

"Along with Sonny Eliot, these honorees prove that 'Ability is Ageless' by their accomplishments at work and in the community," said Karen Kosniowski, Michigan Operation ABLE president.

The organization sponsors the event each year to honor mid-career and older employees who daily make a difference to their companies through their experience, their work ethic and their commitment to excellence.

"Sonny is truly resilient, widely recognized, and greatly respected for his many years of service to the community," Kosniowski said.

In nominating Eliot for the award, Pam Woodley, WWJ news assignment manager, wrote that "Sonny is a positive character at our station and often a ray of sunshine in the midst of some very depressing news."

"His lighthearted commentary about the weather is a welcome relief not only to those who work with him, but also to the WWJ listening audience."

"He is a true professional at what he does because he's always prepared and well-informed. WWJ depends on him, not only for his great attitude, but also for the excellent example he sets."

Eliot, of course, took the award in typical style: "It's a tremendous honor because I'm only 38 years old, you see."

But seriously, folks — very seriously — Eliot's in favor of the award and all it signifies "because age is just a number."

■ 'It's a tremendous honor because I'm only 38 years old, you see.'

Sonny Eliot

—Legendary broadcaster

'Ignore age'

"My feeling always has been that age should be ignored. If he's a 36-year-old quarterback and can thread the needle with those passes, he should be out there playing," Eliot says.

Which is why, he says, since Charlie Batch, the Detroit Lions quarterback, is hurt, he's ready to step out on the Silverdome turf for him.

Of course, Sonny's only kidding.

"The key to all of it is health ... health and the ability to do the job," says the man who's made weathercasts a treat for millions of Detroiters — first as the area's first funny TV weatherman (Channel 4), now with WWJ Newsradio 950.

He recalls working simultaneously at both Channel 4 and WWJ Radio, which were then in the same building (Channel 4, Detroit's first television station, started out as WWJ-TV in '47 before becoming WDIV-TV4).

"I would run up the stairs to do radio, down the stairs to do TV. I wore track shoes to work."

"If God meant us to run, he would have given us radial tires."

Why do weather?

"Weather is an important part of our lives. The only time when it's bad is when it's severe."

"And no matter how you forecast it, it's always six hours behind arthritis."

Eliot's wide-ranging career in his hometown — he's said in previous interviews he never wanted to leave Detroit — has included news and sports, quiz shows, afternoon movies and documentaries.

He also worked in summer stock with such as actor and fellow native Detroit George C. Scott, who died this year, and has appeared on stages in Ontario as well as in England, France and Germany.

He says talk was a constant while he was growing up — as Marvin Eliot Schlossberg, youngest of seven children and, therefore, nicknamed "Sonny."

'Always joking'

His parents, Jacob and Jennie, "were always joking, always talking," he recalls.



Sonny Eliot of Farmington Hills

"I took no-wit training and was never at my wit's end because he was always there."

Why is he a performer? "We, all of us in this business, it's recognition. Any kind of recognition you get is appreciated and accepted."

The only thing he feels he hasn't achieved, he says, is to have earned "national acceptance."

Oh, and he hasn't checked into whether he's related to Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg — and won't, either.

Eliot and wife, Annette, have been married 24 years.

Operation ABLE, which also recognized The Kroger Co. of Michigan with its 1999 community service award, is a nonprofit employment and training agency providing counseling, computer instruction and job-search assistance.

In 1998, Operation ABLE assisted more than 500 people.



Trying on: Gill Elementary students in teacher Liz Walsh's fourth grade class showing their paper calaveras are (back row, from left) Jessica Matthews, Chelsea Connors, Chris Schaefer and Tim Justice, and (front row, from left) Matt Papanetti, Danny Stanaj, Jessica LaTour and Anthony Tomei.

Kids observe Mexican holiday

Farmington Public Schools fourth and fifth graders recently learned about a Mexican holiday with an unusual sounding name but a very human purpose.

Known as Dia de Los Muertos in Spanish, or "Day of the Dead" in English, it is the day each year when Mexicans — including many in southwest Detroit — remember with warmth and good food their departed loved ones, both family and friends.

Although it falls on Nov. 2 — just after Halloween — the two observances have nothing in common, said Flora M. Chinchilla, Spanish teacher at the Gill, Eagle and Longacre elementary schools who explained the holiday.

She said it's actually a two-day celebration: Nov. 1 to remember the babies who died when Mexico's infant mortality rate was very high some years ago, and Nov. 2 for everyone else.

■ DIA DE LOS MUERTOS

Chinchilla said also that families on Nov. 1 go to the cemetery to clean away weeds from gravesites and decorate them with marigolds, the flower for the observance.

At home, families set up a special altar which holds food — tamales, mole and pan de muertos, or "bread of the dead" — and special drinks, flowers, candles and mementos such as wedding rings and photographs of the departed.

A special feature of Dia de Los Muertos are the skull masks, or calaveras, made by and for both children and adults. The adults make theirs from paper, while the children make theirs from either chocolate or sugar with icing for decorations.

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OBITUARIES

HOWARD F. NEILSON

Services for Howard F. Neilson, 82, of Farmington Hills, were held Nov. 18 at First United Methodist Church of Birmingham.

Mr. Neilson was born Aug. 9, 1917 in Johannesburg, South Africa and died Nov. 15.

He is survived by wife, Ruth; sons, Howard "Skip", David and Jeffrey; five grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

Memorial contributions can be made to the Chick Evans Caddis Scholarship Fund.

Arrangements made by Haley Funeral Directors in Southfield.

GRAYDON L. KARR

Services for Graydon Lewis Karr, 72, formerly of Farmington, were held Nov. 12 at Forest Cove Baptist Church in Kingwood, Texas with the Rev. David Lino officiating.

Mr. Karr was born Sept. 24, 1927 in Detroit and died Nov. 10. He was a United States Navy veteran and worked as an engineer/salesman for companies such as Vickers, Superior Welding, American Motors, John Deere, Caterpillar, Inland Steel and Hydramation. He was active in the New Heart Men's Bible Study, CrossNet Criminal Justice Ministry, Network for Life Aftercare, Community Bible Study Program, Senior Citizens Bible Study and 3H Service. Mr. Karr was also an usher and visitor reception greeter at Forest Cove Baptist Church.

He is survived by wife, Virginia; daughter, Carolyn Drexler; son, David Karr; stepdaughters, Carolyn Hinytzko and Ann Rapp; and grandchildren, Kristen, Amy and Michael.

Memorial contributions can be made to the Forest Cove Baptist

Church Missions Ministry, 22770 Highway #69 N. Kingwood, TX 77339.

ELIZABETH A. OAKLEY

Services for Elizabeth A. Oakley, 90, of Farmington, were held Nov. 16 at Glen Eden Cemetery in Livonia with the Chaplin Andrea Teeple officiating.

Mrs. Oakley was born Dec. 10, 1908 in Marion, Mich. and died Nov. 14 in Farmington. She worked as a department manager for Federal's Department Store and was an active volunteer for the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit. Mrs. Oakley was recognized several times for her volunteer efforts.

She is survived by sons, Frederick (Patricia), Raymond and Owen (Helen); daughter, Frances (Robert) Murphy; sister, Ethel Cole-Davis; seven grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.

Memorial contributions can be made to the Michigan Humane Society, 37255 Marquette, Westland 48186.

ELIZABETH ERRAIR

Services for Elizabeth Errair, 79, of Farmington Hills, were held at Fort Custer National Cemetery in Battle Creek.

Mrs. Errair was born July 10, 1920 in Detroit and died Nov. 17 at Hospice Home in Farmington Hills.

She is survived by husband, Charles; sons, Ronald and Raymond Errair and Todd Lipa; and three grandchildren.

Memorial contributions can be made to the Farmington Hills Foundation for Children, Youth & Families.

Arrangements made by Heeney-Sundquist Funeral Home in Farmington.

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