

Ed Craney was listed in the Missoulian as one of the top 100 most influential Montanans in the 20th Century

80. Ed Craney

By IAN MARQUAND for the Missoulian

Each year the Greater Montana Foundation and the Montana Broadcasters Association present awards for outstanding work in radio and television. This year those awards were renamed the "E.B. Craney Awards."

The name is fitting, because of all of Montana's pioneer broadcasters, Ed Craney's legacy stands tallest.

Founder of one of the state's first radio stations, creator of the Z-Bar radio network, Peabody Award winner, father of the Montana Broadcasters Association, the first Montana broadcaster to venture into television: Ed Craney displayed enterprise, vision and a commitment to quality in his 40 years of broadcasting.

Craney was born in 1905 in Spokane. His mother had hoped he would become a doctor, but his first success came selling advertising for the North Central High School newspaper in Spokane.

He discovered broadcasting in the school's radio club, where he learned to build and operate radio sets.

The combination of sales experience and radio knowledge led to a job building and selling home receivers for Spokane store owner Thomas Symons. Craney soon convinced his employer that in order to sell more radio sets, Spokane should have its own commercial radio station.

Craney earned his federal commercial operator's license, returned to Spokane and with Symons prepared to put Spokane's first radio station on the air. Station KFDC began broadcasting on Oct. 18, 1922, well before Craney's 18th birthday.

In 1927 Craney went to Butte to sell radio sets. Within a year he had established that city's first radio station, KGIR. By 1949 Craney had established stations in Helena, Bozeman, Great Falls and Missoula, all forming the Z-Bar Network and all sporting the letters XL in the middle of their call signs.

The original Spokane and Butte properties even changed their names to the familiar KXLY and KXLF still used today.

In 1953 Craney expanded into television, founding Montana's first television station, KXLF-TV in Butte. Five years later he put KXLJ-TV on the air in Helena.

Craney's contributions to Montana's broadcast industry went beyond his entrepreneurial exploits. He was an advocate for local broadcast stations and was the driving force behind the Montana Broadcasters Association. In 1958 he created the Greater Montana Foundation to foster mutual improvement in his state and his industry.

In 1961 Craney sold his Montana stations but remained a passionate advocate of over-the-air broadcasting. He died in 1991.

- *Ian Marquand is special projects coordinator at Missoula's KPAX. University of Montana Radio-Television Professor Bill Knowles contributed to this article. Knowles' research on and interviews with Ed Craney will be featured in an upcoming history of Montana broadcasting.*

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