Steve Meuche

July 14, 2005

Jeff Charnley,
interviewer

Charnley: Today is Thursday, July 14th, 2005. We're on the campus of Michigan State University in East Lansing. I'm Jeff Charnley interviewing Steve Meuche for the MSU Oral History Project for the sesquicentennial of Michigan State, which we're commemorating this year in 2005.

As you can see, Mr. Meuche, we have a tape recorder here for this oral history. Do you give us permission to do this interview?

Meuche: Yes, I do.

Charnley: I'd like to start first with just some general educational and professional background and training. Where were you born and raised before college?

Meuche: In Dayton, Ohio.

Charnley: Where did you go to high school?

Meuche: Kettering High School in Kettering, Ohio, which is right outside Dayton.

Charnley: Was there any particular high school teacher or parent that had an influence on you in terms of education, an important one?

Meuche: Yes, there was one in particular. Her name was Leah Funk [phonetic], and she was the drama teacher and debate coach. I was on the debate team, and we traveled virtually every weekend all over the state. She was an amazing person because we spent about half of our day in her class, because she taught us everything, but she taught us all the things that we needed to get done rapidly so we could spend all our time focusing on preparation for debate. Then there were the kids in there who were doing the drama stuff, too. We won the Ohio State Debate Championships two years in a row. She was quite a person. And she never slept. She did not have a bed in her house. She would nap occasionally on her sofa.

Charnley: That's amazing. Did she encourage you to go into broadcasting?

Meuche: No, actually she didn't. I worked for a Junior Achievement company that was a radio broadcasting company. Junior Achievement at the time, they did everything, kids would sell commercials, other ones would do announcing and stuff. We had a mentor at this radio station who was our advisor. I did editorials, which were pretty funny at the time. But it was a big band station. So my beginnings in radio were working at a big band station.

Charnley: This was in what year in your high school years?

Meuche: This was in the sixties. I graduated in ’62. ’58 through ’62. Ella Fitzgerald, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, you know, all that stuff.

Charnley: Did you learn much about some of mechanics of radio at that time?

Meuche: Yes, I did.

Charnley: How was it that you came to Michigan State?

Meuche: I wanted to be either a forester or in broadcasting, and so I chose three schools that had strong programs in both. I thought I wanted to be a forester because I was a shy person, I thought, and really would be much happier working with trees than people, or so that was the idea. But then I came here for the summer orientation and discovered how much math and science you had to have to be in forestry, and changed my major to broadcasting before I even came to school here.

Charnley: So the fall of ’62 was when you came?

Meuche: Yes.

Charnley: What were some of your early impressions of Michigan State?

Meuche: First of all, having been born and raised in Ohio, it was a different state, and I guess when you're that young, that's somewhat different, because you're not as used to it. But my early impressions I think were initially some awe about the size of the place. I certainly remember having terrific times with the friends I met in the dorm. There was one other person from my high school who came to Michigan State, since we were out-of-state students. I did not have a preference for a roommate, so it was luck of the draw. They tripled us, which they still do, I think, in Shaw Hall. So there were three of us in a little room in Shaw Hall, and we either had to be really friendly or else it wasn't going to work out very well.

Charnley: So the normal rivalry between Ohio State and Michigan State, you were right in the middle of that.

Meuche: I was never much into the Ohio State thing anyway.

Charnley: So you didn't betray any family confidences? [laughs]

Meuche: No.

Charnley: When you switched your major from forestry, tell me again what you went into at that time.

Meuche: It was called television, radio, and film at the time.

Charnley: The School of Communication Arts and Sciences, was that part of that?

Meuche: Yes, it had been in existence at that point. In fact, I think it's one of the oldest in the country, about to celebrate their fiftieth anniversary this fall, I think.

Charnley: Did you have any contact with Gordon Sabine at that time?

Meuche: No, not much. I knew who he was, of course.

Charnley: In the 1960s, while you were here as an undergraduate, in what ways did you get involved in broadcasting?

Meuche: I was working at the radio station in Shaw Hall. There were radio stations in a lot of the dormitories on campus. They were what were called the old closed-circuit stations where they broadcast over the electrical wiring in the building. It was awful quality. But I actually ended up being the manager of the station in Shaw Hall. Then I was also working at the one in Brody Hall, as well. Then I got a job at WKAR in my freshmen year, working there. So I was playing radio a lot.

Charnley: Was it music mainly, or were you doing interviews?

Meuche: Yes, it was sixties rock and roll, early sixties rock and roll, at the dorm stations. We used to have this big old clunky console that had turntables built into it and speakers, and we'd

roll it out into the lower level of Shaw Hall and have big dances every Friday night. There would be hundreds of MSU students who would come. So I would spend my nights helping run the Shaw Hall dance on Friday nights.

But at WKAR, because it was a professional radio station and it was very labor-intensive at the time, so announcers did nothing but announce, so you had to have somebody operate the control board and play the records and play the music, and then there had to be another separate person, an engineer, at the transmitter to control the transmitter. So it was very labor-intensive.

The music was mostly classical music. I did not know anything about classical music, my background having been my family's interest in big band music, and the station I worked at in Dayton, and then the sixties rock at the campus station.

So my first job at WKAR was as a control board operator for the announcers. So all I did was play the music and turn the microphones on and take cues from the announcers. I spent, obviously, a lot of time listening to them announce classical music. After a while, I think it probably was only maybe my first year, maybe even less, I had learned the classical music because I was subjected to it constantly, sitting across the window from the announcer, so that I took the audition. They had a rigorous audition at the time. We had a great blooper tape of kids who took the auditions and all the different ways they mispronounced all the classical composer names.

Charnley: You need to be a linguist.

Meuche: So I took the announcer audition and got promoted to an announcer.

Charnley: Where was the station at that time?

Meuche: It was in the Auditorium Building. We were crammed in literally to the fourth floor, third floor, and then overflowed into the second floor, which is really the balcony level of the auditorium. So the offices on the second floor were essentially storage closets under the balcony seats. No air conditioning and the windows didn't open up there on the fourth floor.

Charnley: That was the main offices for quite a few years, wasn't it?

Meuche: Until 1981, when we moved into the Communication Arts Building.

Charnley: What was that like?

Meuche: Oh, that was like heaven. It was like just heaven. It was an amazing facility that was designed by one of the greatest known acoustical studio designers in the country at the time. And going from studios in the Auditorium Building that literally had windows in them, so you could hear buses going by, we ended up in studios that were acoustically outstanding. I always felt at the time, because buildings, you know, I think they still do, have to be built to state specifications, which means no Taj Mahals, but I thought they did a really nice job of creating an attractive building which now needs some work, but that was 1981 and today is 2005.

Charnley: Yes, twenty-four years. Do you remember some of the announcers? Were they students or were they paid staff?

Meuche: It was a mixture of students and paid staff. There were announcers who, I felt at the time, were just really, really good, and I lost track of them. I don't know where they went on to be.

I do know that when I was a student, there were three students who were in classes with me, and two of whom worked at the station who went on to be pretty famous as broadcasters. One of them was Susan Spencer, who was an anchorperson and news reporter for CBS Television Network. Another one was Jay Johnson, who left here and worked at a number of stations, but ended up as a legendary NBC local news anchor in Green Bay, Wisconsin, but then got elected to Congress and became a congressman. He was in Congress for only one term and then lost. Let's see. That probably would have been the first [George H.W.] Bush election perhaps, because I think he just got lost in a Republican landslide. He was a Democrat. And ended up, strangely enough, being appointed by the Republican administration to be director of the U.S. Mint, and he was there for a little while. Now he still lives in the Washington [D.C.] area and is doing consulting work.

Charnley: So you've had some contacts with him or maintained contact?

Meuche: Actually, yes, I did. Yes, I did. He was here working at the station, which I suspect we'll get to it later, during all the student Vietnam War protests. One time about—must have been about ten years ago, he did a whole series for the Green Bay station about Vietnam War and being on a campus at the time. He brought his TV crew down here for a weekend and we spent a weekend walking around campus and sitting on the porch of the Auditorium Building, telling stories about what it was like working at the MSU station during the Vietnam War protests.

Charnley: Interesting. Are those tapes still in existence?

Meuche: I have—I need to listen to it because it may have fallen to pieces by now—an audiotape from February 1970 of whatever year that was. It was extremely cold. We had one portable tape recorder. It weighed a lot, really, really heavy. I went out to cover what you could probably characterize as riots, student riots, on Grand River Avenue. Students were breaking the store windows. The state police were there in their riot gear. I recorded this street scene, and all I remember is the recorder was very heavy, it was extremely cold, and I got clubbed in the back by a state policeman. I do want to listen to that tape. I do have that tape.

Charnley: That sounds like a priceless treasure.

Meuche: It will probably be awful when I listen to it.

Charnley: Well, slice of life from an interesting period. How did the Vietnam War affect the radio station?

Meuche: Well, it was interesting, because we just missed that as students. You know, we were just out of school and working at the station at the time, and so it was more our job to be onlookers and cover it, rather than go participate. But it was a tumultuous time on campus, obviously. There were protests that would break out all over the place, sit-ins at the Administration Building, and demonstrations. That was all mixed in that same era of the sixties with the riots in Detroit, the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Bobby [Robert F.] Kennedy,

and Martin Luther King [Jr.]. It was an incredibly interesting, unfortunate time in many respects, but it was quite an interesting time to be involved in a news-gathering operation with what little resources we had at the time.

Charnley: Did the station cover any of the major demonstrations or anything like that?

Meuche: Yes, we did. We were doing a lot of long-form stuff at the time, major addresses. We actually used to broadcast a lecture, or a class, or a speaker on campus, every day at ten o'clock in the morning. In fact, I think this program was called *On Campus*. So if there were events that were related to the war or other current events, those would appear in a long form. It was almost like the C-SPAN of the sixties on radio at the time.

Charnley: How did the professors respond to that?

Meuche: To the program?

Charnley: Yes.

Meuche: Well, it was a strange time, for programming that particular radio station, because in the sixties there was no NPR [National Public Radio]. NPR didn't come along until 1970. We had limited off-campus resources for news, just an old clicky-clack Associated Press newswire, and we had to make do with what we had here.

The other thing that was most fascinating was that we didn't have audience ratings. We couldn't tell how many people listened to programs, and, frankly, we didn't care, because we felt that it wasn't our job to reach as many people as possible like the commercial stations, because we weren't selling commercials. We were doing no fundraising whatsoever. We were 100 percent paid for by the university. So in a perverse kind of way, it was like we broadcasted what we thought people ought to hear rather than what people necessarily really wanted to hear, which was what the commercial stations were doing. It was a very different time.

Charnley: The transition from an ag school to a major research university, which many people would say was accomplished during the fifties and the early sixties, were you doing agriculture programming in that time?

Meuche: Oh, indeed we were. We had a full-time farm director and a full-time women's director. We had a daily show called the *Farm Service Hour*, and it was every day at noon. I think it was an hour and a half for a while, but then it was mostly an hour when I was there, and it was every day at noon because—remember the logic. The farmer gets up early, goes out works out in his field, and comes in for a big hearty lunch at noontime.

Charnley: Turns on the radio.

Meuche: Turns on the radio, because he must have the *Farm Service Hour*. And it was almost a formula show where, you know, if it's Thursday, it will be so-and-so, the Eaton County Cooperative Extensive Director, who will come in and tell you whether you should plant your

corn now or not. That went on for a long, long time. The program won a lot of awards, but eventually people realized that farmers didn't necessarily have that big hearty lunch at noon, and nobody really needed to tell them when their soybeans needed to be planted. They had finally figured that part out. [laughs]

So the old Farmers Week here, all of that was a big deal for the radio station, you know, wall-to-wall coverage, as they say.

Charnley: That was during spring break, wasn't it, usually?

Meuche: Yes.

Charnley: When the students were gone.

Meuche: And the Auditorium Building, where the radio stations were, would be just jam-packed with Future Farmers of America, hundreds of them, for their little annual meeting during Farmers Week. We have their old historical pictures of Farm Show things on the radio station. One of my favorites is one of the farm directors interviewing a cow. I remember getting letters from farmers saying that they played the radio station in their dairy barn because it really soothed their cows. The cows liked the actual music. It would be interesting to know what the *Homemakers Hour* programs consisted of, because—

Charnley: You weren't involved in that production?

Meuche: Well, I don't quite remember that, but there was a full-time women's director, and there was a show called the *Homemakers Hour* that I remember. In its waning years the *Homemakers Hour* was fifteen minutes long. I'll bet if you listen to it today, it wouldn't be complying with today's equal rights. I'm sure it was very, "Now, ladies, remember when your man comes home," I mean, I'm making this up.

Charnley: What became human ecology, did human ecology have any role in that, or was that Cooperative Extension Service?

Meuche: No, there was a relationship between Cooperative Extension and the Farm Show. In fact, they paid for part of it, or a part of the cost of the salary of the person, for at least a while. There was also a relationship between the women's editor and the human ecology. It wasn't called human ecology then; it was home economics. My wife is a home economics graduate.

Charnley: I forgot to ask about the station. Was this an AM station at that time?

Meuche: Interestingly enough, the AM station went on the air in 1922. Again, if we're going back to the sixties, the early sixties, the FM station went on in 1948, which is unbelievable, because nobody in the 1960s, hardly anybody, had an FM radio. If you bought a radio, it didn't even have FM on it, and the FM listening in the country was really small compared to AM listening. AM radio was dominant. There's a dramatic graph that shows when the crossover finally took place, where the AM just kept going down and the FM went up to the point where today probably 80 percent, or at least 80 percent, of all listening must to be to FM radio as

opposed to AM. So there was this WKAR FM station that went on the air in 1948 and nobody could listen to it.

My first FM radio was, living in the dorm, working at WKAR, and wanting to be able to hear the FM station, I went out and bought a converter device to attach to an old tape recorder to play it through the speaker in my tape recorder, because you could not, literally you could not buy an AM/FM radio at the time. So what WKAR did was they simulcast everything. The AM station could only be on the air from sunrise to sunset, and so they just played—everything that was on the AM station was also simultaneously on the FM station.

Charnley: That restriction still applies, doesn't it, the AM sunrise to sunset?

Meuche: Yes.

Charnley: Is that a FCC [Federal Communications Commission] rule?

Meuche: It is the goofiest rule. It has to do with the fact that AM radiowaves bounce off the ionosphere and travel huge distances at night. When I was a kid and we used to go to Canada every summer, it was one of my pastimes seeing how many distant radio stations I could listen to, and, boy, when you were up north could you ever get AM stations from all over the United States. I used to do that, too, when I was in high school and stuff. I was always a radio junkie; wait until nighttime and listen to my favorite shows in Virginia or Philadelphia or something. So it was because of this, stations going this long distance, that the FCC made stations that shared channels, some of them, not be on at night.

So the reason that WKAR AM had to go off was to protect WWL in New Orleans. At one time we tried to figure out a way to be able to stay on after dark. We hired consultants, did research, who showed that we would have to protect WWL's signal to Fort Wayne, Indiana, and therefore we could only be on the air if our signal wouldn't go further than Fort Wayne, Indiana, which it certainly would do at its daytime power at night.

When I worked at the station in Dayton, that was the big band station, the Junior Achievement Company, they were a daytime station and their signoff used to say, "Due to an archaic and ridiculous FCC rule, it is now time for WAVI to leave the air." I always thought, "Boy, you're flaunting this one." We never did that here.

Charnley: You were probably tempted, though.

Meuche: Right. It was a wartime thing, too. The notion was that you needed to hear those big powerful stations if you were in a rural area, and that was the only way to reach these rural areas, because there weren't very many radio stations then compared to today.

Charnley: WKAR, those weren't the original call letters, were they, of the radio station here?

Meuche: Those are the only call letters I know of. People ask what do they mean. Who came up with them? I get asked that question all the time. The answer to the question is, they were randomly assigned by the FCC. And interestingly enough, they could have been changed. Today these rock-and-roll stations change their call letters about every week. It's not hard to change your call letters. Once or twice, you know, somebody would get an idea at MSU. One

time it was a board of trustees member, but I don't remember who it was, that we should have the call letters WMSU. I always argued that WKAR was of such historical significance, in being truly one of the oldest, not the oldest, but one of the very oldest educational radio stations in the country, that those call letters should be preserved. I almost lost that battle once, but it turned out that WMSU was not available because it was owned by Mississippi State University.

Charnley: And Montana State.

Meuche: I never told anybody that if MSU really wanted those call letters and they made an offer to Mississippi State University, you can buy them. They could be paid to change their call letters. But I felt so strongly that they are of such great historical significance that they need to remain that way. And interestingly enough, when the TV station went on the air, it went on the air with the call letters WMSB, Michigan State Broadcasting. Well, guess what they are now and have been for years? WKAR.

Charnley: When was that switch made, do you remember from your research?

Meuche: The call letters?

Charnley: Yes.

Meuche: No, I don't.

Charnley: We can look that up.

Meuche: Probably when they switched from the shared agreement with Channel 10. They shared time with Channel 10 and then switched to Channel 23 full-time.

Charnley: Were you involved at that time?

Meuche: I was not involved with TV.

Charnley: You were doing radio.

Meuche: I was involved with TV in that we did some things together and people like the sports department, Jim Adams, Terry Braverman [phonetic], they worked at both TV and radio. There was also some of the news; there was a news relationship, too. We shared a program guide for a while after we started fundraising, but I didn't become really involved in TV until 1989.

Charnley: Was the frequency 870?

Meuche: Well, it might not have been 870 in the very, very beginning, because in the very, very beginning it was experimental. There were a bunch of electrical engineering students who didn't care about programming; they just cared about being able to transmit radiowaves. So at that time the call signs were not—I don't believe they were four, three or four letters; they were letters and

numbers or something. We actually have the early logs where they would sign on at noon and broadcast for five minutes and then sign off.

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

Charnley: This is side two of tape one of the Steve Meuche interview.

When the tape ended, we were talking about the logs, the station logs, of the early WKAR, and you mentioned that you didn't know exactly where they were, but you had seen them at some point.

Meuche: I'm sure they're still around somewhere. Unfortunately, we did not do—"we," not necessarily "me"—I like collecting things, historical things, and unfortunately, there's not a lot. There are a lot of photos and some written stuff, but, boy, there aren't a lot of programs. It would be hard to really preserve programs that were—first of all, nothing was recorded early on. Very little was recorded. What was recorded was recorded on these giant transcriptions that you would cut something onto a huge platter.

Charnley: Like a larger record.

Meuche: Yes. They were fourteen or sixteen inches, like a big pizza box. In fact, all of our theme songs for all the different classical music shows and stuff were all on transcriptions, where they'd been cut to a transcription, and you had to have these giant players.

Charnley: Then you were going from one to another during the course of the broadcast, what was the process of where you were able to use them?

Meuche: Well, you used two turntables. So you could always have the next one ready over there, and they were quite clunky and the had styluses in them and they would get dirt on them and sound funny.

Charnley: Could you talk a little bit about after you graduated, how was it that you ended up staying here at the university?

Meuche: Actually, I was offered a full-time permanent position at WKAR before I graduated in 1965, as a producer/director. I have a funny just as an aside to that. The thing that I will never forget and that is, remember I was an out-of-state student because I was from Ohio. So I was paying a lot more than in-state students. Suddenly I was employed full-time by MSU. So I went over to the registrar's office, or whoever was in charge of that, I remember that in the old Administration Building, and said, "I don't think I should be paying out-of-state tuition anymore."

And they said, "Well, why is that?"

I said, "Well, how can I be out of state if I'm a full-time employee of MSU?"

And they told me that it didn't matter, I should still have to pay it. I don't remember what I did. I wasn't surly or anything. But eventually they decided that, no, maybe I only had to pay in-state tuition if I worked for the university full-time.

Charnley: You weren't commuting from Dayton.

Meuche: No. That was only in the last one or two terms before I graduated.

Charnley: Were you doing music at that time or was it news production or a combination?

Meuche: Actually, I was doing both. While I was still a student, I was doing the sign-on program, the first program at the beginning of the day, which was a music program, interestingly enough, mostly big band music. Eventually I did a whole bunch of programs. At that time we had programs. Today regular stations have formats. You have a favorite format; you don't have a favorite necessarily radio program. You may have a favorite television program, of course, but you have favorite radio stations. But we had all these compartmentalized programs. We had *The Homemakers Hour* and *The Farm Service Hour* and a program called *The Scrapbook*, which I did for years after the producer, who had done it for years, left and went to get a Ph.D. at Stanford [University] or somewhere.

Charnley: What was *The Scrapbook* about?

Meuche: *The Scrapbook* was a great show. It was a variety—a show of news, interesting kind of tidbits, interviews with people, and music. I actually kind of broke the music barrier on the station because I would play stuff that had never been played before. I mean, I played the Beatles. Nobody played the Beatles on WKAR at the time.

Charnley: Did you hear from President [John A.] Hannah about that?

Meuche: No, no. Actually, I enjoyed doing it. I just felt like if there was something that was interesting, that it would be fun to play it on that program. But like I said, we had *The Farm Service Hour*, *The Women's Show*, *The Scrapbook*. There was a show called *Listen to the Band*. Some of these were just fifteen minutes long. So we had like a marching band show every afternoon. We had a Broadway Show. And my favorite was *Hymns You Love*. So I would do *Listen to the Band* or *Hymns You Love* or these shows. I always thought *Hymns You Love* was amusing because it was fifteen minutes long and you'd play one religious album for fifteen minutes, but it was white Anglo-Saxon Protestant hymns you love. Well, I played Mahalia Jackson. But those shows eventually all went away.

Then the big year was 1965 when we split the two stations. So for the first time the FM station became totally separate programming than the AM station. Well, I shouldn't say that. Some of the programs were still simulcast, but a radical step for the stations at the time.

Charnley: Did the FM station concentrate on classical at that time?

Meuche: Classical, and it was very eclectic. The programmer was Ken Beechler [phonetic], who was the musical director at the time. Ken is an absolutely brilliant person when it comes to the arts and culture. Again, it was a period when we didn't have a lot of audience research. Remember we still weren't fundraising.

There was an MSU professor named Hans Nathan [phonetic], who was an expert in new classical music, the stuff that drove me nuts because it was atonal. He used to have a show, so

we'd play that. Beechler would weave Dylan Thomas reading poetry in the middle of classical music and we would play—well, there's an old joke in public radio today that some of the classical music stations that are classical music stations, if you can't dance to it, don't play it. This is classical music, right? Well, believe me, we played a lot of classical music you couldn't dance to.

Charnley: I'm glad you mentioned Ken Beechler. Was he directly involved in broadcasting?

Meuche: Yes. He did programming on the air, but he was the architect of the new FM format. I did the sign-on show, the first show of the day, at six-thirty in the morning.

Charnley: For FM?

Meuche: For the newly separated from the AM station FM.

Charnley: Do you remember what year that was again?

Meuche: '65.

Charnley: Was that about the time when more people started getting FM broadcasts?

Meuche: Yes.

Charnley: You mentioned that graph where the two—

Meuche: Right. I think that was in the late seventies when the crossover happened. I think there were enough people listening to FM that it certainly made sense to have two separate programmed stations. Again, remember, no network. The programs, the external programs we had—and the other thing that's important, compared to today with public radio stations, is there weren't very many public radio stations. The early public radio stations were almost all affiliated with colleges and universities. MSU was one of the very, very first, and they were, oh, they were hugely popular in the Big Ten. Big Ten had the public—they were kind of the dominant force in early educational. They weren't called public radio then; educational radio stations.

So there weren't very many stations, but there was a network, no interconnection network, run by the National Association of Educational Broadcasters. They were headquartered at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana. Stations would produce programs that were intended for more than a local audience, a national audience, and then submit them to NAEB to possibly be accepted for national distribution.

Then what you'd do is, in the mail—it all sounds so old-fashioned. In the mail every quarter you would get a catalog of shows that were available and then you'd order them and then they would come in boxes in mail on tapes. So it was all bicycling, what we called bicycling, tapes around. It was like when you're done with your tapes, you send them on to Ohio State.

Charnley: Kind of like what movies used to be or 16-mm movies.

Meuche: Yes. And it was so funny because at the time everything—again this is this whole notion of programs instead of formats, everything was thirteen weeks, a quarter. So it would either be thirteen half hours or thirteen hours and you'd play one a week for thirteen weeks at a given time. And those were the kind of programs we were producing here locally. We weren't always producing thirteen in a series, but I was producing local series. Then I also got a grant and produced a national series that was distributed nationally by NAEB called the *Circumstance of Science*, which was about science in the late sixties.

Charnley: Did you do anything at that time on the cyclotron or any of the research that was going on on campus?

Meuche: Was that going on at that time, in the late sixties?

Charnley: It was just starting.

Meuche: I didn't do anything. I was focusing a lot on the programs I was producing. This would be after you do your show, *The Scrapbook* or this morning show, then you would spend the rest of your day producing programs. It was very clunky the way programs were produced then. You literally had to cut the tape with razorblades and splice it with splicing tape.

Charnley: Physical editing.

Meuche: Interesting today at the radio station, WKAR, there is no tape. It's all digital, hard disk, everything.

But I was focusing primarily on programs about youth issues. We had another producer who was doing environmental-related stuff. Then with another producer we did a program, *The Poor* was the name of the series, in the Lansing area, focusing principally on migratory workers in Michigan. At the time Michigan was the third largest employer of migrant labor, which is hard to believe, and they were right here. They were over west of here in Eaton Rapids, picking pickles, and, of course, up north and over on the West Coast with all the fruit farms. The conditions were pretty intolerable for the living conditions and the social services. We hitched up with some people who were working for the state trying to improve the conditions, and spent a lot of time at migrant labor camps doing the series. It was quite enlightening, because I'd led a rather sheltered life growing up in Ohio, and this whole experience, I think that was what the college experience did.

Charnley: How did you approach it for radio? One can understand and one has seen documentaries with film and videotape, but how would you approach those same topics with radio?

Meuche: It was a lot of interview stuff. The way programs were produced at the time it would be—I have *The Poor* tapes, but I haven't listened to them. It would sound so rudimentary if you listened to the way those shows, I think, were produced. A lot of just interview and, you know, today the stuff, the radio material has so much sound and things. I mean, we were riding around on these dusty country roads with this man named Ubaldo Patino, who I believe is still alive. We

did a documentary about the Hispanic migration to the Lansing area a few years ago on TV and he was one of the interviewees. We probably weren't recording talking to him while the car was bouncing over the road and the dust was blowing in the window. You know, if you did something today, that's the way you'd record it. We probably said, "Stop. Turn off the car so we can do this interview."

Charnley: Interesting. So that one got picked up by the NAEB.

Meuche: Not *The Poor*, because that was local. *The Circumstance of Science* would have.

Charnley: Were you working on a master's or anything at that time?

Meuche: Yes.

Charnley: You were right on campus?

Meuche: Right. I got a master's in—I don't know if it was still called television, radio, and film at the time or not. My thesis advisor was—there were some really good professors in the Television, Radio and Film Department—was Arthur Weld [phonetic], who was like within five minutes of a Ph.D. in French and never got his Ph.D., and he taught film courses. My master's thesis, which interestingly enough, my granddaughter, my sixteen-year-old granddaughter, who is a movie nut and very interested in drama, ended up seeing my thesis at my house and read it a month or so ago. She said, "Can I read this?"

I said, “It’s very academic. This is not fun stuff.”

She said, “No, I’d like to read it.” So she took it home, and she brought it back and she said, “I thought that was very interesting.” She said, “You write just like I do.”

Charnley: You must have felt very good about that.

Meuche: It was about violence in motion pictures. The movie *Bonnie and Clyde* at the time was a watershed movie, because it was considered by many critics to be one of the most violent movies ever made. I had a lot of fun doing that thesis because there were incredibly good film critics during those times, and I did this research project about the evolution of violence in motion pictures and how *Bonnie and Clyde* became a watershed in terms of how movies were made. It pales by comparison, of course, to today, but it was a fun thesis. Art Weld was my advisor for that, and he retired and moved to Florida. I think someone told me recently that he has passed away. I’m not sure.

Charnley: Were you able to use any of your master’s work in your later broadcasting at all?

Meuche: A master’s degree, I never had a job that required a master’s degree. Well, I shouldn’t say that. I did teach at MSU for a couple of years shortly after I got my master’s. I also taught a broadcasting course at Lansing Community College for a while, too. At MSU I was teaching radio production. It’s funny, I happen to still have my grade sheet, because the final exam, each student had to do a radio production on tape. I thought I had some of those tapes, but I’m not quite sure, and the notes I wrote. But I had two notable students when I taught at MSU. One is

my dear friend who just retired from WKAR, Hal Prentice, who was the music director at WKAR for years and years. At his retirement I embarrassed him because I had the grade sheet and Hal got a B-minus, even though there were a lot of As. The other person who was in the class was Steve Garvey, the famous baseball player. Steve didn't work too hard in that class. I think maybe he was too focused on baseball at the time.

Charnley: As I recall, he had a good radio voice.

Meuche: Yes. Those facilities were so funny compared to today. They were up above Fairchild Theater. There are a couple of rooms up there.

Charnley: Just across the street from where we are.

Meuche: Yes, the other end of the Auditorium Building. Oh, I can see that equipment now. Today it would just look like it belonged in a museum. Well, it belonged in a museum. It was funny, the Michigan Association of Broadcasters had a display of the history of broadcasting a few years ago at the Michigan Historical Museum, the state historical museum, and we had a reception down there for our donors and stuff, and it was like déjà vu. Part of the display was a radio control room, and it was the same equipment that we had at WKAR when I started there. It was like, "Oh, my goodness. I cannot believe this. Where did they get this?"

Charnley: Did you find out where they got it?

Meuche: No. But right next to that, of course, was a digital TV set.

Charnley: In terms of the tremendous technological change that you have seen in the course of your career and that you've mentioned a little bit, was it hard or easy to keep track of all those changes, or did you anticipate those as a radioman?

Meuche: I wouldn't say it was hard, but, boy, there was a lot of, "Oh, wow," to it. I mean, there were so many moments, and some of them today don't sound like they're very dramatic at all. I mean, I remember when we first became connected to National Public Radio and it was on telephone lines, not satellite. The satellite didn't come till five or six years later. So everything we got from NPR came over these not-very-high-quality phone lines, and it was like, oh, wow, listening to a real public radio network coming from Washington. I remember sitting there and listening to it, and the first thing they ever fed to stations, the very first thing, it was when the Vietnam veterans protested at the [U.S.] Supreme Court in Washington. It was a piece that a man named Jim Russell, who's still working in public broadcasting today, did of the Vietnam veterans protesters at the Supreme Court. And I'm sitting here listening to this thing, and it was sound of them arresting the veterans, putting them in a bus and driving away as they chanted, "One, two, three, four, we don't want your fucking war."

And I went, "Oh, wait a minute. Can we broadcast this?" We'd never had to deal with anything like this before.

Charnley: Interesting. And that was broadcast on WKAR?

Meuche: I don't remember.

Charnley: John Kerry was involved with the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, VVAW.

Meuche: Yes.

Charnley: MSU, did they sign on to NPR relatively early?

Meuche: We were one of the very first stations. I think today there are at least eight hundred NPR stations. There were less than a hundred in the beginning; I think it might have been around seventy. It was absolutely fascinating, because it was just such a breakthrough moment for us, because it just totally liberated us from being confined in a kind of smaller world.

Charnley: Did you find that the audience was interested in that at the time? Were they doing any surveys?

Meuche: That was just starting. That was just starting, and as I recall, our FM audience at the time, our weekly FM audience, was about 15,000 to 20,000 people. Today it's over 100,000 every week, at least. So much of that is due to NPR. So much of it is due to commercial radio, too, thank you very much. I mean, commercial radio has been very successful, I think, in driving people to discover and find a place where you don't have to listen to endless commercials and disc jockeys that talk nonsense all morning long. So the audience for National Public Radio is just huge now for public radio stations.

Charnley: In the late sixties, who was head of broadcasting at MSU at that time?

Meuche: Interestingly enough, MSU was one of the few places, especially in the Big Ten, with both television and radio stations that were separately administered. Actually, there was a man named Armand Hunter [phonetic], who was the founder of television at MSU, who convinced John Hannah that the university should become involved in TV at such an early time for TV, 1954. He was around for a while. I had the real honor and privilege of knowing him because he's truly the MSU at least television pioneer. But in 1960, late sixties, Dick Estell [phonetic] was the manager of the radio station. I became the manager of the radio station in 1978. I was the program manger beginning in 1969. So from '69 to '78, I was in charge of all the programming, and all of the producers worked for me.

Charnley: As you linked with NPR, was there less local programming that was produced?

Meuche: No, not at that time, because at that time we still were 100 percent paid for. Well, maybe things were getting tight then. Because we didn't have our first fundraiser until 1975, and NPR started in 1970. So for that period from '70 to '75 we were still dependent on MSU for 100 percent of our support, but I think because we no longer had to deal with the clunky notion of the bicycled tapes and weren't as compartmentalized with the programming with all this, you know, *Homemakers Hour* and all this stuff. In fact, at that point in time, some point along there, we started moving to large blocks of classical music time, especially at night where the announcers were not really there; they were recorded on tape. So a bit of time was spent every day having to

record your announce tape, and then a student normally would play the announcer tape, and then the record, and then the announcer tape, that kind of thing.

So I think there was a change in what people had to do that might have freed up people to be able to focus on producing more programming. But there was a lot more emphasis then, instead of on that one—there was very little of that long-form stuff. So we were able to do things like a whole series of programs with the voice library and the library with Bob Vincent, who, of course, was the founder, when he was still here. Then later we did stuff with Maury Crane [phonetic]. So we did a little national series on that. That was when we really got into state government coverage, too, because we suddenly realized—see, commercial stations just stopped doing news eventually. So there was a real niche there.

Charnley: And the proximity of the Capitol is just down the road.

Meuche: It was a natural, yes.

Charnley: Was there any competition between the stations at University of Michigan?

Meuche: Early on I had incredible respect and admiration for them. For some reason I always, early I felt that they were a better public radio station. I don't know why I would have felt that way, but I admired them a lot and I admired the man who was leading the station. His name was Ed Burroughs [phonetic] at the time. But then they got in a trap where they didn't change over time and they maintained that very kind of eclectic, old-fashioned, classical music format with announcers who sounded like stuffy old announcers. It's kind of what we call in radio now that

you have to sound accessible instead of distant. So they got stuck in that kind of format until just recently when they completely changed, much to the chagrin of the hardcore classical music lovers down there, and actually totally changed the station to an all news and talk format. So there was a long period of time when we became the dominant station and—

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

Charnley: This is tape two side one of the interview with Steve Meuche.

Charnley: When the tape ended, we were talking about somewhat of the rivalry between the U of M stations, radio and broadcasting, and Michigan.

Meuche: We've always gotten along. In fact, we've always been the envy, I think, of some of the other stations in other states, because the Michigan public radio and public TV stations have always worked closely together. I think it was probably in the sixties, late sixties, maybe early seventies, we did lots of, not lots, but we would do occasional joint program projects where we'd take some kind of conflict of statewide interest and then link together the stations with some kind of a clunky setup where we relayed our parts off the air. So we'd actually be like, all right, so this first segment will be ten minutes long and it will be done at the University of Michigan, and the way we'll get it on WKAR's air is to tune into University of Michigan in the Auditorium Building station and put it into the WKAR transmitter. Then they would finish and then we would do our part and they would tune us in down there.

Charnley: It sounds pretty complicated.

Meuche: It was clunky, too. But we did that with U of M, Western Michigan, MSU. And we today still work closely together and have a state association that meets regularly along with the TV people. That's also unusual in some states. The public TV people hardly ever relate to the public radio people, and Michigan, our association is both public radio and TV.

Charnley: Were you involved in that early?

Meuche: I was the chairman of the board for a few years and on the executive committee and quite involved in that.

Charnley: Was that state-funded?

Meuche: Oh, no, it's a nonprofit corporation that's funded by the stations themselves.

Charnley: We were talking a little bit about the covering of state affairs, state government. Did John Hannah support that in the early stages or was it something else?

Meuche: I admired John Hannah so much. Of course, he was the president when I came here as a student, but I never knew John Hannah. I don't recall ever receiving any kind of feedback one way or the other from the Hannah administration. Now, I was not the manager during a lot of

that time, but certainly the university never said, “We want you to go in this direction,” or, “We don’t want you to.”

In fact, that’s one of the things I am absolutely the proudest about MSU, in terms of its relationship with the public radio and TV stations, and that is having spent years and years and years with my colleagues who are at other university and college stations and having heard horror stories about how their administration interfered in one way or another with the programming on the station, and where it gets especially dicey is in news. If you have a story that you report and it’s negative about MSU, there can be people at the university who will be angry about that.

Charnley: Public relations.

Meuche: And if at any time somebody, at least we always strongly, and still do today, felt that if any person in the administration told us, “You should not have done that story because it reflected MSU in a negative way, and don’t ever do stories again that are negative toward MSU,” that would become a serious problem for us, because that would totally compromise our journalistic integrity. So therefore, other stations would be reporting this story, the newspapers would be reporting this story, but we would be saying nothing? Like I said, based on horror stories from other stations, not once in my entire career here did anyone make us change programming or not report something. There were little incidents from time to time where people were mad because we did something, and they would call us up or tell us that they weren’t happy, and we would say, “Well, but we have a job to do and that really has to be the way it is. We hope you can accept that.”

Charnley: With the publication of *Ramparts* article that dealt with issue of the involvement of MSU during the Vietnam War—

Meuche: Wow, I had completely forgotten it. Oh, my goodness. *Ramparts*. I remember that.

Charnley: Do you think that was 1966?

Meuche: Yes.

Charnley: But I wondered if there were any repercussions, if that was covered, or on the radio?

Meuche: You know, that was so long ago, I don't remember. But, boy, I do remember that controversy.

Charnley: We're talking about the role of MSU in training the South Vietnamese police force on campus and the allegations about CIA connections and that sort of thing. I didn't know if that was one of the controversies that the station avoided.

Meuche: No, not at all. I don't remember it as being something that where we—no, we wouldn't avoid it, but I don't remember us ever getting criticism for doing anything about that. But I'm not sure what we did about that at the time.

Charnley: In the seventies, obviously some of the sports scandals and that sort of thing. Maybe we could talk a little bit about sports programming. How did you balance that? Were there some people that wanted all sports?

Meuche: It was all sports all the time. It was. Actually, it kind of used to drive me crazy, because we broadcast everything, football, basketball, baseball, hockey. I mean, sports was always strong with the leadership. I mentioned Jim Adams and Terry Braverman. I forgot Bob Shackleton [phonetic], who was here. Jim was Bob's assistant. It was Bob and Jim at the time.

Baseball was the most frustrating because it came right in the middle of the afternoon during the weekday, you never knew how long it would last, and if it got rained out, then they'd change it, and the next day, what you thought was going to be a single game, suddenly became a doubleheader or something. It was just like—you'd wring your hair. It was disruptive, you know. But there were people who liked it.

We ran the statewide football network for years, where if you wanted to listen to MSU football on a Saturday afternoon on your little local station in Petoskey, it will be Jim Adams and Bob Shackleton. That's who you'd listen to. I believe in the later years then we also programmed it in a way so that there were opportunities for those local commercial stations to cut away and run commercials. Eventually that all went away.

I don't know how the baseball and that kind of sport went away. I think it went away because we finally convinced people, or convinced ourselves that as we became more sophisticated and were fundraising and wanted to reach more listeners without compromising the type of programming we did, that you can't break a format, which is what we call it. So you can't have classical music every day except, oops, sorry, we're not going to play any classical

music today, we're going to have two and a half hours of baseball on the radio. But the football prevailed for a long time, and especially on the TV station because it wasn't available. Now, of course, you can watch every basketball game, you can watch every football game and you can watch the hockey games on the cable channels. So the necessity, I guess, if that's the correct word, for doing that on the radio went away. But, oh, yes, lots of sports.

There was the TV show *Sportlight* on WKAR. We did a show every day called *News Sixty*. We did a sixty-minute news program on the radio station and there were sports sections and hard news sections and features. A pretty dramatic undertaking for the times to do a sixty-minute program every day. Of course, I think it was at six. It might have moved to five. Six today would be—you wouldn't want to put anything on at six today.

Charnley: Your listening audience would probably not be there.

Meuche: *All Things Considered* is at six o'clock. Wouldn't want to waste a lot of local news, public affairs energy, at six o'clock; too much competition from television.

Charnley: Was there a relationship with on-campus broadcasting or instructional television? Were you involved in that at all?

Meuche: Mildly involved. But of course, I ended up being director of instructional television, ITV, eventually, but not until the late eighties. My only involvement with instructional television was when I was teaching the broadcast courses right after I got my master's degree. I also taught a course in television and radio announcing, and for the television announcing course

we did it in the instructional TV studios, which were in Erickson Hall. At the time instructional television and public television were two separate entities; they had not been merged. That was my only really contact with those folks.

Then ironically, it turned out that twenty years later, almost twenty-five years later, I ended up having responsibility for that instructional television and working with some of the same people who helped me when I was teaching this television announcing course, because I knew nothing about television, but I was teaching television announcing. It was like, okay, I can teach announcing, but—so we did, you know, "Okay, Students. Now it's time to do the weather forecast." I'm like, "Help me out here, instructional TV people. Take care of these cameras for me, will you, because I don't know how to do anything with a camera."

Charnley: Was Kent Creswell involved in that?

Meuche: I don't know if Kent was at that time. Erling Jorgenson was the pioneer of the instructional TV stuff.

Charnley: On campus.

Meuche: And Kent did come here later, from Ohio State, as the associate director. Then Kent worked for me when I was director of broadcasting services heading up the instructional arm of that. There was a time, I think it was probably in the seventies, when there were these really prestigious program awards called the Ohio State Awards. Ohio State ran a competition for the television and radio awards competition, and Kent was a judge running a judging center, and I

worked with Kent as a judge each year judging those award submissions. So that was my first real contact with him. Later on I ended up doing that, running a judging group here on campus in the nineties. The awards have since disappeared.

Charnley: How did the nature of your job change between the seventies and the eighties?

Meuche: To me it wasn't as dramatic as between the sixties and seventies. There were a couple of significant changes. Of course, one was the most dramatic, in terms of facilities, was moving to the Communication Arts Building in 1981. Also in the mid-seventies NPR moved to the satellite network. So for the first time we were capable of getting multiple radio channels from satellite, and we were selected to be one of only I think it was about fifteen public radio stations that not only had a downlink capability to receive the programming, but also an uplink. So we could transmit to the entire public radio system via satellite. That was pretty dramatic. I always thought that was really quite technically interesting how you could take a signal and beam it 22,000 miles up in the air and capture it at another public radio station in California. Today it's not so dramatic.

Charnley: People have it in their homes in a little small dish.

Meuche: And interestingly enough, as a matter of fact, so that was such a big deal to have that satellite uplink in the mid-seventies, about three or four years ago we packed it up, all the electronics for transmitting radio, and sent it back to NPR. We decommissioned the uplink part because that's not the way you do things anymore. It's all over the Internet or fiber optic lines.

We still have a TV uplink, because it's a little harder yet to do high-quality video that way, but you know that we'll be doing it that way soon. This was seventies to eighties.

Well, the public radio audience started growing dramatically. The whole fundraising audience thing dramatically changed. We did our first on-the-air fundraiser in 1975. I remember it because we set up the news room in the cramped auditorium as the area we did the pitches from, and we raised $10,000 in 1975. That was the total amount of money we raised from listener contributions. Today the radio station is over a million, the television station over two million every year. We did not do underwriting, those underwriting announcements. We, public broadcasters, have all been trained to call them underwriting announcements. Everybody else calls them commercials. There really is a difference. But, boy, they're pushing the line these days, I'll tell you.

Charnley: Yes, it's quite a contrast. It seems like one of the first ones, *Masterpiece Theatre*, that connection, I remember that was about as close to endorsement.

Meuche: Yes, that's mild compared to today. That's really quite mild.

Charnley: Where you're seeing the product and you're hearing the pitch.

Meuche: You're not allowed to say, "Buy this product." You're allowed to show the product. You can't urge people to take action. Of course, you still can't interrupt the program, which is the way, certainly, it ought to be. And there's a lot of research. I mean, from time to time we get

people who complain about it, but there is a lot of research that shows that people do understand the necessity of that.

Charnley: Were you involved in that fundraiser, the very first one?

Meuche: Oh yes.

Charnley: Did the university start withdrawing some of the support in relationship to that? It seems like that was a tough balance.

Meuche: You know, and that was always a fear of mine, that they would say, "Well, if you're fundraising, we'll just offset our support by the amount you raise every year." I don't believe that happened. There were periods when things were tough economically in the state and others, as I'm sure history has recorded here for sure, 1981, and the modified coordinated proposals, where they took 17 million, I believe, out of the MSU budget, MSU did at the time. [M.] Cecil Mackey was the president. That was the first time ever that—ever until two years ago—we actually had to lay off employees because the budget cuts were so extreme, relatively speaking, in 1981. Since then, actually, the MSU support has not gone up. In fact, it hasn't even kept pace with inflation, but probably neither has the MSU overall budget. But MSU is still, I think, quite generous in its support, even though we got a big budget cut two years ago. But again, it was a rough time and we ended up having a couple of layoffs again.

The combination, the funding model now, I think is a really good funding model where MSU pays for some of it, some of it comes through congressional appropriations, and the

listeners or viewers pay for the rest. And the listener/viewer support is about 50 percent. I think that's good, that nobody really is the majority owner, even though, of course, MSU owns the license, so they really do control the stations.

Charnley: Were you surprised that the radio was able to maintain that level of giving, or not surprised by that?

Meuche: Actually, radio's done quite well. In terms of the listener support?

Charnley: Yes.

Meuche: Radio's done quite well. TV is struggling these days because there is just so much competition, so many cable channels. And public radio and TV people tend to lose sight of reality sometimes. I remember one of the very first public TV meetings I went to in 1989 or 1990, and they had this elaborate presentation about how public TV had nothing to fear from cable television because the public television national audience was bigger than all those cable networks, Discovery Channel, Learning Channel, Food Network, CNN, ESPN, bigger than all their viewers combined, and that was fifteen years ago. Oh, it's not true at all today. No way.

Charnley: They were ignoring that, I think, or misjudging it.

Meuche: Discovery Channel was spending more money on advertising than public television was spending on programming in a year. How do you compete with that?

Charnley: You went more into administration in the 1980s.

Meuche: Yes. Well, I was the radio general manager starting in 1978, but then in 1987 Bob Page, who had been the TV manager for years and years and years, retired. Irv Bettinghouse [phonetic], the dean of College of Communication Arts, who was the area we reported to at the time—we've been all over this university in terms of changing reporting relationships over the years, but at that point in time it was Communication Arts and Sciences, and Irv Bettinghouse came to me and said, "Bob Page is retiring. I'd like you to be on the search committee or—." Well, no, he said, "I'd like you to also be, if you're willing, the acting director of the TV station, as well as radio general manager. Or if you're a candidate for the job, then tell me and we won't do that."

I said, "Well, let me think about it." And I thought about it, and the next day I said, "I can't give up radio," because it was are you going to become a candidate to become the director of the TV station and somebody else would run the radio station. Remember, they're still separate, even though we're in the same building now. I said, "I can't give up radio. So I'll be the acting director for TV and do the radio job, and you go find yourself a TV manager."

I was on the search committee. After two years of being acting TV director, along with my radio job, and the search committee becoming frustrated because a couple of people who were offered the position eventually declined, they suddenly realized that they could save some money and create some synergy if they combined the television and radio administration, as I had mentioned earlier, like it was at most universities. So they created a new position, the board of trustees created a new position, director of broadcasting services, and made me the director of broadcasting services. So that's what I began doing in 1989.

So it was like, “Oh my, I’ve been doing radio for all these years and suddenly we’re into the world of television. This will be interesting,” and it was interesting. I had to keep telling people at the TV station, “Look, you produce those programs. We’ll talk about what direction we’re going and stuff, but just remember one thing, Steve has never produced a television program in his life. I’ll try to figure this out, but I can’t direct a TV show, because I used to do radio.” Well, it worked out pretty good. I enjoyed it and I think we accomplished some things.

Charnley: What were some of the producers that you relied on then to hold up the leg of the TV?

Meuche: Actually, many of them are still there, and some of the legendary ITV producers now. They’re all gone now. Dick Brundle [phonetic]. Gary McQuaig [phonetic]. Gary McQuaig, here suddenly, is working for me in the 1990s, and he was my director that helped me do that television announcing class in Erickson Hall. And the TV people, directors, many of whom are still there, too, some of whom retired.

One of my early TV stories that kind of summed up my baptism to TV was, because I always had an interest in programming I took a real interest in television, public television programming, which was unusual, because for some bizarre reason public TV managers tend not to be involved very much in programming. I took a real interest in it and learned a lot that way, but I also made my early mistakes in TV by not understanding how it worked.

One of my favorite early-on stories was they were programming the television station and they had the ability to videotape programs fed from PBS and schedule them at other times. So if you had a children’s show that you wanted to show, you could record it when it was fed off the

satellite at seven a.m., but if you wanted it to be on at ten a.m., then you'd play the tape back at ten a.m. And we were doing some things that I thought were kind of goofy, so I said, "Well, I don't understand why you're recording this, playing this here, doing that, doing that."

And they said, "Well, that's the only way we can do it. We have to do it that way. We don't like doing it this way either, but there's no other way to do it."

I said, "Well, why is there no other way?"

And they said, "Well, we don't enough tape machines."

I said, "You don't have enough videotape machines?" I said, "In radio, if we don't have enough tape machines, we go buy one. They cost two thousand dollars."

They said, "Uh, Steve, welcome to television. Do you know how much a television tape machine costs?"

I said, "I have no idea. Just go buy one."

And they said, "Oh, okay. Where's the thirty thousand dollars coming from?"

I said, "Oh, okay. I guess we won't be buying a tape machine soon, will we?"

Radio's so simple compared to TV. One person in radio can go off and do a program from start to finish. TV, you do a big studio production, it takes eleven people.

Charnley: Was MSU producing many TV programs when you took over?

Meuche: We had a little niche. We had a little niche where we were producing, because there was a man at the television station for years who was an absolute legend. His name was Dr. Donald Pash and he produced a series called *Young Musical Artists*, and some of the most famous American musicians today, when they were very young and undiscovered, came to MSU

and performed, and Don Pasch created, all the way back into black and white and then into color, programs with these performances of these artists. He became an absolute legend because it was such an incredible niche that nobody else was into. He has retired. I think he retired shortly after I became the acting director. He now lives in Chicago.

We decided we wanted to try to maintain some of that fine arts tradition, so we did hire a young man, Eric Schultz was his name, MSU music graduate with some TV interest, and we created a series of programs that were what I would call now not just a straight performance, but a kind of performance documentaries. We didn't do very many because they just took so long to produce and they were so elaborate. But those were distributed nationally on PBS.

One of the last ones we did was the Ellen Zwilich Commission for the Gardens, the Children's Gardens, the symphony that she wrote and was performed here at Wharton Center, the world premier of her symphony. I think it was her fifth symphony. We did a documentary about all her visits to MSU and studying the gardens and composing, went to New York, Eric went to New York to her studio and did a documentary about how she wrote this symphony, and then did a documentary of the performance of the actual symphony. We won an Emmy Award for that.

[Begin Tape 2, Side B]

Charnley: This is tape two side two of the Steve Meuche interview.

We were talking about Ellen Zwilich's, The Gardens, and you mentioned the—

Meuche: Eric Schultz the producer.

Charnley: And you have an Emmy Award?

Meuche: Yes. That was a regional Emmy Award, not a national award, by the way. Let's be correct here. And Eric Schultz, who was the producer, who was the mastermind of those programs, left. Actually, he went through the MSU Weekend MBA Program, and got an MBA, and then strangely enough, left and went to the New Jersey Public Television Network to do performance programming.

Charnley: He was able to use it as a springboard.

Meuche: See, public TV stations have to make decisions about where they want to focus on their programming, and the station here really isn't big enough to be a major regular producer of national programming. By "not big enough," I don't mean to belittle station, but the problem is that the minute you commit yourself to doing that kind of thing, the local programming suffers. Somehow you decide, you know, I want to be a producer of these shows that are on PBS all the time.

Charnley: And a contrasting station would be like GBH in Boston, some of the others from—

Meuche: Correct. San Francisco and Los Angeles and New York, they're the ones that produce all that programming, but they have multi-, multi-million-dollar budgets and they're constantly having financial problems. It's so difficult to produce those kinds of programs.

So, long ago we made a commitment that in addition to our programs of local interest that we would focus on statewide programming because we were in the capital. There are seven public television stations in Michigan, and we are *the* public television station that produces virtually all of the statewide programming, the programming that's carried by all the other stations, *Off the Record*, which we've done forever and ever.

Charnley: With Tim Skubick?

Meuche: With Tim Skubick, who lived in Shaw Hall with me and worked at WKME, the Shaw Hall closed-circuit radio station in the 1960s, and did the Friday night dances with me. Tim Skubick is still doing *Off the Record* and has been. He calls himself the senior capital correspondent. I always used to crack up, because I thought that was pretty funny, but, boy, he is now the senior capital correspondent. I guess they did an anniversary thing for him in the studios two years ago, anniversary of the show.

Charnley: Was that the twenty-fifth?

Meuche: No, I think it was the thirtieth. I'll have to check that. And without hesitation, the governor showed up, you know. He's done a beautiful job. So that show, *Off the Record*, tapes every Friday morning, satellite uplink Friday morning, broadcast on every public station in Michigan over the weekend. And we do a series called *Michigan at Risk*, which is always a topic of statewide concern, that we produce here. That program is carried live. Well, not live, but simultaneously at the same time, same night, on every one of the seven Michigan public TV

stations. And then we do a lot of specials, the governor's State of the State Address and legislative specials, programs like that. So that's our niche. None of the other public TV stations in Michigan are producing programs for the other stations on a regular basis; here occasionally.

Charnley: What's the Michigan equivalent of the C-SPAN?

Meuche: That's Michigan Government Television, MGTV. That's not a public TV thing. That actually is financed by the cable companies. Now, we have an excellent relationship with MGTV. We work with them. In fact, we put all the MGTV programs on the campus cable system here so faculty and people can use them in their classrooms if they wish. For a long time, I don't know if we are still doing it, we were doing the archiving of all their daily broadcasts, and they use our material occasionally when we have something. We occasionally will do an interview with the governor, long-form, you know, an hour-and-a-half, hour interview, they would ask us for that kind of material.

When we do the State of the State, we do the State of the State address, and the opposition party responds live every year. That used to be expensive because we had to haul cameras down there and microwave the signal back here. The legislative television system, working with MGTV, has all the cameras and facility there, so they do the video part for us. So they save us quite a bit of time and money by working together on that. So we work closely together.

We're also working much closer with the local commercial stations. We have a partnership right now with Channel 10, WILX, the *Lansing State Journal*. Together, the three of

us are doing mayoral debates. We did them last year. We've done some joint projects. It's a good thing. It makes you feel good working together with other media in Lansing.

Charnley: You mentioned the cable networks controlling the Michigan government broadcasting. Was there any relationship in terms of local, like, Comcast or some of the other cable companies?

Meuche: The relationships with the cable companies are interesting. For a while the cable company managers, local managers, were turning over so fast that as soon as you established a relationship, they'd be gone. I don't know what was going on. Either they were growing so fast that they kept moving these people to other places, or they were getting rid of them, I don't know what it was. But I'd say over time our relationship has always been relatively good.

But then there are various different FCC matters that are much more formal, where we have to have agreements with cable companies, for example. For example, cable companies fall under FCC rules regarding whether they have to carry certain off-the-air TV stations. The cable companies, frankly, would like to carry as few off-the-air. By "off the air," I mean your local stations that have transmitters. They would like to carry as few as possible because they don't make money on it. They make money on the cable networks and those shopping networks. So they like to keep their channels for other purposes. Now, they're not nasty about that, but we had an instance, for example, where we were on the cable in Ann Arbor, a good place to be, to say the least, and the cable company there dropped us. It's very complicated, the FCC rules, but they had the right to drop us, and it was unfortunate.

If I might go off on an aside, one of the most interesting things that ever happened to me was I was deposed, a deponent, for a Supreme Court case, and this was Turner Network Television and Time-Warner, Incorporated versus the FCC. The issue that ultimately went to the Supreme Court was an FCC rule called "Cable Must Carry." The rule said that if a television station put a strong enough signal into your community, you had to carry it. So, prior to that, the cable companies didn't have to do that.

So here's how this evolved. I hope I don't go off on this too far. But the way this evolved was, early on most people didn't have cable, so it didn't matter. If you lived in Kalamazoo, you could watch WKAR, because you watched it off the air. Then cable came to Kalamazoo and fewer people watched stations off the air; they watched them on cable. In fact, today cable penetration, what they call cable or dish, combination cable and satellite dishes, is 90 percent. So there are only 10 percent who are watching TV stations off the air today. Well, suddenly then, if people used to watch you in Kalamazoo off the air, but now they have cable and the cable company chooses not to carry you, you've lost lots of viewers.

The FCC confronted that issue and said, "Well, wait. This isn't right. People are disaffected from their opportunity to watch TV, so therefore we're going to require cable companies to carry any station that puts a strong enough signal into their community that could be watched off the air." And that's what they sued about, Time-Warner and Turner and a whole bunch of cable people, that it was unfair for the FCC to force them to carry WKAR in Flint, where we were on.

The reason I was deposed was we had evidence that the attorneys loved. This was through America's Public Television stations, the lobbying organization for public TV stations, that demonstrated beyond a doubt that when we were removed from cable systems in Ann Arbor

and Kalamazoo, that our membership income in those areas dramatically decreased. So they caused a financial hardship for the stations because people in Ann Arbor, if they can't watch us, they're not going to give us money anymore. So that was why I was deposed. The Supreme Court ultimately ruled in favor of the FCC, and that's why we can still be seen on cable systems in Flint, where we wouldn't be if that law had not been upheld.

So then I read the whole Supreme Court decision. It's big. I mean, those things are really, really big, and yet I'm not in it once. There's no reference to me.

Charnley: Not even a footnote.

Meuche: No. But it was fun, being deposed at this big legal firm in Washington, D.C., with these—excuse the expression—slick lawyers who came down from New York working for the big television companies. It was quite an interesting day.

Charnley: What was the relationship in terms of time from when Ann Arbor and Kalamazoo dropped you to this lawsuit? Was it several years or was it relatively close?

Meuche: It was four or five years.

Charnley: So you regained the Ann Arbor audience then?

Meuche: We regained the Ann Arbor audience and we regained the—it was difficult because we had to start writing letters to cable companies saying, "According to FCC rule so-and-so, you

have to put us back on. We're not on." So it became somewhat of a contentious issue, but we were determined we were going to be on where we were entitled to be on. The reason Ann Arbor dropped us is, you only have to carry so many public TV stations, and so they dropped us.

Charnley: Is that fifty-six?

Meuche: Fifty-six. They dropped us. Why they ever did this, they dropped us and put on the Toledo public TV station, and there's nothing we can do about it. Then you're talking about cable, one of our recent things with cable is now, again, a must-carry agreement for digital, because that's now a big issue. We're on the air with our digital TV station, but the cable companies don't have to legally carry that digital TV station. The Lansing cable company is carrying the digital TV station, but only on their more expensive digital service that you have to pay extra for.

Charnley: It almost sounds like a similarity between the shift to FM.

Meuche: Absolutely.

Charnley: And now the shift is to digital.

Meuche: Absolutely. That's going to be the most dramatic change, is the shift to digital from analog. Well, that will be even more dramatic because the analog stations have to go away. The TV stations that people watch today suddenly will disappear and there will be nothing left but the

digital stations. And I just keep saying there will be riots in the streets when somebody turns on their TV one day and all the stations are gone.

Charnley: They'll be looting Best Buy and ABC.

Meuche: Well, fortunately, they're getting less expensive. The FCC has done what they did with UHF television. WKAR was a UHF TV station, went through the same thing as FM. There was a time when there was no UHF on TVs, nothing above Channel 13, and then the FCC finally required that every TV that was manufactured have both UHF and VHF. You can't buy a TV today that doesn't have 2 through 63 or whatever, 83, whatever it is. Well, they're doing the same thing now with the TVs, that it's being phased in with the bigger ones right now, but there will come a point in time when you cannot buy a TV, a legal TV, that doesn't have the digital capability. That's the way they're going to do it. But how long do you keep TVs? So at some point there are going to be a lot of people who aren't going to—well, and then the issue again becomes cable. If the cable companies aren't required this must-carry rule, again, to carry those digital stations, you're going to have that same problem again.

Charnley: Was that challenged again at all, or was that pretty much accepted?

Meuche: Not yet. It's still kind of evolving because digital TV is still so new. WKAR digital TV went on the air a year ago. It's been on the air a year and a half now, eighteen months. We actually signed on the digital TV on the exact date at the exact time that WKAR TV, analog TV, went on the air fifty years earlier.

Charnley: Wow. Interesting coincidence.

Meuche: And that was a nightmare, building that digital TV station with the equipment.

Charnley: Where is that located?

Meuche: We had serious problems with the equipment that we purchased because it was so new and so expensive. That's in Okemos on Dobie Road. MSU owns a little nature preserve research area out there, and TV and radio stations have been out there for a long, long time, the FM. The AM is on the MSU farms.

Charnley: So there were some equipment problems with that?

Meuche: Well, see, here's the problem with digital. By the way, we're on the air with our digital radio stations now, too, both AM and FM. So we've got WKAR AM, WKAR FM, WKAR AM digital, WKAR FM digital, WKAR TV, and WKAR DT, which is the way the FCC says you've got to ID. So suddenly we've doubled the number of stations without having the extra money to run them. This is a government mandate. The radio wasn't a government mandate, and the radio was relatively inexpensive compared to the TV. The TV, we've spent up to this point with the digital, probably close to three million dollars, and we do not have the capability of doing local programming. We cannot locally produce programs in high-definition TV because every piece of equipment we have is not compatible with the new digital high-definition format. So there still has to be another equal expenditure of two to three million more

to equip the control room, studios and field capability to go out and produce a program outside the studios.

Charnley: Well beyond the 30,000 for the recorder.

Meuche: Yes. Luckily, as with everything electronic, the prices are coming down, but it's extremely different, sophisticated. Our nightmare was the antenna. They had to replace the two-ton antenna that's sitting on top of a thousand-foot tower. I've always been fascinated by the transmission process. A lot of managers probably don't even know where their transmitter is. I certainly like to go out there and see when they're doing this kind of thing. That was quite an incredible—those tower climber company people—I don't do heights. [laughs] Oh, they scare me. But they had to take off the top of that tower this sixty-foot long antenna that had been up there for thirty years and put the new one up there. The new one cost over four hundred thousand dollars because it was the combined analog and digital. Shortly after they did that, it blew up.

Charnley: Of its own accord or was there lightning strike?

Meuche: No, there was a fault in the manufacturing. So suddenly there we are with—not having the digital is no big deal because not many people can watch it at that point, but the analog was gone, too; Channel 23 was gone. Luckily when we installed that, we put in a temporary antenna halfway up the tower, so that when we did work we could switch to this other antenna. So we had to switch to that other antenna, which significantly reduced our power.

People could not watch us in Jackson anymore, caused all kinds of problems with the cable companies out there who could only get these really awful pictures. We went through, oh, my goodness, I think it went on, between the time we blew that antenna and we finally got it replaced, it was four or five months, because they had to take it down. Come back out here, take it down, not an easy task, because it takes them forever to put all the rigging on the tower. Take it down, truck it away back to the factory in Maine, do an autopsy on it, decide they can't fix it. They convinced us to switch to another kind of antenna, which caused all kinds of changes in the electronic configurations. It was just a nightmare.

Charnley: Was the timing bad, too, in terms of—

Meuche: Well, when you don't reach as many people, you're not raising as much money.

Charnley: And that was during fundraising?

Meuche: Oh yes. Oh, absolutely. Of course.

Charnley: Worst-case scenario.

Meuche: Yes.

Charnley: In terms of the Internet and how that affected broadcasting—

Meuche: Oh, goodness.

Charnley: —would you talk a little bit about that? Because that obviously occurred during your tenure.

Meuche: Well, we very early got into having the webpage and streaming the programming. So everything that's on WKAR Radio, with one exception, it's a copyright problem, the *Radio Reader*, about a half hour, everything else is streamed live on the web, so you can hear it anywhere in the world. That's been fun, getting e-mails from people saying, "I'm an MSU alumnus and I used to love WKAR. I now live in Japan and I listen to the station and it's really fun." So that's been fun.

Plus, the good thing about the radio webpages is all the local programming is archived, too, so you can go back and listen to it later. So we had a graduate assistant a few months ago who won an award, a programming award, and I had not heard her piece, her award-winning piece, but you can go listen to it because it was archived on the website. The TV is a little different, because, again, it's a rights problem, so you can't put PBS programs on there, but all the local material is, again, archived there. So you can watch the *Off the Record* shows, you can watch the *Michigan at Risk* shows.

Charnley: So teachers can use those in class.

Meuche: Yes. And then we run another website called WMSU.org. See, I used the MSU call letters. We did that on purpose, so the board would feel comfortable. [laughs]

Charnley: They wouldn't attack the WKAR logo? [laughs]

Meuche: Right. We use that for MSU-related stuff. If you go there, there's all kinds of stuff, commencement addresses, symposia. It's a free service to the MSU community. If you do an international conference at Kellogg Center, we'll put it on there for you. That's fun, and that's the kind of thing we like to do. We need to do something for MSU, and we do a lot for MSU. Sometimes there are people who think we don't do enough, but we're reflecting MSU all day every day.

Charnley: We were talking about, also, the history, certainly the 150-year anniversaries, and obviously WKAR's been an important part of the last fifty years of the institution. Are there any ways that you were involved in preservation of the MSU history, or how it was presented on both TV and radio?

Meuche: I'm sure over the years there are things that are archived here, and we're just going through our tape library again. I mean, I just saw the other day a program—oh, some of those things were so dreadful. But there was a young student here named Jim Spaniolo, who was the editor of the *State News*, who became the executive assistant to President [Clifton R.] Wharton [Jr.], who went away, became an attorney, worked for the Knight Ridder newspaper chain, and ended up as the director of their foundation in Florida, and, as you know, came back here and was dean of the College of Communication Arts until just, oh, a year and a half or so, and has gone on to be the president of a university in Texas, I believe.

But anyway, I just saw that the other day, it was Jim Spanilolo, assistant to President Wharton, interviewing President Wharton about what's going on at MSU, broadcast on WKAR in beautiful black and white. [laughs] So there are those things and they're around. I don't know if they're in the university archives or if we have them.

I know that we had a bunch of film that we did transfer to the archives recently, and we are working with the university on the official sesquicentennial television documentary. That will be a really good, I'm confident, documentary that's being produced.

Charnley: It's good to hear that at least some of those things are being preserved. They'll get a wider audience, I'm sure.

Meuche: I must mention, because we're beyond the sixties, but one of my embarrassing moments, just for the record here, is that I have the distinction in 1969, a young man, twenty-five years old, who was working at the University of Minnesota Public Radio station applied for a news job at WKAR, sent an audition tape and scripts that he had written for his station. I sent him the "Thank you very much for your application. We appreciate your interest, however," letter, and his name was Garrison Keillor. I have the letter that I wrote. So I rejected Garrison Keillor for a news job at WKAR.

Charnley: And now the station plays *Prairie Home Companion* for years.

Meuche: They think that's pretty funny at the station.

Charnley: Did you meet him? Or I guess you would talk to him anyway, because he was on campus.

Meuche: Oh yes, sure. They actually did two of the national shows. WKAR sponsored two of the national shows when he came here. But that was when Garrison was simpler. The venue had to be a funky auditorium, so it was Eastern High School, and I forget where the other one was, but they were Lansing High School auditoriums. The admission was five bucks or something. Today, just as we speak, I think, they're making a movie, a motion picture, that Garrison Keillor wrote about *Prairie Home Companion*, with big stars. I mean, I think it comes out in the fall or the winter. So it's much more than it was at the Eastern High School auditorium for five bucks.

Charnley: That's quite a distinction. I'm glad you brought it up.

Meuche: When Garrison was here, we went down to the Lansing City Hall because the mayor, Terry McCain at the time, was going to present him with a key to the city. I remember that, because Garrison and I went down to Lansing City Hall and there were two Garrison Keillor moments when we were on the elevator with a young couple who was going to get their wedding license at the city clerk's office. This woman, the young woman—I don't know, I must have said, "Do you know who this person is? He's famous."

And she said, "No, I have no idea who he is."

And Garrison Keillor said, "Oh, I wrote *Moby Dick*."

Then we went up to the mayor's office in the Lansing City Hall, which is on the top floor of the City Hall, and Keillor walked over and looked out the window at the capitol and he said, "This must give you a feeling of great satisfaction sitting up higher than those people."

Charnley: That's great. [laughs]

Let's maybe talk a little bit about your retirement. Oh, I'm sorry. Let's go back. I forgot to ask about the fire.

Meuche: Oh, the fire. Oh, my.

Charnley: I was on campus then and I was on my way in to Morrill Hall, and I had to take a different route because I saw the smoke. Was the Quonset hut burned?

Meuche: Oh, that fire.

Charnley: That fire.

Meuche: Oh, that fire. That was the good fire. [laughs]

Charnley: Tell me about that.

Meuche: The good fire or the bad fire?

Charnley: The good fire. Well, let's talk about both. Let's start with the MSU WKAR TV in the Quonset hut.

Meuche: The Quonset hut story was that we had moved into the Communication Arts Building and the TV station was in—there were, as people who know MSU history, a whole city of Quonset huts over where the Breslin Center is located now, and the TV station was located in this handsome Quonset hut for years. It was actually the mess hall, so it was the biggest, probably the biggest—

[Begin Tape 3, Side A]

Charnley: This is tape three side one of the Steve Meuche interview.

When the last tape ended, we were talking about the fire at WKAR, the Quonset hut.

Meuche: The famous Quonset hut, the former mess hall. As I was saying, I remember going over there and having meetings in Bob Page's office, the manager. I mean, they were temporary. They were there forever because they were built right after the war for the G.I. Bill soldiers. There used to be trees growing out of the floor in his office. TV people used to talk about how when they were producing TV programs and it started raining on the tin roof, they had to stop because it was so noisy. We thought we had problems with the Auditorium Building and having windows.

Anyway, so we all moved to the Communication and Arts Building in 1981. They were going to tear down the Quonset hut and get rid of it, but it was full of asbestos, so they had to do

asbestos abatement. They were using torches to cut the asbestos out of the walls or ceilings or whatever. They went home after work, and apparently something was still ignited from the asbestos removal, and that morning, it must have been probably around—it was certainly billows of black smoke by about eight-thirty in the morning, I think. The Quonset hut caught fire and burned up. That was the "good fire" in the sense that there wasn't anything in there, nobody got hurt, and it was ready for the bulldozer anyway. That was the good fire.

Charnley: What was the other one you mentioned?

Meuche: The bad fire was in 1978, August of 1978. The FM and TV transmitters, as we mentioned earlier, are out on Dobie Road, both in the same building. Due to—well, they never were sure, but due probably to a malfunction in the TV transmitter—TV transmitters are so Rube Goldberg, it's unbelievable. They have cooling systems that pump antifreeze through the TV transmitters because they get so hot inside, and it was thought that something malfunctioned. But there was a huge fire in the building, completely destroyed the building. The building is back down this road along the Red Cedar.

I remember vividly because I was in my office at the Auditorium Building, and one of the engineers called and said, "You'd better get out to the transmitter. The transmitter is on fire." I started driving down Grand River, and as I was just starting to drive down Grand River, toward Okemos, you could see billows of smoke in the sky. The Meridian Township Fire Department didn't realize—nobody had ever told them—that that building was there, and when they discovered that it was full of megawatts of electricity burning, had this slight trepidation about

standing there with hoses pouring water on it. So I think they had to have the power company come and turn the power off.

It was just a total disaster, put us off the air for a long time. Radio was off the air for only a few weeks, because they rushed a replacement transmitter and built a temporary little shelter at the bottom of the antenna. It didn't damage the tower or the antenna, so radio was able to get back on pretty quickly. TV, there was no way they could do that, because the TV transmitters were so big and there was just no way to do it. So we had to wait until the building was rebuilt.

The insurance adjusters, when they first came out, took one look at it and said, "Oh, we think all this equipment can be cleaned up and you can use that again." And we finally convinced them that you don't take expensive electronic equipment and cover it with water and soot and black ash and plan on using it again. So they declared it a total loss. The university had a deductible on it. I think they had like a 400,000 or 800,000-dollar deductible. The university paid the deductible; the insurance company paid the rest of it. They rebuilt the building. We got new equipment and finally got the TV station back on the air.

What saved TV at the time was we were able to feed the TV directly into the local cable stations, so people who lived in the immediate Lansing area could still watch WKAR TV, but nobody else could until we got back on the air.

I just saw a picture last week, because I found my fire photo files and gave them to our person who kind of collects the history of the TV station, and there's a picture of me standing at the transmitter while a fireman is chopping a hole in the roof with his axe. You know how they have to do that. And I'm standing there—oh, I remember them vividly—in my plaid pants. It was 1978. I showed that picture to somebody there and I said, "Don't you like those plaid pants?"

And he said, “You know, those were real popular then.”

The TV manager, Bob Page, was up north on vacation, so he wasn’t there.

Charnley: You were his assistant?

Meuche: No, I was the radio manager. Radio transmitter and the TV transmitter were in there. I was the radio manager. But he was up vacationing up north, and he swears that he told them, “I’m going on vacation up north. Don’t call me unless the station burns down.”

Charnley: Oh no.

Meuche: He says he said that. And they called him and said, “Bob, the station burned down.” [laughs]

Charnley: When did you decide to retire?

Meuche: I actually stepped down as the director of broadcasting services in January of 2004. I think I submitted, or talked to Dave Gift the vice provost who I was reporting to at the time, I think I told him about eighteen months in advance, because I wanted to make sure they had plenty of time to do a—maybe it was a year—to do a search. There aren’t very many of us in the business today, so it’s always a lengthy process to replace somebody. They did hire, which I suggested, a national firm that specializes in public broadcasting. But I was supposed to retire

July 1st, 2003, and the search was taking too long, so they asked me if I would continue until a new person was hired. So I did continue from July to January 17th, I think it was.

Then I spent six months on a consultancy and wrote a grant application for equipment and had fun. That was fun, not having to worry about people or money for six months.

Charnley: Since your retirement, have you had any continuing contacts with the university?

Meuche: Actually, yes, I still have an office. This spring I wrote another grant application for free—nobody paid me—for radio—there's a government agency, it's pretty competitive, for equipment for public television and radio stations, for some digital studio equipment for the radio stations. I wrote the narrative. I don't write the technical part; I can't do that. They did recently call and negotiate with us. So usually that means you're going to get the grant, but we don't know yet. So I did that.

I've done some audience research. That's one of my favorite pastimes. I was involved early on, and still am today, on the executive committee of the Board of Directors of the public radio nonprofit research company that does all the research, assimilates all the research for public radio stations. So I'm still working with the station on some audience research projects.

As a matter of fact, when I leave here, I'm going over there, because when I was there earlier this week, they gave me a tape of a new program that's proposed, public TV program, that's a financial-related program, which is also an interest of mine, and said, "Would you please look at this and let us know what you think." So I have to go over and let them know what I think.

Charnley: Do a review of that.

Meuche: So it's fun, because I get to do stuff when I want to do it. I'm still trying to clean out my thirty-nine years of the Steve Garvey grade sheet and the fire photos. I'm getting there. I'm making some progress.

Charnley: You'll need to contact the archives, I think.

Meuche: Yes, I will. I do need to talk to them because I've got, I also have some—yes, I do. I have some tapes that they may want that are commercial network, radio network, tapes about MSU.

Charnley: When you started here as a student, coming from Dayton, did you ever anticipate that you'd not only go to the university here, but that most of your working life would be spent here at Michigan State?

Meuche: I suspect that became kind of obvious once I started working full-time at WKAR. It is bizarre, because it's like not many people just come to one place. What made it exciting here for me was every time I had done a job long enough where it was starting to get kind of rote, a new opportunity came along. It was just great that the TV opportunity came along when it did, as well as the radio manager opportunity.

For a brief period of time, when I was a student, I also worked at what is now WFMK, the commercial station in Lansing. I only applied for one other job when I worked at WKAR,

and that was to put on the air a new FM station for the Rochester, New York public TV station, and that was a community licensed station. So the licensee is a community corporation. They did offer me the job, and my boss at the time, Dick Estell, as they say, bought me out. "What will it take for you not to leave?" And I never did go to Rochester, New York. And I'm very happy I didn't, even though that became a very successful public radio station. I became very close to the man who offered me the job, because I started doing public TV, and he was one of the leaders in public TV, and has since retired. But that was my only flirting with leaving MSU.

Charnley: Very interesting. I'd like to thank you on behalf of the project. I appreciate your insights.

Meuche: It's been fun. I hope I didn't talk too much.

Charnley: Not at all. Thank you very much.

[End of interview]

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