



## INDEPENDENT LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

### Martin 'Marty' Brophy



Talk about reality TV. It doesn't get any more real than a cold February evening in Shenandoah, a former coal-mining town about 112 miles northeast of Philadelphia, PA.

It was Super Bowl Sunday in Feb 2010, and Marty Brophy, the affable President/CEO of Shen-Heights

Cable, took his customary position: "Watching the game at home, worrying that nothing would happen" to the

TV reception, he recalls. "It was the beginning of the third quarter [of Super Bowl XLIV, Colts vs Saints] and boom, it went off the air. Before I could even get my coat on to run to check on the problem, I heard my neighbors yelling right through my back yard: 'Brophy, you better get this thing back on!' We ask if that was the printable version of what they screamed. "Yes," he laughs.

But that was Brophy's world heading Shen-Heights, one of cable's oldest systems. When you live in an area with about 6,500 residents, "you walk down the street and people know you," he says. Add to this the fact that the Brophy family has owned and run the cable system for some 60 years, and well... you're going to hear from people.

Born and bred in the area, where today Mrs. T's Pierogies is the biggest employer, Brophy worked at Shen-Heights during high school vacations. He's got cable in his veins. "I've

been here like forever," he jokes. Says Dan Tunnell, President of Broadband Cable Association of PA: "No one is more deserving of a cable lifetime achievement award than Marty." And ACA VP/COO Rob Shema only half jokes when he describes ACA's Treasurer as "legacy cable personified... His father was in the room when the first cable systems started; Marty was there soon after." Perfect: *CableFAX's* Lifetime Achievement Award goes to someone who's been in cable his entire lifetime.

Brophy's father Frank hooked up Shen-Heights' first customer in 1951. When Marty sold the system to Electric Services Co. just a few months ago, Shen-Heights served 3,000 customers. Brophy, 66, is helping with the transition until the golf course beckons. He works from an office with two field techs and three CSRs; Marty's brother Anthony is the engineer, and brother Frank Jr. is the construction supervisor. Customer care is a point of pride for the staff of 9. "When we get a call in the morning, we're usually there that day, if not right after we get the call," he says. "The big boys don't care as much about customers as individuals... they don't know you, or where you live. You're a number."

"Our office is just a plain storefront, nothing fancy," he insists. Perhaps, but the services he provided his customers were. Well before many small systems offered Internet and digital cable, Shen-Heights provided them. HD came later; telephone came on line a bit more than 2 years ago.

A modest man, Brophy sometimes downplays his accomplishments. "Our engineer, George Yudisky, kept us on the cutting edge," he says. "We knew we had to modernize, but we waited until others had experience. We learned from them and noted which vendor's products performed best in the field." Brophy also took notes at cable shows and ACA meetings. "I heard [Buford Cable's] Ben Hooks talk at a convention about expanding channel capacity... and that's what we did."

But this story of homespun cable is bittersweet and all too predictable. "The retransmission consent fees, programming costs and technology upgrades got to be too much for us," Brophy says, explaining the main financial reasons for selling. "The day you install a piece of technology, it's out of date," he laments. When Brophy initially expanded channel capacity from three stations to six in the late 60s, the family financed it.

Still, he's upbeat about cable's future. "If you have the right people and the right system, it's still a good business," he says.

Oh, and Brophy also handled that Super Bowl blackout. "We were on it instantly. We had it fixed before the end of the quarter," he says proudly. ■ - *Seth Arenstein*

### FAST FACTS

- WWII veteran and Bronze Star recipient Frank Brophy Sr and Albert Kersewicz began building Shen-Heights in 1950, mainly so they could pull NY stations to watch NY Yankees games. It took years until microwave technology arrived to grab the signals. By that time, Frank Brophy had died and son Marty was running Shen-Heights.
- The buyer of Shen-Heights is Service Electric Cablevision, an affiliate of Service Electric Co, the country's oldest cable operator, founded in 1948 by John and Margaret Walson. Service Electric Cablevision remains family owned, serving 100K customers in 100 PA communities.
- Marty Brophy was chairman and board member of Broadband Cable Association of PA (BCAP), the country's first state cable association. He's now Treasurer of ACA.

