

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

CABLE HALL OF FAME

Get to Know the 2023 Cable Hall of Fame Class

The newest class of the prestigious Cable Hall of Fame will be celebrated at the Ziegfeld Ballroom in New York City on April 27. We asked each honoree to reflect on their careers and the industry with interviews edited for length and clarity.



Tom E. Adams
Former EVP, Field Operations
Charter Communications

What made you decide to join Charter in 2012 after nearly two decades at Time Warner Cable? When John Bickham talked

to me about coming to Charter and the vision he and Tom Rutledge had for the company, I knew it would be an exciting challenge to take on. Their carefully thought-out plan for how the company would be organized and how it would operate made perfect sense to me. That along with the customer growth opportunity at the company made it an easy decision to join Charter and lead the Field Operations team.

When you look back at the Bright House/Time Warner Cable integration, what are you most proud of? Combining the three companies came with both challenges and opportunities. I am most proud of how we leveraged the tremendous people talent from Charter, Bright House and Time Warner Cable to embrace “New Charter’s” operating model. Implementing a standard operating model with consistent operating metrics across the country allowed the leadership to focus on flawless execution rather than inventing new ways to accomplish the same task. Combining the talent from the three companies with the “New Charter” operating model created the best leadership team in the business, in my opinion. Charter would not have been as successful without the excellent execution of this team.

You served as chair of SCTE as it merged with CableLabs. What benefits are you seeing from the new structure? With the consolidation of the cable industry, I along with other board members felt the SCTE had to evolve to create value and better serve its members. Under the leadership of Mark Dzuban, SCTE’s CEO, and Phil McKinney, CableLabs CEO, the two organizations combined. This marriage better aligned the SCTE mission of training the industry’s workforce to implement CableLabs’ new innovations and technological advancements. We are already seeing the benefits of the combined entity.

What do you see as some of the biggest challenges ahead with tons of network expansion and construction coming for the industry as a whole? With the future demand for higher data speeds

and the push to bring broadband to unserved and underserved rural areas, existing networks are simultaneously being upgraded and extended. This requires adding incremental skilled workers along with retraining the existing workforce. I also believe regulatory reform for pole attachments and access to ‘rights of way’ will be required to complete this work quickly and economically. In addition, government subsidies and a well-defined competitive process to compete for these funds will make it economical to buildout farther into rural areas. Charter has made significant progress addressing these hurdles and is well underway in executing its aggressive network evolution and buildout plans.

What does being named to the Cable Hall of Fame mean to you? To be acknowledged by my peers for my accomplishments during my career is really special. Having my name forever included with Hall of Fame industry leaders and entrepreneurs that I’ve admired during my career is a little surreal. I’m both humbled and honored to be included in the Cable Hall of Fame and will forever cherish this honor. Many thanks to my mentors and fellow employees that helped make my career a success.



Italia Commisso Weinand
EVP, Programming & Human
Resources
Mediacom Communications

What was it like taking a leap of faith to leave your career at established cable operators to help start up Mediacom? I

was in love with the industry; and I knew walking away from Comcast was risky. But by then, I had 19 years working for some of the biggest and the best cable companies. The opportunity to use this experience combined with my knowledge of cable operation gave me the confidence to leave Comcast to build a new dream. The real challenge was living two hours from the office and managing my highest priority, raising my deaf toddler who had recently received a cochlear implant. I had to balance a travel schedule alternating weeks to CHOP for follow-up training and every other week flying to Ridgecrest, California, to oversee operations. Those were challenges met and exceeded. And now look at me. You’d think things would slow down, but honestly; I think I still work harder than the

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from your passion and commitment
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Charter celebrates Tom Adams' induction
into the Cable Hall of Fame.

average 30-year-old. But I do love what I do.

Mediacom has grown from 80 employees to nearly 4,000. How do you maintain a connection as the company gets larger? As Mediacom grew, I traveled much and often, in my role in HR. I realized that our employees loved the “meet and greets” that I did. Through that came the idea on how to reach many and hopefully imbue the spirit that we at Mediacom truly cared about and listened to our employees’ needs across our base. I created a program where annually we visited numerous systems throughout 22 states. We conducted “Employee Focus Groups” amounting to three focus groups with 10-12 employees per group (excluding managers and supervisors). We did not of course meet with 100% of our employees. That did not stop the news traveling to others, and the mission was a success.

How have you seen women leadership evolve in the industry during your 46-year career? “We’ve come a long way, baby.” And I must acknowledge the bold and entrepreneurial leadership of the early ladies of cable, women like Lucille Larkin. She along with a handful of women in cable formed WICT over 40 years ago (I was there to see it happen). These early pioneering women in cable pushed for education, promotion and leadership opportunities for women at all levels of cable. Our dear Maria Brennan carries the torch and look at what is today! In the course of the last 40 years not only did we invent coaxial cable that was ready to carry internet services but what industry can claim the creation of “women and minorities” roadmap to business success that today results in an incredible pool of talent ready to serve. Look at Silicon Valley’s latest lingo-inclusion numbers—and they are the innovators?

What impact has streaming had on programming nego-

tiations? Well, as I predicted cable fees are leveling off and streaming is not getting the full revenue from homes. Why? Simple old-fashioned churn. Churn is an equal opportunity effect on our business. Volume discounts don’t add up. A reverse model is now happening. Reason will hopefully prevail.

What does being named to the Cable Hall of Fame mean to you? The honor of being inducted into the CHOF makes me feel like a rock star (that is what I tell my friends) without the music. As a young girl, I always had dreams of what my siblings would accomplish but not for me. I was the “worka bee.” All that hard work and excelling at all that I touched (including spaghetti alla matrecciana) and passion for an industry that I discovered when no one was looking! Of course, a little luck and blessings fill me with gratitude!



Doug Holloway
President
Homewood Media

How does the AVOD world compare to your early days in distribution for cable? There are a lot of similarities between today’s AVOD and my early days of cable. In the 1980s and 1990s we were making it up as we went along. At first it was thought that advertising could not be successful for ad supported cable networks. This thought existed in streaming as well as most services went with the SVOD business model. Also the key in the early days of cable were focused on distribution and shelf space. Now there is a scramble to get your streaming service on as many platforms as possible. The early cable networks were often operating on a shoestring as many streaming apps are doing today.

Bresnan Ethics in Business Award



David Van Valkenburg
Former CEO/COO
Telewest PLC

With decades as a senior leader, Van Valkenburg has plenty of experience balancing business priorities with ethical principles. Take his role at Telewest. When he was named CEO/COO in 1997, the company was in serious financial trouble. Shortly after starting the job, he had to lay off about 2,000 people or 25% of the workforce. Layoffs are never easy, but he insisted on taking a personal approach by visiting every office in England and Scotland to deliver the news with compassion.

Van Valkenburg then got to work on turning around Telewest, and within two years it was listed on the London Stock Exchange and FTSE 100 and recognized by J.D. Power for customer service. He began his cable career with ATC in 1973 and went on to senior executive positions with ATC, United, Cox, Paragon, and MultiVision.

Van Valkenburg said he was shaped by his religious upbringing and growing up as the eldest of seven sons on a family dairy farm in Michigan. He learned the value of hard work and treating others with respect. He volunteers with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church’s World Mission Board, interviewing prospective missionaries and annually providing feedback to existing missionaries based on personal and supervisor evaluations. Over the last 12 years, he and his wife, Doris, have visited missionaries in 25 countries in South America, Africa, Europe, and Asia.

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ITALIA

Mediacom Communications is proud to celebrate the induction of our very own **Italia Commisso Weinand** and all the outstanding honorees into the **Cable Hall of Fame.**

Italia, your loyalty, leadership, and compassion continue to inspire us.

The 4,000 men and women of

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What's your prediction for the future of linear television?

Linear TV will continue to exist. People thought TV would put radio and movies out of business, that didn't happen. FAST channels are linear TV and they are growing in popularity and development. In the future, linear TV will continue to thrive and be supported by FAST and streaming apps.

You're a professor at City University of NY and Vice Chair of Emerson College. What do you wish the industry knew about the younger generation entering the workforce?

They are very different than baby boomers of which I am one. They are independent thinkers and see the world through an optimistic lens. They are not driven by the same motivations of those in my generation. They are willing to work hard, but they want more balance to their lives at an earlier age than I did. Overall they do not know the history of our business or the history of America and the world. They have so much more to learn than we did, because there is so much more information in the world today.

What advice did you give your sons when they joined the industry?

I have two sons in the business, one making movies for Amazon Studios and one selling advertising for Hallmark Media. I have told both of them that unless they are totally committed, don't enter the business. They need a long-term plan to manage their careers (10-20 years) and they should pursue the things they like, are good at and could develop a passion for. I also warned them of the pitfalls of the politics and being a Black man in an industry where you are not going to be received with a warm welcome.

What does this honor mean to you?

This is an unbelievable honor. I never set out to be in the Hall of Fame, just to be the best at my job. Also, to use my creativity to make an imprint on the industry and change the images and perceptions of how Blacks are looked at and portrayed in media, particularly TV. I just wanted to do what I love, which is TV. This means so much to me, my family and Black people, by being recognized for making a serious contribution to this industry. It will send a message to other young people of diverse backgrounds that they too could achieve this level of accomplishment. I still can't believe it's real, beyond my wildest dreams.



Julie M. Laulis
Chair, President & CEO
Cable One

Cable One's family of brands include Sparklight, Fidelity Communications, Hargray, ValuNet Fiber and CableAmerica, with operations spanning multiple states. How do you create a cohesive culture across the portfolio? Communication and authenticity. You really cannot have too much of either. Having a purpose, values and core operating principles doesn't hurt. Being "birthed" from a family with family values (Cable One was spun off from the Graham Holdings company, owned by the Graham family, in 2015) doesn't hurt. Acquiring brands that have a similar culture doesn't hurt. Ultimately, it is our 3,200 CABO associates who work to reinforce the culture that they care about... and they do

a spectacular job!

Having started your career as a CSR, what advice do you have for someone just starting out who'd like to have your role one day?

I could likely write a page about my thoughts on this. First, I'd say examine what you care about and what your gifts are. Hopefully, you are curious and you care about people and their growth. If so, your curiosity will have you continuously learning and trying new things and your caring of people will lead you to serve others. That would be a fulfilling role, regardless of your title!

There's a lot of emphasis on closing the digital divide. What's your prediction on where America will be in five years?

I think in five years, internet service (agnostic of how it "arrives" at the home) will be available to virtually all American homes. I do, however, believe the digital divide is about more than every home in America gaining access to the internet and the education and opportunities it affords. Education—often referred to as digital literacy—is also needed and an imperative to drive the use of the internet as a tool that will open the world to consumers. My hunch is that most will have the devices needed to access the service, as almost everything is now internet enabled, but there may be some remaining needs in this aspect of "digital divide."

You've been on C-SPAN's board for more than five years now. What have you learned about it that has surprised you?

I was exposed to C-SPAN during its foundation, as I was working for John Evans (one of C-SPAN's co-founders) at the time. To see the spectacular journey that it has been on—to open the democratic process for all to observe—has been instructive to me. The C-SPAN founders and team have continued to grow and transform and role model selfless service, highlighting the country and our process, not themselves. In the business world today, that in itself may just be a bit surprising and refreshing.

What does being named to the Cable Hall of Fame mean to you?

Wow—that is a great question! On one hand, it likely means I am old and have worked in the industry a LONG time. On the other, I have to wrestle with the idea that some have found my life's work to have value—which is incredibly humbling. What matters to me is that I strive to make significant impacts—not to be called a success. This honor is indeed an honor for which I am grateful.



Wonya Lucas
President & CEO
Hallmark Media

How do you feel like you've brought your own stamp to Hallmark Channel and its sister brands?

The 112-year-old Hallmark brand encompasses many different target audiences and demographics including Spanish language cards to LGBTQIA cards to cards for the Black community, Mahogany. I saw an opportunity to lean into and harness Hallmark's IP in ways that would attract new audiences. We created the Mahogany programming initiative, which reflects different aspects of love for Black women including romantic love, sisterhood, love of



2023 CABLE
HALL OF FAME

Congratulations to Cable One Chair of the Board,
President & CEO Julie Lulis on being inducted into
the 26th Annual Cable Hall of Fame.

Cable One®

community and self-love. And, under the direction of our EVP of programming, Lisa Hamilton Daly, we have significantly expanded our programming so that all viewers can see themselves and have their unique love stories depicted on screen.

What is it like trying to secure quality content these days with so many networks and streamers in the mix? We are lucky to work with a group of incredibly talented producers, writers and directors who know our brand and know how to deliver the kind of programming that resonates with our viewers. Also, in widening our storytelling aperture, we've accomplished two important things that give us an edge in the content game: one, we have empowered our programming team to develop projects, stories and characters that are more nuanced, complex and novel; and two, we are attracting a lot of new voices and creative talent—in front of and behind the camera—who want to work with us.

You've also worked in packaged goods at Coca-Cola and Clorox. Are there any similarities to the cable industry?

My experiences working in brand management for consumer products became the foundation of my professional journey as I learned a basic brand framework that I've used in media throughout my career. I've had the privilege to work on amazing brands including CNN, The Weather Channel, Discovery, NPR and now, Hallmark Channel. When I worked on media brands such as CNN, Discovery and now Hallmark Channel they had a unique brand proposition with a clear target audience, distinctive reason for being and either a strong functional or emotional core. The most important lesson is to know your audience. I often gave T-shirts to senior execs that simply stated, "You are not the target audience!"

You were close to your late uncle, Hank Aaron. Did he ever offer you career advice? I grew up in a baseball family. In addition to my uncle Hank Aaron, my father, Bill Lucas, was the first African American GM (Atlanta Braves) in Major League Baseball. They were both inspirational as professionals, but also as Black men who were trailblazers. I learned the importance of perseverance, resilience and how to face difficult situations with calm and grace. I also learned how to treat people with dignity even when they were indignant to you. My Uncle Hank once said, "in playing ball, and life, a person occasionally gets the opportunity to do something great. When that time comes, only two things matter. Being prepared to seize the moment and having the courage to take your best swing." He would also tell me that he was proud of me and to keep climbing no matter who or what might get in the way.

What does this honor mean to you? The Cable Hall of Fame represents the strongest leaders, most visionary thinkers and most accomplished professionals in our industry, and throughout my career journey I have been inspired by so many of them. And, honestly, to be recognized among such an esteemed group of individuals is beyond humbling. I hope to carry on the Cable Hall of Fame legacy and inspire new generations of cable industry professionals.



Curb Your Enthusiasm

HBO

(Answered by Laura Streicher,
Co-Executive Producer)

Why do you think Curb has been able to stay relevant for so many years? Overall, I think

the show's ability to stay relevant is due to its unique approach to comedy, consistency and ability to capture the human experience in a relatable and humorous way. The fact that Larry continues to address contemporary issues and social situations through his unique brand of humor has given us the license to tackle taboo topics and socially awkward situations in a way that resonates with both new and long-time viewers—and still feels fresh, even after 12 seasons.

How has HBO supported the show through its long run? HBO has always been extremely supportive in providing us with the resources and creative freedom necessary to maintain the show's unique style and humor, allowing Larry to explore new ideas and take creative risks, which has helped ensure our continued success and longevity. They've promoted "Curb" through various marketing campaigns and helped to build a loyal fanbase through various social media platforms and have been instrumental in the show's distribution and availability. And of course, the network's streaming service, HBO Max, allows fans to watch the show on-demand, making it accessible to new and old audiences alike.

In what ways do you think Curb opened the door for other series?

Being that "Curb" is truly the first of its kind to be unscripted, with the actors given an outline of the scene and encouraged to improvise their lines, I'm sure this approach has influenced other comedies, such as "Arrested Development" and "The Office," which both relied heavily on improvisation and naturalistic dialogue. In my opinion, "Curb" has also paved the way for comedies to tackle more sensitive and controversial topics with its use of "cringe comedy" style, relying on uncomfortable and awkward situations to elicit humor.

What does joining the Cable Hall of Fame mean to you?

I've worked on "Curb" since the pilot and have seen it go from a little show that no one really knew about to the iconic comedy classic it has since become, so being part of this series for the last 24 years and now seeing it inducted into the Cable Hall of Fame is a tremendous achievement and an incredible honor for me. Being recognized by our peers and the industry for our contributions feels like a true testament to our hard work and dedication and is a significant milestone within my career.

What do you think Larry's Curb character would say about being inducted into the Cable Hall of Fame?

Being that Larry's character is known for being blunt, opinionated, and uncomfortable with praise and recognition, I think it's very possible that TV Larry might make a sarcastic or self-deprecating comment about this honor. He's quite the wild card, so who knows what he'd say...Of course, whatever it would be is what we're all secretly thinking anyway and are just too civilized to say out loud.



Hallmark Media 

Proudly Celebrates

Wonya Lucas

on her induction into
The Cable Hall of Fame.

Congratulations to all of this year's honorees!


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