



The

Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

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... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

Remembering Charles Ellis

The broadcast consulting engineering community has lost a truly unique engineer, Charles F. Ellis, PE, of Lafayette, Louisiana, who died Friday, June 16, after a brief illness.

MENTOR AND FRIEND

Charles Ellis was one of the smartest engineers - and finest human beings - I have ever known.

As one of my earliest mentors, it was Charles who beat into my head the basics of AM DAs, as well as many other aspects of good engineering practices. Although during the intervening years our busy lives had reduced our opportunities to get together, we continued to maintain a very enjoyable professional friendship even to this year.

Although his name was not well-known outside the tight-knit consulting engineering community, he earned the respect of his peers, which included the top names in the business; Clarence Beverage, John & Jack Mullaney, Ron Rackley, Bob duTreil, and others all worked with and respected Charles's intellect, insight, and professionalism.



In fact, all who worked with him, from the top names to the freshest engineering intern, quickly came to admire and respect him.

Charles Ellis was that rare individual who, though truly a genius, retained the ability to see the absurdity of life and was always willing to acknowledge his own limitations and foibles. His sly, subtle, and quirky sense of humor and fresh ways of looking at the world and at engineering challenges were famous among his friends and colleagues.

TEACHING THE NEXT GENERATION

However, Charles never let his intellect or success go to his head. Along the way, he took the time to mentor several engineers, several of whom went on to make their own impact on the industry.

He was a perfectionist, as I recall, not a corner-cutter, as so many other engineers were – and some are even moreso now. I will always remember his patient explanations of AM propagation, ground wave vs sky wave, radiation resistance, and other contributors to tower base Z, sample system issues, etc.

RADIO WAS HIS CALLING

Charles Faison Ellis, an AFCCE member, was born November 1, 1946 in Cloudland, Georgia. on and, while still in high school, worked as an engineer for WLAQ, Rome, GA and earned his First Class Radiotelephone license.

He first attended Oklahoma Baptist University, majoring in classical piano, then transferred to Florida State University, earning dual Bachelor's degrees in physics and math. While there, he worked as an engineer for the college's radio and TV stations, serving as the CE of WFSU-FM.

After graduation, he then joined the Peace Corp and served in both Fiji, where he met his future wife, and later in New Zealand, teaching math and physics for four years, and then as CE for the first privately-owned radio station in Wellington.

RETURN TO THE USA

After returning to the States, he settled in Lafayette, Louisiana, where he operated a successful contract engineering firm in the area that included many local stations as clients.

During this time, Charles earned a BSEE from the University of Southwestern Louisiana (Now the University of Louisiana at Lafayette) and his Professional Engineer certification. In 1980, he transitioned into consulting work instead of routine station engineering, founding C. F. Ellis Consulting Engineers, a position he held until his death.

Charles also was a station owner on multiple occasions, applying for, building, operating, and then selling first KFXV and then KJJB, both in the Lafayette area.

NOT JUST ANOTHER ENGINEER

Charles's expertise was wide-ranging; he was an expert on RF propagation work, AM DA design, RF facilities design, AM/FM/TV allocations work, lightning and surge protection, and emergency power systems for communications facilities.

Furthermore, over the years, he presented a number of seminars on communications system design, maintenance, and evaluation issues for various industry and governmental groups.

Charles was not a self-promoter or seeker of attention, preferring to labor behind the scenes and the sort of guy whose reward was the intellectual stimulation and satisfaction of a problem well solved. Unlike myself, and many other engineers, he did not seem to get any kicks from recognition.

MORE THAN JUST RADIO

Charles also had broad interests outside of engineering; he enjoyed playing the piano, critically listening to jazz and classical music, and being a family man.

Charles loved to travel, having seen most of the USA and making a number of overseas trips with his wife and family. A kind and gentle soul, and at times possessed of an almost child-like innocence, he was truly a unique human being – an engineer's engineer.

Charles leaves behind a wife, Simla, two children, Todd and Sonja, and several grandchildren. His presence in his family and community, and in our industry, will be sorely missed.

Requiescat in Pacem, Charles Ellis, my old friend and mentor.

- Michael Patton

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