

Scholars

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had such a will to live. He was always active in the news, and he had written the column Plain Talk (that appeared in *USA Today*).

Morrison was on a Neuharth Scholarship for 2 1/2 years, providing him with the financial freedom to take trips abroad, including to Russia and Costa Rica.

"I didn't enter journalism, but (the scholarship) allowed me to open my eyes and explore areas," he said.

Morrison remained amazed at Neuharth's common touch around USD students and the amount of time and interaction the media magnate provided the collegians.

"He ran one of the most successful newspapers in the country and also transformed (his efforts) into the Freedom Forum," Morrison said. "There were a lot of (influential) people at the Neuharth Award that he could be talking to, and he would have the time for you."

Neuharth showed that South Dakotan's young people can succeed in the larger world, particularly the media, Morrison said.

"You have someone like Al Neuharth, who played a major role in journalism and is so successful, come back home and tell you," I started out where you're at now, with the *USD Volante*, and look where I'm at today," Morrison said. "Al was an inspiration to a certain extent, showing you can be a kid from a small town in South Dakota and make it on the big stage."

As part of his Neuharth Scholar experience, Morrison served an internship with the *Press & Dakotan* and the *Vermillion Plain Talk*. The experience, he said, taught him not only journalism but has helped him with his legal training in communicating with others, approaching new and constantly changing situations, and meeting deadlines.

Many people think of Neuharth's flamboyant style, Morrison said.

"But that's only one side of Al," Morrison said. "He was somebody who really wanted to make a difference in the lives of USD students. Al did it through his generosity and his presence on campus. It changed a lot of people."

JESSICA KOKESH

Jessica Kokesh, a 2007 Yankton High School graduate, served as *Volante* managing editor for a year before graduating from USD in 2011. She currently lives in Kearney, Neb., and has worked as regional editor for the Kearney Hub for the past 1 1/2 years.

"I will always be grateful to Al's contributions to the journalism program at USD," she said. "The Al Neuharth Media Center was my second home on campus, and I couldn't have asked for a better learning environment than the *Volante* newsroom."

The Neuharth scholarship provided more than money, Kokesh said.

"Personally, being the recipient of an Al Neuharth scholarship was one of the best things that happened to me in college," she said. "Being a Neuharth scholar was sometimes demanding, but it taught me a lot about leadership, hard work and, of course, journalism. I know I wouldn't be where I am today professionally without the benefits and opportunities that program provided."

Kokesh enjoyed meeting Neuharth on campus, particularly the question-and-answer sessions after each year's awards ceremony where Neuharth and the guest of honor were present.

"Al was always sharp and intelligent, and I liked hearing his insight on the still-evolving field of journalism," she said. "I loved listening to the history of *USA Today's* development and being able to interact with influential journalists and members of the Freedom Forum."

Neuharth was credited with leading the way into digital journalism, but Kokesh recalled a

2009 incident showing the media mogul hadn't totally embraced technology himself.

"I do remember getting a phone call from my fellow Neuharth scholar, Josie Kerk, the summer we interned together out at the *Rapid City Journal*," Kokesh said. "She told me that Al had apparently forgotten his typewriter at home and was on his way to Rapid, so someone at the Freedom Forum contacted her to see if she could find a working typewriter for him to use up there."

"She eventually found one or loaned a family one to him, but it was so surreal to the two of us that, in 2009, he hadn't embraced using a computer yet."

MICHELLE RYDELL CWACH

Michelle (Rydell) Cwach, a Vermillion native, worked on the *Volante* beginning with her freshman year and worked as editor-in-chief in 2008. She graduated from USD in 2009 and received her master's degree in journalism and mass communications at Iowa State University. She currently works at a marketing associate at KPI-JCI and Astec Mobile Screens. She handles all public relations, writing all editorial content and managing their social media.

"So many doors were opened for me when I received the Al Neuharth Excellence in Journalism Award as a senior in high school," she said. "The award was far more than just a scholarship — I received some of the best training and mentoring in the country. I formed relationships with those in the industry that a young journalist could only dream of."

Neuharth did much more for USD than put his name on a scholarship and the Al Neuharth Media Center, Cwach said.

"He also came back every year and embraced his South Dakota roots," she said. "I remember attending the Al Neuharth Award for Excellence in the Media event each year and listening to great journalists like Garrison Keillor, Bob Schieffer and Katie Couric. Afterward, we were invited to sit in on a 'bull session' and were able to ask questions directly to

Al Neuharth and his honored guest. How many young journalists get this opportunity?"

"And of course, I will never forget the bright red sports jacket and matching shoes he wore to every awards event. Al Neuharth made a great impact on the University of South Dakota, and his legacy will continue for many, many years to come."

ALLISON STRUCK

Yankton High School graduate Allison Struck received the Neuharth Award and graduated from USD. Now living in Sioux Falls, she has served as Back-Pack Program Coordinator at Feeding South Dakota since January 2011.

"I was saddened to hear of Al Neuharth's death. He was a trailblazer in the field of journalism and an outspoken advocate of the First Amendment," Struck said. "He often highlighted the responsibilities those in the media have, and I am reminded of a T-shirt that has this quote of his on the back: 'The First Amendment guarantees a free press. We in the media must make sure it is a fair press.'"

Struck appreciated the ability to thank Neuharth personally for investing in her education and for opportunities such as a Washington, D.C., conference and

state-of-the-art facilities on the USD campus.

Struck enjoyed one experience in meeting a Neuharth Award recipient. "At one of the events on campus, I had the chance to meet veteran reporter Bob Schieffer. He was witty, soft-spoken and had a great sense of humor," she said.

Struck saw the long line of Neuharth Scholars from Yankton as a tribute to the YHS staff, including her English teacher, Dick Anderson.

Neuharth provided an example that will shine for future generations of South Dakotans, Struck said.

"It's always great to see South Dakotans thrive at the national level, but like others who have achieved similar success, (Neuharth) continued to return to the state," Struck said. "He often expressed his gratitude to the people who helped him in his early days, and he spoke fondly about his experiences at the U."

EMILY NIEBRUGGE

Without the Neuharth Scholarship, Niebrugge said she wouldn't have been able to afford college.

Besides the financial assistance, Niebrugge appreciated Neuharth-related experiences such as attending a Minneapolis orientation for Neuharth scholars

and attending a convention in Chicago to meet the nation's top media professionals and to accept the prestigious Pacemaker award for the *Volante*.

Neuharth also believed in diversity, which Niebrugge appreciated as a young woman breaking into journalism. She noted the large presence — even majority — of women in newsrooms.

"That wouldn't have happened if Al Neuharth hadn't given a strong push for diversity. He's probably not given the credit he deserves," she said.

Yankton High School graduates have shown their excellence as Neuharth Scholars, Niebrugge said, and she is glad to keep the tradition alive.

Neuharth would want to keep alive the legacy of USD students making their mark in journalism, said Niebrugge, who also works part-time at the *Press & Dakotan*.

Niebrugge believes she will feel Neuharth's influence for the rest of her career.

"The opportunity to take part in something like this is so cool," she said. "Al helped us with what we needed, and that meant so much. He made you a priority, and that's an experience I will never forget."

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