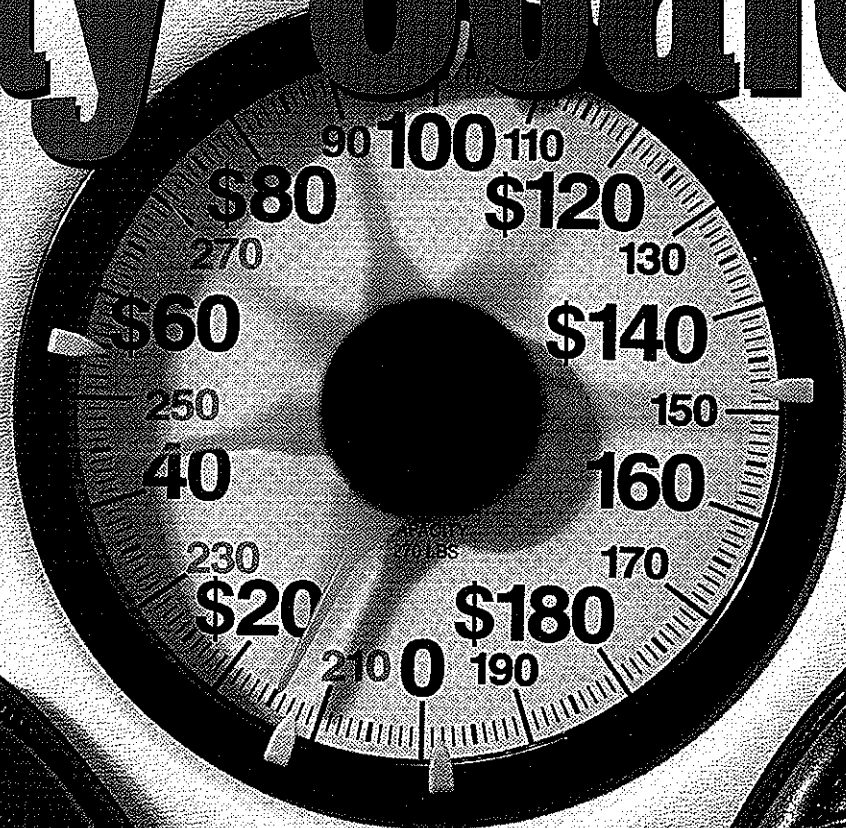


# Pay Scales



## There was some pain, but also a lot of gain in news salaries last year. Radio newspeople took increases of 2.2 percent to the bank, while television newspeople pocketed raises of 3.6 percent.

**M**atthew Todd is news director at KAMS-FM (country) in Mammoth Spring, AR, and KALM-AM (gospel and information) in Thayer, MO. Todd has been in radio news for less than a year and makes a little over \$12,000, which is more than he made working in fast food. Todd's not sure if he'll get a raise this year, and he's not sure if he'll stay in radio.

Todd's not the only one wondering if he can afford to stay in radio news. Several others contacted in the latest RTNDA/Ball State University salary survey said the same thing. With tight budgets and a greater workload, many radio newspeople wonder aloud if they can stay in the business. Radio salaries rose a modest 2.2 percent overall, and almost all of that went to news directors in medium, large and major markets.

Television fared better across the board, especially for certain specialized positions. Television news salaries rose about 3.6 percent in 1997. The biggest winners were producers in markets 100 and larger, assignment editors in all but the smallest markets, weather and graphics people and most videographers.

### Television: Producers Are Golden

Most news directors report salary increases of 3 to 5 percent. That range included stations as diverse as WTOG-

TV in Savannah, GA; WTNH-TV in Hartford/New Haven, CT; KAUZ-TV in Wichita Falls, TX; WFLA-TV in Tampa, FL; and KMPH-TV in Fresno, CA. Some stations did a little better, with raises of 6 or 7 percent: KDLH-TV in Duluth, MN; WHSV-TV in Harrisonburg, VA; and WLKY-TV in Louisville, KY.

Smaller markets found they had to pay more to hire more experienced people—or just to keep them from leaving.

John Schuldt, news director at KDLH in Duluth, says he had to hire almost all new reporters for the station. "In every instance," Schuldt says, "we had to pay a little more to get a better, more experienced person

from the talent pool." With starting reporters in the mid- to upper teens, more money translated into increases of 6 to 7 percent. And Schuldt says two new primary anchors

came in at "double what I had to pay before." Again, that was the price for more experienced people committed to longer-term contracts.

Most news directors talk about paying more for producers. Michael Sullivan, news director at WTOG in Savannah, says it's supply and demand, and right now, "producers are getting a little more expensive and harder to find." Sullivan says he has to pay about \$1,000 a year more for a producer now than he did the last time he hired. He adds that producers at his station make 5 to 10 percent more than the reporters do.

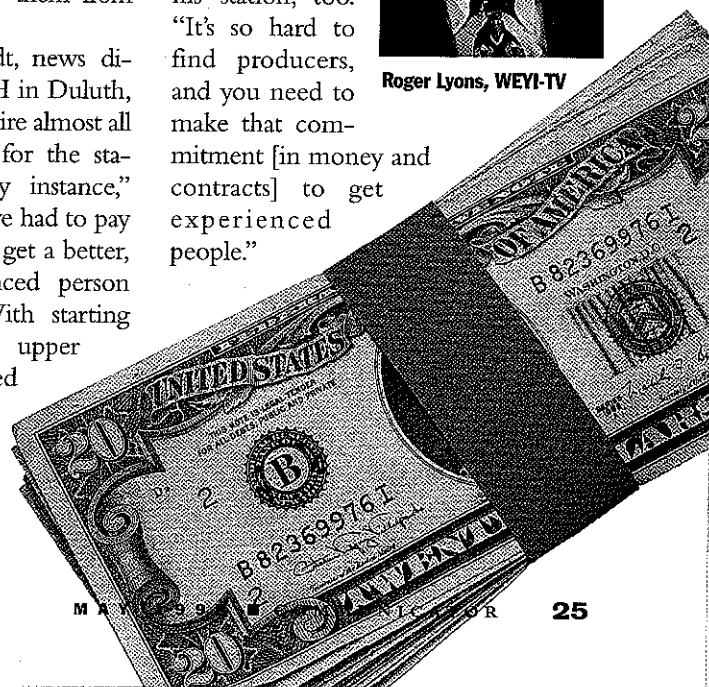
Roger Lyons, news director at WEYI-TV in Flint/Saginaw/Bay City, MI, says producers get paid more than reporters at his station, too. "It's so hard to find producers, and you need to make that commitment [in money and contracts] to get experienced people."

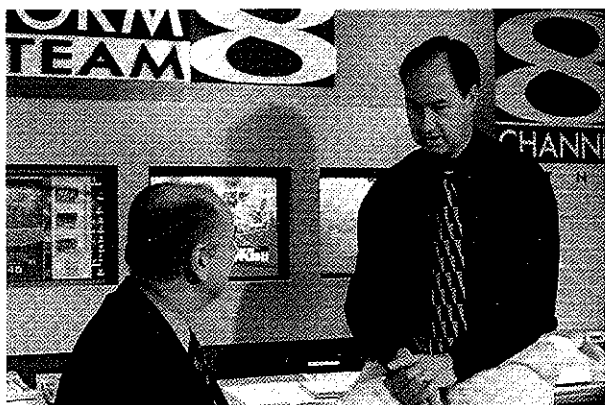


Roger Lyons, WEYI-TV



John Schuldt, KDLH-TV





**Billy Otwell, WTNH-TV**

News Director Billy Otwell, at WTNH in Hartford/New Haven, says he, too, asked for more money for the producers and got it. "They work like dogs," he says. "Our producers' salaries were abnormally low to begin with,

but in the last couple years, they've gone up faster than others." Otwell says he knew he had to do something or lose them. "With anchors, reporters, weather, sports, the supply is enormous. There are a lot of really good people to pick from," Otwell says. "Producers are just the opposite."

"I'm looking forward to the day when we treat producers with the same respect as reporters," says Dan Bradley,

news director at WFLA in Tampa. "Producers are responsible for our shows. It's about time we give them the proper respect and treatment." Bradley says when he looks for producers, he cares less about what size market they've worked in and more that they've had hands-on experience and know what a good story looks like.



**Dan Bradley, WFLA-TV**

Good photographers are also a prize catch, so they are reaping good increases, too. "For every reporter vacancy I'll have 100 applications," says Marci Burdick, news director at KYTV in Springfield, MO. "For every producer or photographer I'll be lucky if I have 10—and I'll be competing with larger markets." At KYTV, the winners were both producers and photographers.

James Warner, news director at KAUZ in Wichita Falls, says the biggest raises at his station went to weather people. "In this size market (number 143), higher-profile positions fared better than others."

News Director Roger Gadley, at Fox affiliate KMPH in Fresno, says salaries at stations like his have gotten better overall. "Most Fox affiliates not too long ago were independents, with a history of paying lower than market. In this market, that's changing. Now, we're nearing market pay," Gadley says at his station, reporters and



**Marci Burdick, KYTV**



LAWRENCE RUGGERI





Roger Gadley, KMPH-TV

producers were likely to do the best—with slower growth for photographers.

Michael Sipes, news director at WLKY in Louisville, says both photographers and producers did especially well in 1997. Photographers got raises last year of 9 to 10 percent—just as they did in 1995, and Sipes says he paid more to hire producers. All producers and desk people are under contract—with assignment editors paid “a little more” than producers. “Louisville is a highly competitive market,” says Sipes, “so experience is everything.” And if that means paying more for experience, Sipes says that’s what he does.

Most news directors expect this year to look a lot like last year, although a few television news directors think raises might not be quite as high. On the other hand, that’s what they said last year—and raises in 1997 wound up nearly identical to 1996. Best bet for 1998: another pretty good year.

### Radio: Doing More with Fewer Resources

Both Sipes and Gadley also run radio news operations—along with TV.

All-news KMPH-FM in Fresno has about 25 people. Gadley says the radio salaries used to be low, but that’s changed. He says he’s using more and more radio people on TV, and 1997 salaries for radio people went up by the same amount as on the television side (about 5 percent). Gadley also says that, other than anchors, the

## Television News Salaries

	High	Average	Median	Low
News Director	\$183,000	\$60,700	\$53,000	\$20,000
Assistant News Director	93,000	49,700	46,000	18,000
Executive Producer	90,000	44,500	44,000	20,000
Managing Editor	75,000	45,200	46,500	22,000
Assignment Editor	49,000	27,100	27,000	13,000
News Producer	60,000	25,400	24,000	13,000
News Anchor	325,000	54,300	41,000	9,000
Weathercaster	150,000	43,700	37,000	9,000
Sports Anchor	135,000	40,000	30,500	14,000
News Reporter	85,000	26,800	23,000	8,000
Sports Reporter	47,000	23,200	21,500	13,000
News Writer	80,000	23,800	20,000	12,000
Videographer	53,000	23,800	23,000	8,000
Graphics Specialist	56,000	30,500	32,500	10,000
Internet Specialist	40,000	26,600	26,000	14,000
News Assistant/Assistant Producer	36,000	18,900	18,000	8,000

Overall, TV news salaries increased 3.6 percent in 1997 over 1996. As usual, higher salaries tend to go to people working in bigger stations in bigger markets. Also as usual, few stations in top 10 markets participated in the survey. The median (midpoint) is probably the best gauge of what people typically make.

## Radio News Salaries

	High	Average	Median	Low
News Director	\$110,000	\$27,800	\$25,000	\$12,000
News Anchor	85,000	28,900	24,000	16,000
News Producer	45,000	27,400	26,000	14,000
News Reporter	75,000	24,900	20,000	10,000

Overall, radio news salaries increased 2.2 percent in 1997 over 1996, but the only real growth went to news directors. Other positions remained virtually unchanged. The median (midpoint) salary is probably the best gauge of what people typically make.

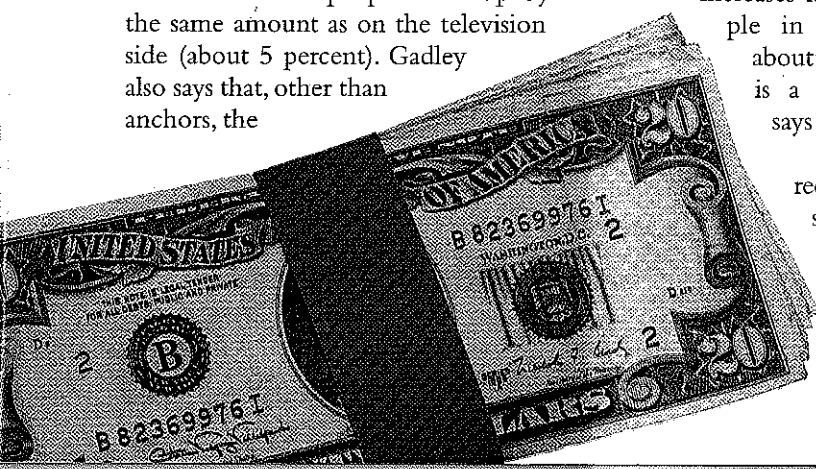
salary gap between radio and TV is shrinking.

That’s not the case at WLKY-AM in Louisville. While folks on the TV side walked away with 5 to 6 percent increases last year, the people in radio only got about 3 percent. “Radio is a different world,” says Sipes.

Radio news directors—outside the smallest markets tended to move up in salary, but they fre-

quently paid a price for that money: more responsibilities with additional stations, fewer reporters to work with and more duties outside news.

Mike Dougall hopes he can stay in radio. He’s news director at KFLX-FM (adult alternative), KSED-FM (country) and KWMX-FM (country) in Flagstaff, AZ. While Dougall is on morning drive, his wife, Pati Urias, anchors All Things Considered at public radio stations KNAQ-FM and KNAU-FM. “It’s tag-team parenting,” Dougall says, explaining the process of taking care of three boys, ages 1, 6 and 12. “I start at 4 a.m., and



## Median Television News Salaries by Market Size

	1-25	26-50	51-100	101-150	151+
News Director	\$100,000	\$82,000	\$69,000	\$48,000	\$38,000
Assistant News Director	76,500	61,500	48,000	30,500	33,000
Executive Producer	65,000	50,000	43,000	28,000	24,000
Managing Editor	59,000	50,000	45,000	34,000	22,000
Assignment Editor	33,500	30,000	27,500	24,500	19,000
News Producer	40,000	32,000	26,000	19,000	18,000
News Anchor	98,000	98,000	55,000	35,000	24,500
Weathercaster	68,000	68,500	50,000	32,000	25,000
Sports Anchor	75,000	55,000	39,000	26,000	21,000
News Reporter	50,000	36,000	28,000	19,000	17,000
Sports Reporter	41,500	29,000	24,000	18,000	15,000
News Writer	28,000	21,500	18,000	16,000	13,000
Videographer	34,000	28,500	25,000	18,000	16,000
Graphics Specialist	37,000	35,000	30,000	20,000	14,000
Internet Specialist	32,500	40,000	28,000	18,000	16,000
News Assistant/ Assistant Producer	22,000	21,000	18,000	13,000	13,000

Generally, the larger the market the higher the salaries, but two significant factors result in understating the pay for markets 1-25. First, as usual, few network affiliates in the top 10 participate in the survey, eliminating much of the top half of the group. Second, a growing number of small, independent stations on the fringe of the largest markets do participate, and their generally lower salaries depress the numbers.

## Median Radio News Salaries by Market Size

	Major	Large	Medium	Small
News Director	\$38,000	\$30,000	\$25,000	\$20,000
News Anchor	29,000	23,500	20,000	N/A
News Producer	30,000	N/A	26,500	N/A
News Reporter	33,000	17,500	16,000	18,000

Major markets are defined as those with 1 million or more listeners. Large markets are from 250,000 to 1 million. Medium markets run from 50,000 to 250,000. Small markets have fewer than 50,000 listeners.

I'm off at noon or 1 p.m. That's when Pati goes in and works 'til 7 or 8 o'clock at night. We eat together, put the kids to bed, and then have 20 minutes to ourselves before I have to go to bed."

"I am the lowest paid radio news director in town," Dougall says. His wife actually makes more money at the

public radio station. That's typical. The survey found that public radio news directors make considerably more than their commercial counterparts. In fact, even public radio reporters make more than typical commercial radio news directors. In Dougall's case, his wife also gets health insurance benefits—which his stations don't offer. Dougall makes

"going on \$20,000,"

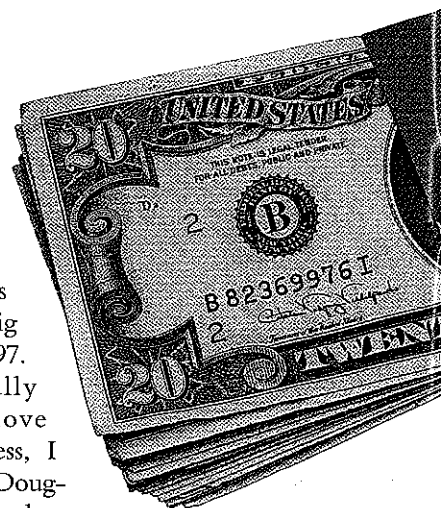
and that's after a "big raise" in 1997.

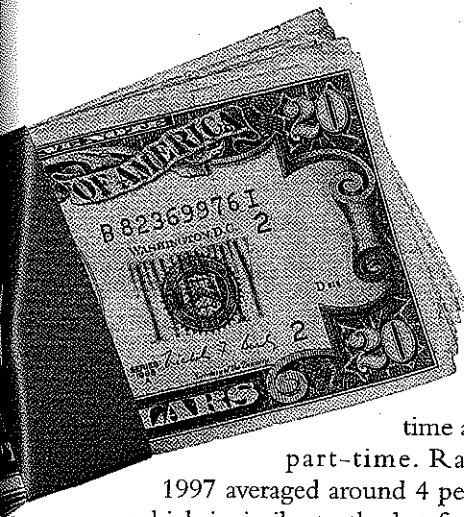
"You really have to love this business, I think," says Dougall. But the long term is hazy. "Pati would like to stay in Flagstaff, but I can't see that."

Mike Turner is news director at KGON-FM (classic rock), KNRK-FM (new rock) and KFXB-AM (sports/talk) in Portland, OR. Turner says 1997 saw "some movement" in salaries—around 3 to 5 percent, and 1998 "looks even better." But Turner is also concerned about the consolidation he sees in the marketplace, with fewer people working at multiple stations and an increasing trend toward using part-timers to save salaries and cut back on fringe benefits. Turner also sees more and more stations having newspeople doing other station jobs—again, to save money. His company has just agreed to pick up three more stations, but he's not sure how the staffing will shake out. "But for those the new owners keep on," Turner says, "salaries and benefits are improving."

That seems to be the case at WJNO-AM (news/talk) in West Palm Beach, FL. News Director Jim Edwards says that a year ago, the station had nine people in news. Now it has four. More and more, the station contracts out for services. Edwards says salaries are competitive—even with local television—but those remaining on staff are expected to do more as their pay increases.

As news director at WOW-AM (hard country) and WOW-FM (contemporary country) in Omaha, NE, Morris James has seven staffers, six





full-time and one part-time. Raises in 1997 averaged around 4 percent—which is similar to the last few years. The budget for 1998 will go up 3.5 percent, with varying raises “loosely based on performance.”

Polly Flinders is news director at WDBC-AM (adult contemporary) and WYKX-FM (country) in Escanaba, MI. Flinders says radio news salaries in the area range from \$12,000 to \$22,000—with her current station at the top. She also says she does better as a radio news director now than she did as a TV station bureau chief in the area not so long ago. Flinders says she's due for a raise this year and expects “maybe 1 to 1.5 percent.”

Randy Hampton is news director at KEBB-FM (country), KBKL-FM (oldies) and KMXV-FM (adult contemporary) in Grand Junction, CO. Hampton's salary went up in 1997, but that's because he was promoted to news director. On the other hand, the station cut his old position, so Hampton now does the work of two people. “I came out of the computer industry,” Hampton says. “I made three times what I make now. I do it because I love it.” But the future is unclear. The station was just sold, and Hampton isn't sure what the new owner plans. “Love is good, but it ain't everything,” Hampton says. “I have student loans to pay and a wife and a kid.” He makes around \$20,000. He says he'd like to stay in the business, but he just isn't sure he can afford it.

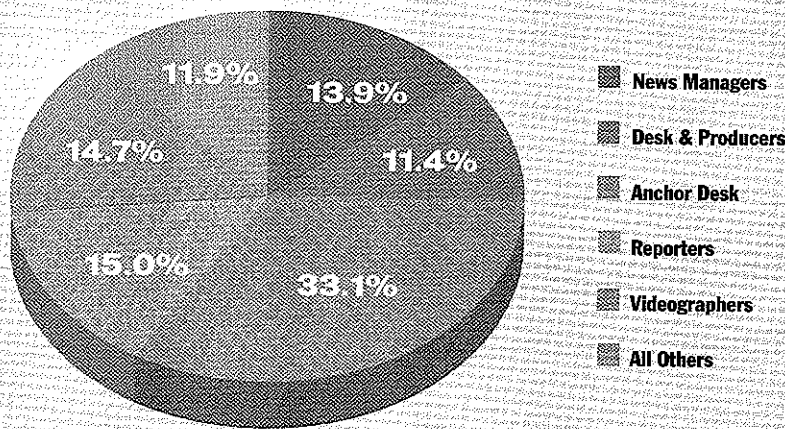
The situation is much brighter at the much bigger combination of WGY-AM (news/talk), WHRL-FM (jazz) and WRVE-FM ('70s and '80s rock) in Albany/Schenectady, NY. News Director Chuck Custer says

## Median Television News Salaries by Staff Size

	51+	31-50	21-30	11-20	1-10
News Director	\$100,000	\$71,500	\$50,000	\$42,000	\$30,000
Assistant News Director	69,000	50,000	36,500	28,000	29,000
Executive Producer	53,000	45,000	30,000	28,000	39,000
Managing Editor	52,000	42,000	35,000	32,000	N/A
Assignment Editor	30,000	30,000	24,500	20,000	18,000
News Producer	34,000	27,000	19,500	18,000	24,000
News Anchor	94,000	69,000	35,000	29,000	21,000
Weathercaster	66,000	53,000	35,000	25,000	25,000
Sports Anchor	67,500	50,000	28,500	22,000	20,500
News Reporter	40,000	30,000	20,000	17,000	18,000
Sports Reporter	28,000	28,000	20,000	15,000	18,500
News Writer	25,000	22,000	15,000	16,000	13,000
Videographer	30,000	27,000	19,000	17,000	14,000
Graphics Specialist	35,000	36,000	21,000	19,500	16,000
Internet Specialist	31,500	31,500	16,000	18,000	N/A
News Assistant/ Assistant Producer	23,000	18,000	13,500	14,000	9,000

Generally, the larger the news department, the higher the salaries. There are some exceptions, especially in the smallest group (1-10 newspeople) where a large or major market location demands higher salaries even at a small (probably independent) news operation.

## TV News Salaries by Category of Total Payroll



The anchor desk, including news, weather and sports, accounts for a third of the total salary dollars in a newsroom.



## Looking Back on TV

	1997 median salary	1996 median salary	1995 median salary
News Director	\$53,000	\$50,500	\$48,000
Assignment Editor	27,000	26,000	28,000
News Producer	24,000	24,000	22,000
News Anchor	41,000	40,000	43,000
Sports Anchor	30,500	30,500	32,500
Weather Anchor	37,000	35,000	36,000

## Looking Back on Radio

	1997 median salary	1996 median salary	1995 median salary
News Director	\$25,000	\$23,500	\$21,000
News Anchor	24,000	21,000	21,000
News Producer	26,000	22,000	20,000
News Reporter	20,000	20,000	19,000

**Raises ranged from 2 to 10 percent, based on merit. Forsyth notes that the company did well last year, and that means employees benefited doubly, since many own stock in their 401k plans or purchased on their own.**

salaries in 1997 went up by the 4 percent mandated in the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists contract. Union minimum is in the low \$20s, but Custer says most of his people make more than that. Negotiations are underway for a new three-year deal, and Custer expects raises of 3 to 5 percent. He has seven full-time newspeople, but Custer says he's only had two full-time positions open up in the last four years. "In this day and age in radio news, there is one strong news station in each market—one oasis. And there are very few openings at those stations. People hang on to those jobs."

Jim Forsyth is news director at WOAI-AM (news/talk) and KAJA-FM (country) in San Antonio. Forsyth has eight people full time in news—the same as it has been for more than

11 years. Forsyth says his salaries vary from the mid-\$20s to the mid-\$50s. "Some reporters have been here 25 years, and one of our anchors has been here since 1955." Raises ranged from 2 to 10 percent, based on merit. Forsyth notes that the company did well last year, and that means employees benefited doubly, since many own stock in their 401k plans or purchased on their own. And 1998's outlook: "Outstanding," says Forsyth.

That's not the way Mike Kinzel would describe his situation. He's news director at WCUB-AM (country) and WLTU-FM (oldies) in Manitowoc, WI. He's been there 28 years. "Too long," he says. Salaries in 1997 rose about 3 percent, but Kinzel says he doubts there will be any raises this year. "We went eight years without a raise, from about 1982 to 1990." Kinzel is 53. "Guys that are my age working in a factory have a hundred thousand dollars in a pension plan. When you're younger, you don't look at those things. But most guys my age don't stay in the business. A lot would have stayed but couldn't afford it. Good people. On the other side of the coin, this way you have really dedicated people." Kinzel's salary is in the upper \$20s. ■

*Bob Papper is associate professor of telecommunications at Ball State University and has worked extensively in radio and TV news. Michael Gerhard is associate professor of telecommunications at Ball State and has extensive industry and research experience. This research was supported by the Department of Telecommunications at Ball State University and the Radio-Television News Directors Association.*

### About the Survey

The RTNDA/Ball State University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 1997 among all 1,254 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 865 radio stations. Valid responses came from 722 television stations (57.6 percent) and 334 radio stations (38.6 percent).