

Dick Haefner – News



WJR News Director Dick Haefner is one of the most recognizable news voices in Detroit. With 46 years in Detroit radio news, Dick has been an award-winning newscaster, reporter, and news director at five stations. Dick has been news director at WJR since 1989. His tenure is unmatched by any other Detroit broadcast news director. Under his supervision WJR News has been honored with nearly every national and local news award in the broadcast business, including the Peabody Award, Associated Press national award for Best Broadcast Reporting, Edward R. Murrow awards, and numerous state news awards. His most recent award is for “Best Newscast” in 2014 from the Michigan Association of Broadcasters.

Some of Dick’s projects have changed laws. A series on suburban toxic waste dumps resulted in tighter rules for handling waste. An investigation of fraud at gas stations brought about new regulations on service station inspections and fuel hauling, and even changed the way the IRS taxes the fuel hauling industry.

One experience Dick will never forget was on the air and in the air: “I was signing on a report from a helicopter when a seagull was sucked through the rotor and smashed out the windshield. Feathers flew, papers flew, and blood was splattered all over. We looked down, and there was the carcass of the gull. My pilot, who had flown Huey’s in the Vietnam War, said it was the closest he ever came to crashing. I’m still relieved that the blood didn’t belong to the pilot.”

Among the biggest stories Dick has broken are Coleman Young’s baby, the Nancy Kerrigan – Tonya Harding whack heard around the world, and Detroit’s two side-by-side sports stadiums.

One of Haefner's most memorable projects was researching and breaking the story of a local, bigamist judge... his only story that has ever been picked up by the National Enquirer!

In 2005 he was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Dick became curious about the treatment option he chose— becoming one of the first patients to undergo robotic surgery. He tracked his own surgery and recovery as a reporter, and used his experience to produce a series. "Robots In The O-R" is the only radio production to win the National Association of Medical Communicators award, the top honor in the field of health and medical reporting.

Dick broke one story he wishes he didn't have to report.

"I was on duty on the day after Christmas 1976. It was a slow news day and I made a round of police calls. I discovered a commotion taking place on I-75 in Troy so I called Troy Police. The lieutenant on duty told me about the discovery of a girl's body. She had been shot to death. The girl had been missing for several days and the community was nervous about a previous unsolved child killing. I did an interview with the officer and asked "is there an Oakland County child killer on the loose?" He said yes. And that's what I reported." It was the first story about the Oakland County Child Killer, whose four murders have never been solved.