

# NEUHARTH

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interviewees for Brokaw's book, "The Greatest Generation."

During the interview, Neuharth was "uncharacteristically modest," Brokaw said.

"Trying to put it all in context, he said, 'Sure I won the Bronze Star, but so did a lot of other people. I just don't like to talk about those days.'"

Upon his return home, Neuharth attended USD on the GI Bill to study journalism. After a disastrous attempt at broadcasting a Coyote football game over the radio, he switched his emphasis to print.

He never looked back, joining the Associated Press in Sioux Falls, and co-founding the weekly paper *SoDak Sports* in 1952. That publication folded less than two years later, and in Neuharth's words he "ran away from home" to Florida to work for the *Miami Herald*.

Neuharth later worked for Gannett and went on to found *Florida Today* in 1966, and the *USA Today* in 1982, followed by the Freedom Forum and the Newseum in 1991 and 1997, respectively.

With a gift from the Freedom Forum, the Al Neuharth Media Center was officially opened on the USD campus in 2003. An endowment from the Freedom Forum also assured the independence of *The Volante*, the campus newspaper.

"Financial support and media attention paled in comparison to Al's most important gift to USD - his constant interaction with our students," Abbott said. "Year after year he patiently answered questions, often the same ones as the year before. ..."

"He enjoyed our students, and they in turn loved him."

Neuharth also was instrumental in the founding of the Native American Journalists Association, the Crazy Horse Journalism Workshop and the Native American Journalism Institute.

"I know that there are so many of us who don't know where they would be today had it not been for Al and the innovative programs he established," said Mary Hudetz, vice president of the Native American Journalists Association.

His work with Native American journalists was another reflection of Neuharth's devotion to his roots, Hudetz said.

"In our industry, in our country, so often the first Americans are forgotten. But not with Al," she said, adding that Neuharth was both a mentor and a friend to many.

"(Because of his support) our members and members to come have never been denied the support to tell the stories of their own people," Hudetz said. "When the founder of the *USA Today* tells you that your voice and your stories are important ... there really isn't anything anyone can tell you



(Above) Music at Friday's celebration of the life of Al Neuharth was provided by "Freedom Sings" members Jonell Mosser, Will Kimbrough, and Shonka Dukereh. "Freedom Sings" is a multimedia concert series about free speech and music.

(Photo by David Lias)

(Right) University of South Dakota President James Abbott greets Dr. Rachel Fornes, widow of Al Neuharth, in Aalfs Auditorium on the USD campus Friday morning.

(Photo by David Lias)

after that to make you think otherwise."

Many of Neuharth's children and grandchildren also were on-hand Friday to share their memories.

"The Al Neuharth we knew was no BS, whether it was striking fear in the heart of some unsuspecting waiter in whatever city we happened to be in, or asking a nurse for vodka and aspirin minutes after undergoing double knee replacement surgery," said granddaughter Dani Keusch. "He always told it like it was. Plain talk was his forte. He did it his way. In doing so, he paved the way for all of us (to do the same)."

Daughter Karina Neuharth said some of the most important lessons her father taught her were to be open-minded and accepting, as well as brave and selfless.

"He's everything that every human being wishes they could be and more. He did so much, and I know he will keep doing so much for everyone in this room, and everyone who loved him," she said.

Abbott seconded these comments, saying, "As we gather here today for this celebration of an extraordinary life, I am comforted by the fact that Al's spirit will remain in the hearts of every future USD student who reads *The*



*Volante*, attends a class in the Al Neuharth Media Center, or grasps the meaning of the First Amendment after reading it perhaps for the first time on the letters attached to the building that bears his name.

"I am confident in the knowledge that the presence of Al's spirit at this celebration at this university, his university, we are all in good company," Abbott said.

The program concluded with another video message from Neuharth,

where he admitted his family sometimes took a backseat to his career when he was younger.

"I put the family front and center for most of the winter (of my life)," he said. "You've met the members of that family who are here today, and now you understand why I love each of them so much. I kept on winning even after my body parts went weak and my mind followed."

Neuharth reminded everyone that life is not "an undefeated season."

"We must always play to win, but we will win some and we will lose some," he said. "When we win, we should share that joy with other. When we lose, we must accept the responsibility, pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, try again."

"Failure is not failing," Neuharth said. "A free spirit can help us get the most out of life, any age, and under any circumstances. We simply must dream, dare, do."

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