

## Interviews: 53rd Chicago International Television Awards on Mar. 23, 2017

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on March 20, 2017 - 11:26am

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CHICAGO –The 53rd Chicago International Television Awards, a companion celebration to the Chicago International Television Festival – and presented by Cinema/Chicago, the organization who presents the Chicago International Film Festival – will take place Thursday, March 23rd, 2017, and will honor entertainment reporter Dean Richards, advertising guru Joe Sedelmeier and the newly-formed-but-already-influential Amazon Studios. The entire television festival will take place from March 21st to the 23rd at the AMC River East 21, and screenings are free and open to the public. [Click here](#) [20] for a complete schedule and details.

The 2016 Awards, given in April of last year, were conferred through Michael Kutza, Artistic Director and Founder of the Chicago International Film Festival, and were “The Commitment to Excellence in Television Productions,” which was given to HBO; the “Career Achievement Award,” that went to actress Regina Taylor; the “Chicago Legend Award,” given to local ABC 7 Chicago broadcaster Janet Davies; and the “Chicago Award” which was presented to Bill Zwecker, entertainment reporter at the Chicago Sun-Times and FOX 32 Chicago.



Chicago International Television Award 2016 Honorees: Janet Davies, Presenter Michael Kutza and Bill Zwecker

*Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago*

HollywoodChicago.com did some Red Carpet interviews from last year – Janet Davies and Bill Zwecker – and will be on the carpet for the 53rd Chicago International Television Awards. On the next page, the 2015 honorees are interviewed. Both the 2016 and 2015 Red Carpet talks are published for the first time.

**Janet Davies, “The Chicago Legend Award”**

Janet Davies is an entertainment reporter and host at ABC 7 (WLS-TV) in Chicago. She has worked for the station since 1984, covering the globe as a general assignment, features and entertainment journalist. She is the host of the Chicago TV magazine show “190 North,” and she is the co-host of the highly rated “Countdown Chicago” every New Years Eve, among other program hosting duties. She previously worked in the Cincinnati (her hometown) and Philadelphia TV markets.



Janet Davies, The 2016 'Chicago Legend Award' Recipient

*Photo credit: ABC 7 Chicago*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Since you grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio, what was distinctive about that hometown life that you don't think would be available anywhere else?

**Janet Davies:** The Cincinnati chili, of course, and Graeter's ice cream and Dixie hamburgers...are you getting the food theme? [laughs] And since we're in a movie theater right now, my childhood was going to the Court Theatre in Hamilton, Ohio. I remember watching, at least six times, the film 'The Moon-Spinners' with Hayley Mills. I was in love with the young male actor in the film, Peter McEnery.

Fast forward years later, I was in Three Oaks, Michigan, at the Acorn Theatre. I knew the owner, and he showed me an organ that they'd recently purchased. It look familiar, so I asked where it came from. He said, 'The Court Theatre in Hamilton, Ohio.' I was blown away, because there in Three Oaks I was reunited with a piece of The Court.



**HollywoodChicago.com:** Since you have some local notoriety hosting the annual New Year's Eve show on ABC 7. What weird things have happened over the years on that live event?

**Davies:** Well, I was physically attacked with a champagne bottle one year. That wasn't good, and it happened on the air. Another year, we were doing the show at the terrace restaurant at the Trump Hotel. The Trump folks at the hotel promised we'd have heaters if we did the show outside. They never showed up. So Mark [Giangreco, her co-host] and I froze our butts off, and it got so cold that people thought we'd been drinking because it was so hard to talk. We ended up in blankets.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What story do you think has been the best in the history of your magazine show, '190 North.'?

**Davies:** Well, I'll start with any story featuring the late Doug Banks, I still miss him. But there was one story, where I put on pads and skates, and joined the 'Mother Puckers' women's hockey league... and I scored a goal. [laughs]



#### **Bill Zwecker, Chicago Award**

Bill Zwecker has Chicago journalism credentials that is all in the family. His mother, Peg Zwecker, was an award-winning fashion editor and columnist for the Chicago Daily News, and the paper her son Bill currently works for, the Chicago Sun-Times. Bill Zwecker also works as an Entertainment Reporter for FOX 32 Chicago, and has worked for "The Today Show," "Entertainment Tonight" and "The Joan Rivers Show."



Bill Zwecker, 2016 'Chicago Award' Recipient

*Photo credit: FOX 32 Chicago*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What memory or story do you think emphasizes your mother's career in old Chicago journalism?

**Bill Zwecker:** Probably the most important story she did is when she discovered [fashion designer] Halston. He was in the School of the Art Institute fashion program, and the publicist for the Ambassador Hotel called my mother to tip her off about him. He was making hats for a boutique in their atrium, and she wrote about him. She then introduced him to a designer in New York City, and lent him money to go there.

Years later, when Halston sold his business for \$60 million dollars, my father said to my mother, 'You should a cut a better deal back then.' [laughs] Halston and her remained friends until he died, and that's probably her biggest achievement.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Prior to being a journalist, what jobs did you do that nobody would believe right now?

**Zwecker:** I worked at a summer camp in Michigan when I was younger, where my job was to clean out all the septic tanks... and there can be many jokes made that it was equivalent to what we see in the screening room. [laughs] I also worked for Senator Charles Percy, politics was my first love. When I started writing at the Sun-Times, I actually did political pieces. Even as I switched to entertainment, it wasn't that dissimilar to politics.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Tell us something about the legendary Joan Rivers that the rest of the world doesn't know.

**Zwecker:** In real life, she was the kindest and nicest person in the world. I know that sounds like something anyone would say, but there was one thing I'll never forget about her. She told me once, when I was working on her show, that she always judged famous people by how they

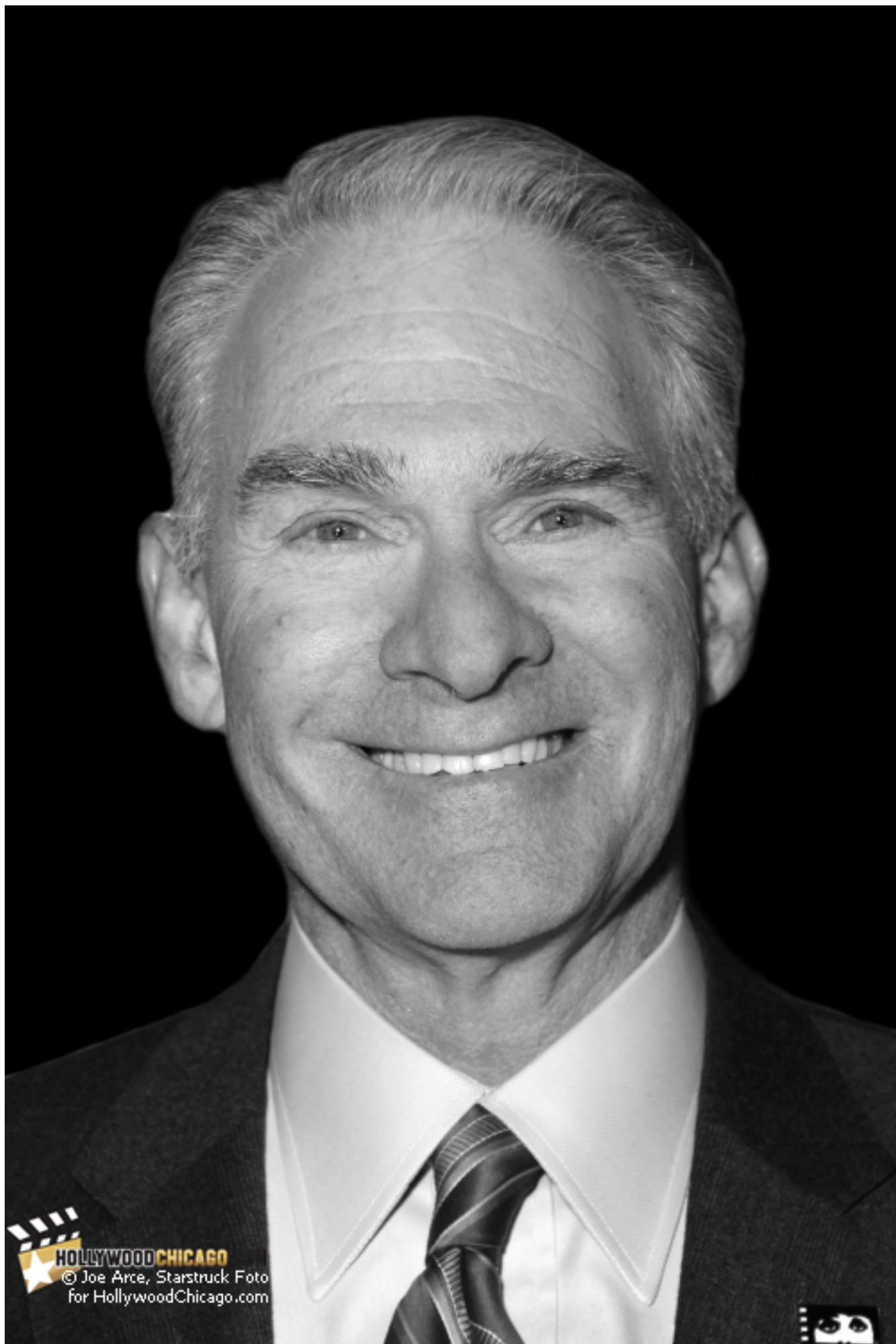
treated others who couldn't talk back to them... like make-up people, drivers and wait staffs. I always thought that was a great rule of life in general, no matter who you are – people are people, no matter what.

**NEXT PAGE: Three more talks with honorees from the 2015 Chicago International Television Awards.**



**Jay Levine, “Commitment to Excellence in Investigative Journalism Award”**

Jay Levine is one of the familiar faces in Chicago broadcast journalism, and in January of 2016 – after 42 years – reduced his status from day-to-day reporter to special correspondent for CBS 2 Chicago (WBBM). He began his work in the Windy City in 1974, working for ABC 7 Chicago until his move to CBS 2 in 1990. One year before that, in 1989, Levine married another local newscaster, Mary Ann Childers.



Jay Levine, 2015 'Commitment to Excellence in Investigative Journalism Award' Recipient

*Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What was the biggest story you've ever worked on, or the one that made you proudest?

**Jay Levine:** I think the biggest was getting embedded with the 101st Airborne during the second Gulf War in 2003. I was trying to keep up with twentysomething soldiers, and had to dig my own foxholes, and set up tents. I lost 18 pounds over the weeks, and my wife told me if I gained it back, I'm going back. [laughs]

**HollywoodChicago.com:** As an investigative reporter, what signal do you get that a story is too hot, and you have to back off?

**Levine:** I do not back off. Reporters don't do that, because any reporting is investigative, it is just characterized as long form or short form. Everyday, I do some kind of investigative reporting. When I go after something, I go after it. Nothing will make me back down.

I've had drug traffickers in Mexico following me because they didn't like what I was doing. I've had bullets whizzing over my head in Beirut. If you're going after a story, those are the type of things that can happen, but I keep going after it.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Since television in general has to create advertising revenue, how do you think the skewers the perspective of a potential audience?

**Levine:** There is a real iron wall between the ad side and the news side, and we don't cross that wall. Sponsors do not affect what I am doing. There are times when they do get uncomfortable about a story, but that's the way it goes. If we started to get influenced by that, it becomes a slippery slope, and that's one place no self-respecting reporter will get on to.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** With television changing so rapidly, what in your opinion is the future of TV news?

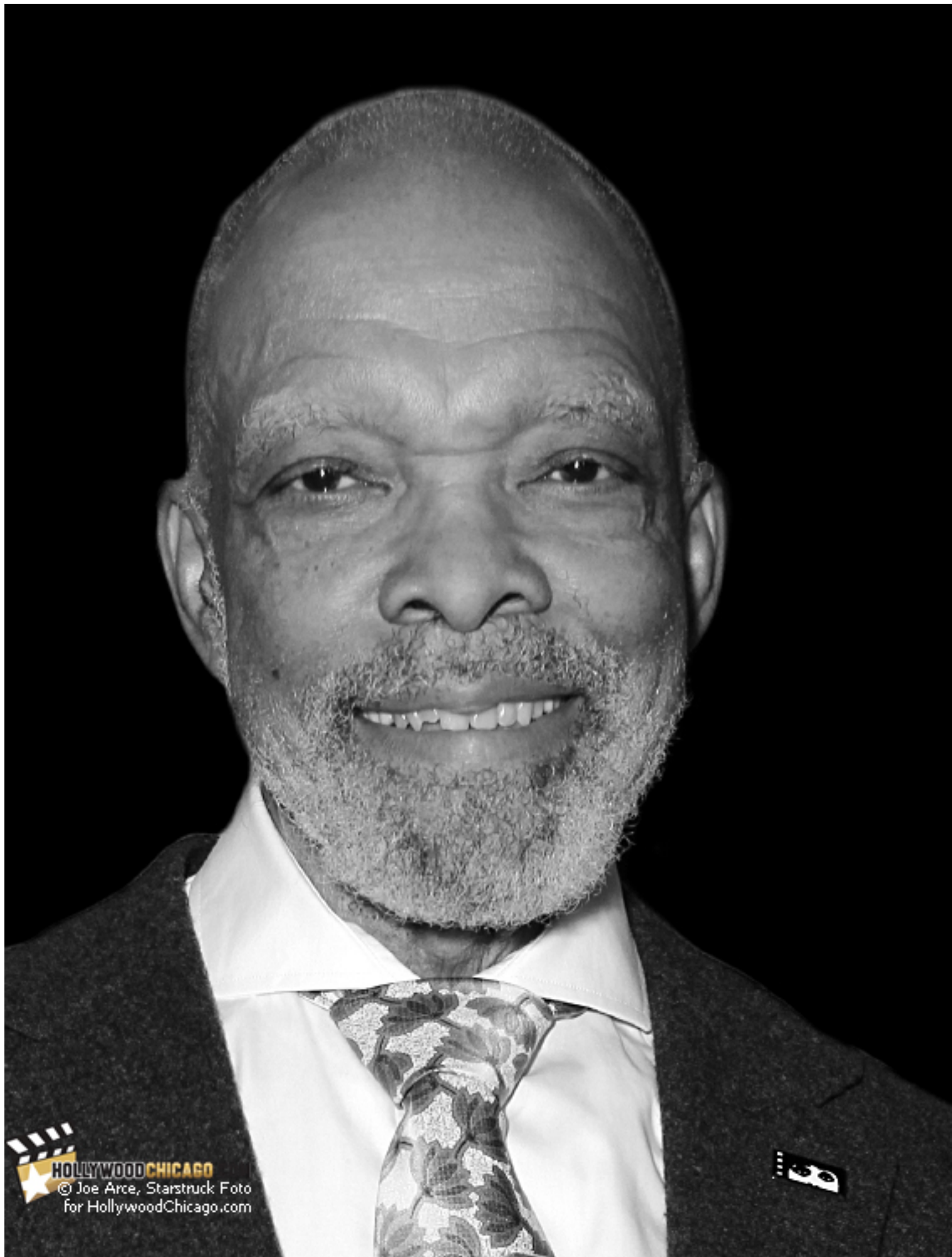
**Levine:** I think there will be more immediacy, because of the online partnership. There is no 'best of the day' on the evening news anymore. Everything is immediate, especially since we can report with devices like mobile phones. The shelf life of a story today is a fraction of what it was when I first started.



#### Tom Burrell, "Chicago Legend in Advertising Award"

Tom Burrell is one of the pioneers in marketing/advertising focus for the African American consumer, when he co-founded the Chicago-based ad agency Burrell McBain in 1971. It was renamed Burrell Advertising in the mid-1970s, and Burrell Communications Group in 1991. With clients like Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Toyota, Hewlett-Packard and General Mills, the various Burrell ad groups delivered cutting edge direct marketing campaigns for the African American audience. Tom Burrell retired from his namesake agency in 2004.





Tom Burrell, 2015 'Chicago Legend in Advertising Award' Recipient

*Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You were famous for coining the phrase, 'black people are not dark skinned white people.' Has the dynamic of that phrase changed since you first coined it?

**Tom Burrell:** No. It didn't start with me saying it, either, it's as old as African Americans being here. It continues to be the same, by the virtue of how we came here – against our will essentially – it has just adjusted through the different dynamics that has been manifested through the culture and marketplace. That hasn't been resolved because it continues not to be addressed.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** In the treatment of African Americans during the 1950s and '60s, and the transition that occurred during the Civil Rights era, where did you see the opportunity to reach that culture of people in advertising and commerce?

**Burrell:** The opportunity simply came out of the fact that African Americans had never seen themselves reflected positively in the media. They were depicted either as caricatures – like a Stepin Fetchit – or exceptions like high achieving academics. There was no middle ground, so the opportunity came from a craving for people in middle to see themselves reflected in media. All we had to do was show that, it did the people some good, and sold a lot of products.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Since you've started a second phase in your life, 'rewired' as you put it, what have you discovered about yourself that you never knew as an ad executive?

**Burrell:** I believe I sat on some of my creative skills just because I was delegating as that executive, and didn't want to compete with the creative folks who were working for me. Once I stopped doing that, I've found that creative side again, writing, artistic stuff, even singing. All of that has value.



### ★ Tom Skilling, "Chicago Award"

Tom Skilling is somewhat of a legends in the world of meteorologists, as the chief weatherman at WGN 9 Chicago, and is acknowledged as one of the best in the business, through his comprehensive knowledge regarding weather trends. He began his career at age 14 on WKKD-AM/FM in Aurora, Illinois. After completing his degree in meteorology and journalism at the University of Wisconsin, he joined WITI in Milwaukee in his first job as on-air weatherman in 1975. Three years later, he joined WGN-TV in Chicago, and has worked for the station ever since, and is under contract until 2022.



Tom Skilling, 2015 'Chicago Award' Recipient

*Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Mark Twain once said, 'everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it.' How do you think that saying applies to weather reporting and meteorology today?

**Tom Skilling:** We're still talking about it, no question about that. I do believe we are doing something about it. Tornado warnings have become sophisticated now, and people are grateful that they get these warnings ahead of time, and lives are saved. What has happened to

the models in the science of meteorology in the last 50 years has been amazing, and anybody who has been lucky enough to do what I do has had a front row seat to this change.

For example, I was just talking about climate change at a conference, and in my keynote speech there I talked about how we're able to see the planet now, and get an idea of what is going on. It's stunning for me, in the context of what I do.

*The 53rd Chicago International Television Festival and Awards, presented by Cinema/Chicago, will take place March 21st to 23rd, 2017, at the AMC River East 21, 322 East Illinois Street, Chicago. For more information about Cinema/Chicago and the upcoming Chicago International Film Festival, October 12th-26th, 2017, [click here](#). [21]*



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