

# 2013 Lifetime Leadership Award

# JAMES B. THOMPSON

**Jim Thompson**, also known as “The Mayor,” has had an outstanding broadcast career, continuing to this day. Thompson, currently president of the Broadcasters Foundation of America, started his broadcasting run in television in 1971, as an AE at WJZ-TV. His TV career would include GSM, NSM, and VP and GM posts at KYW in Philadelphia.

Thompson made the jump to radio in 1989, when he took the job as president and CEO of Group W Radio, which at the time was the largest non-network station group and the second-largest radio company in the United States. Group W had all-News radio stations in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Los Angeles, as well as AOR, Country, and AC formats in major markets.

After spending three years as president of Westinghouse Radio, Thompson and partner Mike Craven launched Liberty Broadcasting. That company started with one station, heritage Long Island Rocker WBAB, but within a few short years, it had grown to 19 stations. Liberty was purchased by Bob Sillerman’s SFX in 1996.

Craven says his close friend Jim Thompson is as genuine as they get: “He’s honest, and he’s very loyal to those he considers friends. His job at the Broadcasters Foundation is made much easier by the fact that he relates to people. And the environment he’s operating in is successful because Jim Thompson is there doing it. People are willing to listen to him, and they contribute because

of his character and his honesty. The Broadcasters Foundation is much better off today because Jim Thompson is there.”

When Thompson was knee-deep in radio, he says the industry was taking in \$20 billion a year of real money. And, while he says he would definitely be willing to get back into radio ownership, his primary focus now is on helping broadcasters through the Broadcasters Foundation.

Broadcasters, like every other segment of society, experience hard times. A lost job. An illness that requires expensive medical care. An unexpected life tragedy. Thompson’s job is to find those broadcasters and help them. He’s set a goal of giving out \$1 million in one year to those in need. In order to do that, he’ll need to spend a lot of time raising money and expend a lot of effort finding those broadcasters who need help. Richard A. Foreman Associates President Richard Foreman says of his friend, “If it’s true that in the end we’re all judged by the level we give back — helping others — then Jim Thompson has provided us all with a path to follow. His caring and dedication to the Broadcasters Foundation of America and total commitment to those it serves is exemplary.”

**Radio Ink is proud to present the 2013 Lifetime Leadership Award to James B. Thompson.**

## How did you get involved with the Broadcasters Foundation?

It was the end of 2008. I was looking to raise some money. Mike Craven and I were going to get back in the business. We had what we thought was a pretty good strategy, Spanish Sports. We had invested about \$175,000 of our money. As we were watching the world change, we said, “Maybe we should hold back for a second.” A second became a day. A day became a week. A week became a month. You couldn’t raise any money. Stu Olds, God rest his soul, who was vice chairman of the Broadcasters Foundation, asked me if I would meet with him and Phil Lombardo, who was the chairman, and come in and help them with the Broadcasters Foundation. Gordon Hastings was moving on to do other things. I came

in and worked with Gordon for a while, then Gordon went on to his own new business. It’s probably the best thing I’ve done, because of how much it helps people and the good it does. This is really touching people, and we’re keeping families together. It is really special.

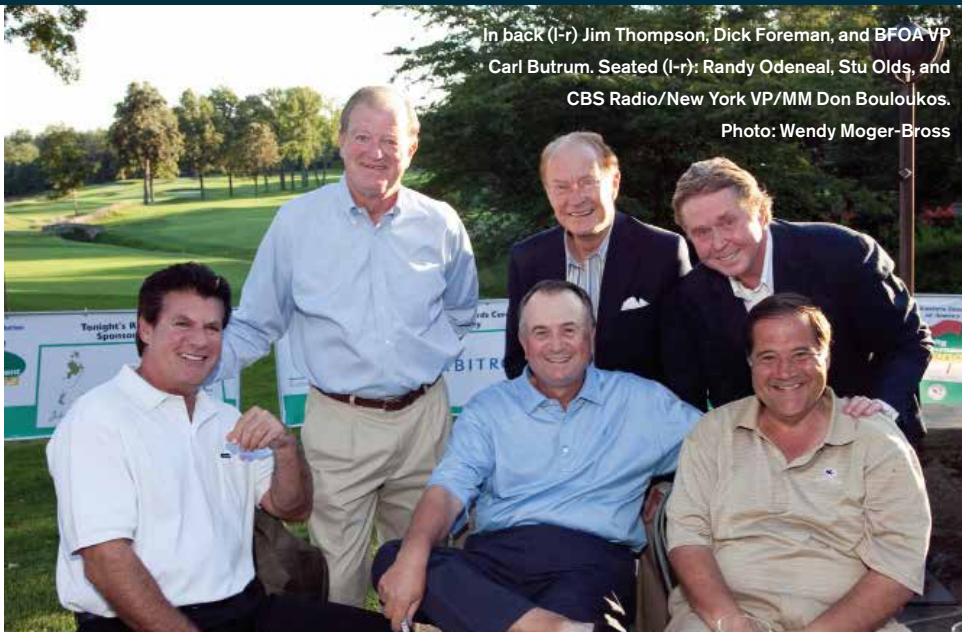
## Why is the Broadcasters Foundation so important to the radio industry?

We talk about the Broadcasters Foundation as an organization you may never need, but it’s there someday if you do need it. We will always be there for you or someone you know. We see it every day. There are people out there who are not covered by insurance or who don’t have pensions. The Broadcasters Foundation is

there for some of these people who are sick and can’t work. They can’t keep their families together. They can’t pay for their kids’ schoolbooks. Every industry should have some organization like this. We have, over the years, helped over 1,000 broadcasters. Right now we are helping broadcasters in over 30 states across the country.

## How does the foundation raise money?

We have events. We have the Golden Mike Dinner, which celebrates a broadcaster in the TV or radio industry who’s deserving, someone who’s done a lot of good for the industry and the community at large. The Golden Mike Dinner raised over \$350,000 this year. We also have our Celebrity Golf Tournament, which raised \$200,000. In



In back (l-r) Jim Thompson, Dick Foreman, and BFOA VP Carl Butrum. Seated (l-r): Randy Odeneal, Stu Olds, and CBS Radio/New York VP/MM Don Bouloukos.  
Photo: Wendy Moger-Bross



Phil Lombardo, Mark Mays, Jim Thompson, and Kim Olds with Lowry Mays

Las Vegas, in conjunction with the NAB, we do the Philip Lombardo Charity Golf Tournament. Then we have a smaller tournament, which is the Stu Olds Memorial Charity Golf Classic. A lot of those who were very friendly with Stu come by and celebrate his life.

### Are there a lot of people out there who need help?

The people we help, we keep anonymous, unless someone allows us to tell their story. Most people who will end up reading this will know some of the people we're helping. We are the safety net for the people in this industry, from all areas of radio — management, programming, engineers, assistants, on-air talent, and others.

### Are people giving enough?

Of course not. I will give you a statistic, even though it's not apples-to-apples. Last year, we gave out 35 percent more than the year before. But we only increased the money we took in from the year before by about 5 percent. Of course, sometimes those two numbers will meet in the middle. When I came here, we were giving about \$400,000 to people in need. This year we are going to give out over \$725,000. It's getting close to doubling in four years.

There are two sides to that. One is we're helping more people and giving out more money. That's what we want to do. Two is that we need more money to help people, and we need to keep spreading the word. The more people that know we're here, the more we can provide help. Some of the people in the radio industry who have been very successful in the past, and who are still very successful, support us in a big way.

### When people get sick or need help, sometimes pride gets in the way of asking for that help.

I know what you're saying, because we're experiencing it. Right now, we have 10 requests for help. Just to give you a sense of scale, three years ago, we might have had 10 requests in a year. We've had 10 in the past three weeks. Why it all happened at once, I am not sure. I think part of it is because of organizations like Radio Ink, helping communicate and get our message out, which is important. Of those 10, four of them are someone else calling on behalf of someone who needs help and hasn't done it themselves. People are embarrassed. They just don't want people to know their situation. I will call them up and talk to them and tell them it's OK. We are here to help.

### Are there certain qualifications? I am sure you can't help everybody.

It's really simple. Anyone who has worked in free over-the-air TV or radio is someone who would qualify, if other criteria are met. Now, we wouldn't help someone who has \$1 million in their IRA but is having trouble meeting their monthly bills. But that's not who we hear from. I will tell you one name. We helped Hy Lit. He's passed away. When I was growing up, I think he was the number one DJ on WIBG in Philadelphia. Later in life, he spent a lot of money on medical bills. The Broadcasters Foundation was there to help him.

### There are a lot of great organizations asking for money. Raising funds has to be competitive.

Well, it's always tough. I will tell you what happens. I think, from my point of view, that

**“As chairman of the Broadcasters Foundation of America, it has been my pleasure to witness Jim Thompson’s growth as its president. Although Jim has been a successful broadcaster, watching him take on the mission of the Broadcasters Foundation with not only all of his skills but with his emotion, his empathy and commitment to broadcasters in need, has been a joy to behold. The board of directors of the Broadcasters Foundation of America is delighted to have Jim spearhead our growth and outreach, and further our mission.”**

Philip J. Lombardo  
CEO  
Citadel Communications Co.



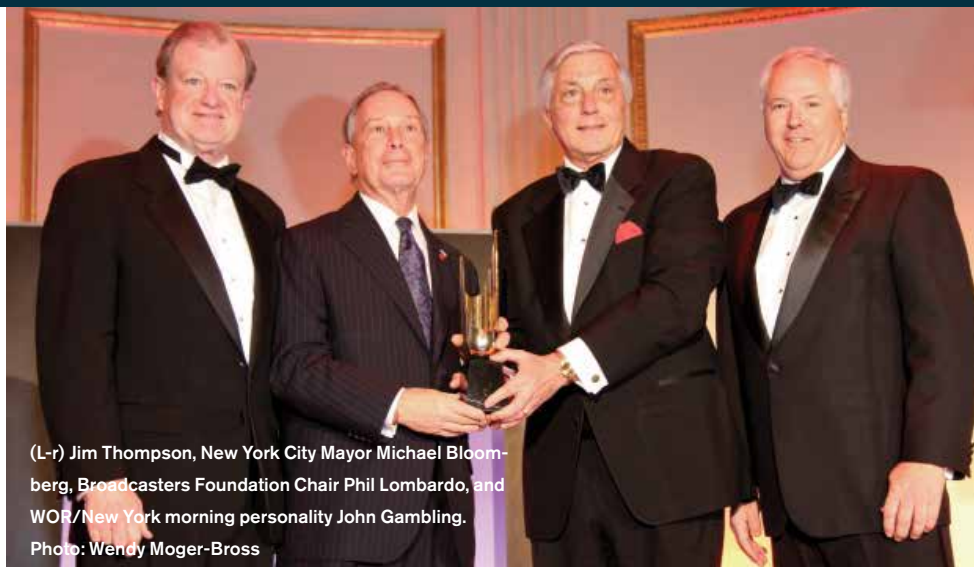
Jim and Cindy Thompson with Peter Smyth.  
Photo: Wendy Moger-Bross

**“Jim Thompson is truly a class act. His commitment to the women and men of the radio industry is unparalleled. He is radio’s true ambassador ... a kind, caring, and dedicated leader. I cannot think of a more appropriate person to receive the Lifetime Leadership Award than Jim. Our industry is better because of people like Jim Thompson.”**

Peter Smyth  
Chairman/CEO  
Greater Media

**“Jim has an superb reputation within television and radio broadcasting. He has served both segments of the business superbly and is a friend and trusted colleague to all who know him! This recognition is richly deserved. Congratulations, Mayor!”**

Peter Doyle  
Former President of McGavren Guild



(L-r) Jim Thompson, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Broadcasters Foundation Chair Phil Lombardo, and WOR/New York morning personality John Gambling.  
Photo: Wendy Moger-Bross

the more people know about us, the less difficult it is to raise money. Many people know someone we’ve helped. You would be amazed at how many people know of someone that needed help. That makes a difference.

You are right. There are so many organizations that do good things. We also like to tell people that we take care of our own. A lot of us have done very well over the years in this radio industry. So we’re giving back. I will say that most of the people in this industry give back.

#### Do small donations also help?

We get from \$10 to \$50,000. We also have membership drives each year. In fact, Katz Media Group has its own internal membership drive. Normally, we ask people to give us \$150 for membership. But we put together a special drive for Katz by age and position, so it can be as low as \$25. The reason for that is we want people to know who we are, stay involved and read our material, and know that if somebody they know needs help, we’re here. So, yes, we will take every \$25 they ever want to send to us. Every bit helps.

#### Why do you do this job?

I tell it, kind of laughingly, to give back for my sins of the ’70s, for those of us who were around and working in the business then — the fun of the ’70s. But the truth is, I do it more each day with a passion, because I see what good it does. I see how we’re helping people. When I first started this, and Carl Butrum, who works here with us, we would go through and read some of these awful situations and you almost want to cry, when you hear about what happens in people’s lives. We come in early in the morning when no one else is around, just to read through them.

Last week, one of our recipients passed away. The wife called and said, “Can you help us? We

cannot afford to bury him. We need \$600 more.” I quickly got the chairman and the executive committee together and we said, “Yes, of course. We will send them the \$600 additional,” to pay for cremation. We tried to call the family and tried to e-mail them, and when we finally heard back from them, their electricity was turned off because they didn’t have any money. The husband and dad just died. They can’t afford to bury him. And then they turn the electricity off. It is sad. There is a lot of this that goes on out there. That’s why it is important to have someone here who is helping — it is important that the trades, like *Radio Ink*, help us spread the word. It is important that people, whether it is \$25 or \$25,000, continue to support the foundation, because it is really all going to good work.

#### What else do you want the organization to accomplish while you’re there?

I want to continue to double where we are. I set a goal to give out \$1 million, because that means we’re touching people. I would also like to increase the money we raise by 50 percent, because that’s what we’ll have to do to reach my goal.

#### How close are you to your \$1 million giving goal?

We distributed \$300,000 in 2007 and \$600,000 two years ago. We are going to grant between \$725,000 and \$750,000 this year.

We continue to grow this, which means we are going in the right direction. One of the things that does upset me is when I find out that someone didn’t know about us, and then they pass away. And that happened recently. That was very upsetting to me. So we redoubled our efforts to reach out. That shouldn’t happen. ❌