

Television Icon of Innovation



On August 7, 2018 the television industry saw the passing of a true technology icon, Dr. Joseph A. Flaherty. Television viewers around the globe are still benefiting from the technology innovations of Joe Flaherty.

Dr. Flaherty received his degree in Physics from Rockhurst College, Kansas, City, Missouri, in 1952. During 1953-1954, he served with the U.S. Army Signal Corps, and in 1955 joined NBC in New York City as a Television Engineer.

In 1957, he joined CBS as a Television Design Engineer. In 1959, he became the Network's Director of Technical Facilities Planning, and in 1967, he was promoted to General Manager, and subsequently appointed Vice President and General Manager of the Engineering and Development Department, a position he held for 23 years, and then CBS Senior Vice President of Technology.

In the 1970's, Joe revolutionized the television news industry by changing the process by which news stories were captured. His foresight led to the replacement of 16 mm film to gather news, supplanting it with Electronic News Gathering (ENG), thereby eliminating the painstaking and time-consuming process of exposing the film negative, transporting the film to the station, developing the film and transferring the film to television. The development of ENG enabled TV viewers to experience the world's events in real-time, rather than watching history unfold, thus eliminating the catch phrase, "film at 11 PM".

In the early 1980's, Joe began developing High Definition Television (HDTV). On February 7th, 1981, he demonstrated "Hi-Vision" or HDTV to the Hollywood production community at the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineer's (SMPTE) annual technical conference.



First US showing of HDTV at the SMPTE technical conference -1981
Joseph Flaherty, Francis F. Coppola, Joseph Polansky, Takashi Fujio

This led to Joe's appointment as the Chairman of the Planning Committee for the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) Advisory Committee on Advanced Television Service, which produced the United States present day Digital High Definition System. His efforts made the United States the first country in the world to convert to a digital HDTV system. Not satisfied with revolutionizing the television system in America, Joe became a Television Technology Ambassador to the world. Joe's push for a worldwide HDTV program exchange standard at the United Nation's technical arm, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), led to the rapid deployment of HDTV on a worldwide basis.

Joe also challenged and successfully convinced the Hollywood production community to replace 16 / 35 mm film, used for prime time television production, with HDTV electronic acquisition and postproduction. Today, all prime time television dramas and comedies are electronically captured and edited in HDTV.

Joe was an active author and lecturer, presenting over 188 published papers and lectures during his career. Joe's technology leadership was not only acknowledged in America, but throughout the world by the presentation of numerous major Broadcasting awards and honors including:

Honorary Member of the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers (SMPTE's - highest award), and the SMPTE Progress Medal Award, David Sarnoff Gold Medal.

Four Technical Emmy Awards - the development of Electronic Newsgathering (ENG), development and installation of the first Digital Computer Automation System, Electronic Editing System of Film Capture, Vidifont electronic character generator.

Two Personal Life Time Achievement Emmy Awards – The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences “Lifetime Achievements in Contributions to the Development and Improvement of the Science and Technology of Television”, and the “Charles F. Jenkins Lifetime Achievement Emmy Award” from the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences in Hollywood.

National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) Engineering Award.

NAB's “Award of Honor” for “Introducing High Definition Television to the World”.

“Giants of Broadcasting” award from the Library of American Broadcasting.

Broadcasting & Cable Magazine “Hall of Fame” Inductee.

Consumer Electronics Association “Hall of Fame” Inductee.

Two French Legion of Honors - Chevalier de l'Ordre National de la Legion d'Honneur by President Mitterand of the Republic of France and in 1989 he was decorated as a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres and later promoted to the rank of Officer de l'Ordre National de la Legion d'Honneur by French President Jacques Chirac.

Swiss Montreux Achievement Gold Medal for Electronic News Gathering.

Fellow of the British Institution of Electrical Engineers (IEE).

Fellow of the Royal Television Society of the United Kingdom.

Fellow of the Chinese Institute of Electronics.

Honorary Member of the German engineering society Fernseh-Kinotechnischen Gesellschaft (FKTG).

Honorary Members of the Institute of Television Engineers of Japan.

International Vladimir Zworykin award for Technical Achievements in the field of Television from the Russian National Association of Television and Radio Broadcasters.

Dr. Joseph Flaherty's lifetime of television innovation is unmatched in the television industry. His efforts have brought real-time global events into our living rooms and through the clarity of HDTV made the viewer feel “as if they were there”. If anyone is to be credited with creating the “Television Global Village”, it's Joe Flaherty. Thank you Joe, for being a Television Technology Ambassador to the world.

Joe is survived by his wife Jan Flaherty, his sons Patrick, Daniel, Michael, Timothy, daughter Margaret and eight grandchildren.