

RTDNA AS 9/11 VICTIM; SEVEN HOURS IN NASHVILLE

By Bob Priddy, Chairman 1988-89, 2004-2005

No single day in the 80-year history of RTDNA changed the organization more than September 11, 2001. Although organization leaders had recognized the changing business and media climate around them and were pondering changes then-RTNDA would have to make, they could never have anticipated the changes set in motion that morning. As the day unfolded, I started keeping a log of events. Later, I added other notes to add context to what happened during those seven hours at the Opryland Hotel in Nashville that shaped much of what the organization is today. The times listed for what was happening to us are the readings from my watch and might not match times in other chronologies of other events. Here is a behind the scenes look at the day history changed for RTDNA.

It was a Tuesday. The RTNDA convention was to start the next day. Exhibitors were building their displays in the large exhibit hall. They had paid us a lot of money to rent space to show us their products and services. Chairman-elect Dave Busiek had put together an excellent schedule of workshops, banquets, awards ceremonies, and other activities. A year of hard work by Dave and his planning committee was about to pay off. Chairman Mark Millage was about to preside over his last executive committee meeting that morning and over his last board meeting starting a couple of hours later. Lou Prato was to attend his last meetings as RTNDA Treasurer, ending two decades of service in that position. Board member Bob Salsberg was looking forward to becoming the next chairman-elect, the person who would produce the 2002 convention in Long Beach, California. The hotel was looking forward to hundreds of people occupying its rooms. Convention-goers were in the air or soon to climb aboard airplanes headed to Nashville. Some had driven in or were on the road.

The Poynter Institute's Jill Geisler, a regular workshop leader at RTNDA conventions, packing her suitcase and would soon catch her flight to Nashville glanced at her television set and saw "video of disfigured World Trade Center towers." She reacted the way a former television news director might react. "I grab a notebook," she later

wrote for *TelevisionArchive.org* and begins to keep a journal. Entries marked (*) are from Jill's log. She would write a few days later, "On September 11, 2001, when life in the United States was at its worst, broadcast journalism was at its best."

Others connected to RTNDA shared their stories in various other ways. Several posted their stories on the RTNDA webpage. Their comments are marked with a double asterisk (**).

In 2019, journalist and historian Garrett M. Graff brought out a book, *The Only Plane in the Sky: An Oral History of 9/11*. Entries marked (@) are from that book.

All times are Central Daylight Time.

As members of the RTNDA Board were starting their day in Nashville, events already were unfolding that would make this day a "where were you when?" day.

@ September 10: NBC News anchor Tom Brokaw, just back in his office after a summer break got a phone call from a friend asking how it felt to be back. "I'm doing fine, but there's no news. It's hard to get cranked back up."

Lt. Joseph Torrillo, the New York Fire Department's Director of Fire Education safety was preparing for a press conference in which Fisher-Price was going to announce the introduction of Billy Blazes, one of the "Rescue Heroes" series of children's toys. He had chosen the day because 9-1-1 was the emergency call number for emergencies and suggested, "Why don't we have a 9-1-1 Day." He remembered that at 9 a.m., New York time, "every TV station in New York City was waiting for me at Rockefeller Center..."

@Ticket Agent Mike Tuohey at the Portland, Maine International Jetport, greets "two fellows" who arrived at 5:43 a.m. He told one, "Mr. Atta, if you don't go now, you will miss your plane."

@American Airlines Flight 11 attendant Madeline "Amy" Sweeney called the Flight Services Office at Boston's Logan Airport and told Service Manager Michael Woodward the flight had been hijacked. At 7:44, she told Woodward, "It is a rapid descent. Something is wrong. I don't think the captain is in control. I see water. I see buildings. We're flying low. We're flying very, very low. Oh my God. We're flying way too low."

7:46: Flight 11 goes into the North Tower of One World Trade Center between the 93rd and 99th floors.

@Torrillo was driving across the Brooklyn Bridge and could see the North Tower in flames. “I was like, ‘*Whoa!* I could see about 10 floors of fire all around the top of the building... Three college fire cadets were sitting in the back seat of my car to help at the press conference. Joe Broadbent, one of the fire cadets, said to me, ‘What do you think is going on?’ I said to him, ‘Everybody on the top of that building is going to die.’... As I got to the other side of the Brooklyn Bridge, I said to myself, *This press conference ain’t happening today.*”

Today co-host Katie Couric was in a backroom between segments of *The Today Show* when she looked up at a monitor and saw the first tower in flames. Her co-host, Matt Lauer, immediately cut an interview short “and I scurried back in next to him and started to try to decipher what had happened... I don’t think I appreciated how massive the fire was... We were talking, we were getting eyewitness accounts, and then, of course, the really chilling and shocking, visual was when that second plane was flying toward the building. It felt like it was in suspended animation.”

@7:55: President George W. Bush arrived at the Emma Booker Elementary School in Sarasota, Florida for a quick stop to read a book, *My Pet Goat*, to Sandra Kay Daniels second grade class before returning to Washington and a planned Congressional picnic at the White House.

@8:51: A second plane has been hijacked, United Flight 175. Passenger Brian Sweeney leaves a voice mail message for his wife. “If things don’t go well, and it’s not looking good, I just want you to know I absolutely love you. I want you to do good, have good times.”

Passenger Peter Hanson, was with his wife and four-year old daughter when he called his father: “It’s getting very bad on the plane... I think we are going down. I think they intend to go to Chicago or someplace and fly into a building. Don’t worry, Dad. If it happens, it’ll be very fast. Oh my God, oh my God, oh My God.”

His flight smashed into 77th and 78th floor of the South Tower at 8:03.

@Jan Clayson: We saw it live. As it rounded the corner, there were people in the studio pointing to monitors. You could see it coming. You

could hear gasps throughout the studio. Then it exploded into that building. There was silence. We looked at one another.”

@Bob Edwards, NPR, “I went into the studio and started doing our entire program live. I concentrated on words I was trying not to say. I didn’t want to use the word “terrorism.” I thought about the Oklahoma City bombing—how people speculated that Arabs were responsible...I was also trying not to say things like, “Holy shit!” In situations like this, your gut reaction is to use crude words that people say in everyday life, but you can’t say them into that microphone.”

Word quickly reached Sarasota where the presidential staff started to plan an emergency return. But the President was in the classroom, reading. The Air Force One crew immediately started preparing for a quick departure. The engines were fired up.

@Assistant Agent in Charge Dave Wilkinson of the Secret Service: “We’re beginning to get the motorcade up and running, getting the motorcycle cops back, we’re ready to evacuate at a moment’s notice. All of a sudden it hits me: *The president’s the only one who doesn’t know that this plane has hit the second building...* The event was dragging on, and that’s when Andy Card came out.”

@White House Senior Advisor Karl Rove: “I remember Andy Card pausing at the door, before he went in, it seemed like forever, but it was probably just a couple of heartbeats. F

@Andy Card: I knew I was delivering a message that no president would want to hear. I decided to pass on two facts and an editorial comment. I didn’t want to invite a conversation because the president was sitting in front of the classroom. The teacher asked the students to take out their books, so I took that opportunity to approach the president. I whispered in his ear, “A second plane hit the second tower. America is under attack.” I took a couple steps back so he couldn’t ask any questions...I was pleased with how the president reacted---he didn’t do anything to create fear.”

Nashville, 8 a.m.

RTNDA Chairman Mark Millage was about to preside over his last executive committee meeting that morning and over his last board meeting starting a couple of hours later. Lou Prato was to attend his last meetings as RTNDA Treasurer, ending two decades of service in that

position. The first executive committee members and association staff members had arrived in Presidential Boardroom A about 8 a.m.— association attorney David Evans, Chairman-elect candidate Bob Salsberg and me. We were just starting with the breakfast buffet of a ham, egg, and cheese muffin, assorted melons and fruits, some cereals, juice and coffee when Millage walked into the room at 8:09 and said an airplane had hit one of the towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. Priddy noted that it was the second time something like that had happened, that a B-25 had crashed into the Empire State Building in 1945. It was one of those trivial things that we pick up in life as we go along.

Prato had arrived by the time someone else (I do not recall who) came into the room and told us a second plane had hit the second tower. Prato hauled a small SONY Walkman radio and earphones out of his bag. He started relaying information to those in the room as details were broadcast.

Former Chairman of the Board Mike Cavender, a member of the RTNDF board, had decided to drive the 225 miles from Atlanta to Nashville instead of catching a plane. He was about 100 miles into his trip when he heard reports of the events on his car radio. He immediately turned around and sped back to Nashville.

In Indianapolis, former board member and newsletter publisher Rick Gevers was packing and preparing to drive to Nashville when his wife, Karen, called him from her office at the zoo and told him, “Turn on the TV.” He instantly knew there would be no convention and as soon as RTNDA sent out an official notice, he sent out an update to his newsletter subscribers, and unpacked.

@New York: Lauer said, “This is obviously something deliberate.” Couric thought, “Well, don’t say that yet,” as she recalled the Oklahoma City bombing when “everybody assumed that it was the work of Muslim extremists...I was sort of paralyzed, but I wanted to be careful about characterizing it a certain way, but Matt said right away, ‘This is a terrorist attack.’”

@ABC anchor Peter Jennings: “I simply put my hands in the air and told everybody in our newsroom to stay quiet because we didn’t

know what was happening. Our suspicions were instant. Rather than risk something foolish, I let the audience absorb it.”:

*8:20: All networks show wide shots of the earliest damage. Fox News relies on video from local New York stations WABC and WCBS. CNBC is talking over its NBC video with an eyewitness, a reporter from *The Wall Street Journal*. Anchors quote a “senior government official” who says “one or both planes may have been hijacked for suicidal missions.”

Within minutes we decided to cancel the committee meeting and move to Millage’s suite where there was a television set instead of waiting for the hotel staff to bring a set to the boardroom. Busiek instantly knew much of his convention planning work had been wiped out.

*8:22: ABC: Peter Jennings refers to “what now becomes a rescue mission,” adding “there was no warning, no intelligence whatsoever” about this event.

*8:29: NBC reports the President will speak soon from Sarasota, Florida. National correspondent Jamie Gangel, in a phoner, reports that her sources tell her “This is clearly terrorist related.” Matt Lauer and Katie Couric talk about two planes that hit the towers, referring to first as a 757 Air Bus that had been enroute from Boston to Los Angeles, the second as a 737. All networks cut to the President’s brief address from Sarasota. Most display him in split screen, showing live video of the WTC at the same time.

(The White House Transcript): *Ladies and gentlemen, this is a difficult moment for America. I, unfortunately, will be going back to Washington after my remarks. Secretary Rod Paige and the Lt. Governor will take the podium and discuss education. I do want to thank the folks here at Booker Elementary School for their hospitality.*

Today we've had a national tragedy. Two airplanes have crashed into the World Trade Center in an apparent terrorist attack on our country. I have spoken to the Vice President, to the Governor of New York, to the Director of the FBI, and have ordered that the full resources of the federal government go to help the victims and their families, and to conduct a full-scale investigation to hunt down and to find those folks who committed this act.

Terrorism against our nation will not stand.

And now if you would join me in a moment of silence. May God bless the victims, their families, and America. Thank you very much.

The President was airborne within minutes, not headed back toward Washington but headed to perceived safer airspace to the west.

*ABC's Peter Jennings describes the President as "clearly shaken." A Fox anchor ad libs about the President's interrupted visit with children at a school, "Perhaps, a little education worldwide would prevent this kind of thing." Correspondent Rita Cosby talks about Osama Bin Laden, reporting there had been recent warnings for travelers heading abroad about potential terrorist threats. NBC interviews former State Department terrorist expert Larry Johnson, who says he wants to be cautious about connecting the event to terrorists, but "I would be inclined to say that's the case." I note that with the exception of the President, we haven't seen the faces of people who are speaking. Directors in booths everywhere understand the compelling nature of the pictures and our need to keep seeing them. Not only are people tuning in to the coverage every moment, but the story is in progress and nothing tells this story more clearly than the video.

8:37: A plane hits the Pentagon.

*8:38: Fox News reports the Nasdaq and New York Stock Exchanges have not opened. Anchors speak with a *Wall Street Journal* reporter by phone. His office is across the street from the World Trade Center. He describes hearing what sounded like a sonic boom. Fifteen minutes ago, he says, bodies started dropping from the World Trade Center. He says he saw 5 or 6 people who he believes leaped to their deaths.

@WPIX-TV traffic reporter Melinda Murphy, airborne over Manhattan, "Our camera's pretty strong. I said, "What's that dripping off the building?" It looked like something was dripping. Chet's like, "I don't know." So we zoom in and we could see people jumping. We were on live TV and I remember going, 'OK, that's it, zoom out, zoom out.' I didn't want anybody to see it...Chet had been a firefighter. He said, "the buildings are going to fall. I remember being really made, vehemently saying "They are not, they are not going to fall down! He said, "They are going to fall. They're going to pancake down."

*CBS is showing the video of the second airplane hitting the second tower, running it in slow motion as Bryant Gumbel talks with James Kallstrom, who headed the FBI investigation into the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

*8:41: NBC cuts to correspondent Jim Miklaszewski, who reports from the Pentagon that the building just shook and he sees construction workers scattering from the area. "It appears to be a small blast. Windows rattled. The building shook." He promises more details as soon as he can gather them "please be careful," urges Katie Couric.

*8:42: ABC's Clair Shipman reports smoke coming from behind the Old Executive Office Building. There is video of the smoke, from a camera position near Lafayette Park. No definitive word on what we are seeing. NBC's Miklaszewski is back with word that the Pentagon is being cleared. "This appears to be a highly sophisticated, coordinated attack." CBS reports from the Pentagon that the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine has claimed responsibility for the acts.

*8:44: ABC reports a fire at the Pentagon and evacuation of personnel. CBS reports all airports, tunnels, and bridges in New York are closed. NBC's "Mik" reports pandemonium in the hallways of the Pentagon. CBS says the Pentagon bombing was a plane attack. Fox reports that the Pentagon incident involved another large airliner, perhaps hijacked.

8:45 (Opryland Hotel): The FAA announces the shutdown of all air traffic, nationwide. Moments later, as Busiek, Millage, Priddy, and Salsberg—now joined by President Barbara Cochran—watched as word came that the Pentagon was on fire. RTNDA Vice-President and convention planner Rick Osmanski arrived and quickly went into a huddle with Cochran, Busiek, Millage, and Salsberg to assess damage to the convention. They feared many people would pull out of the convention or not even attend. They recognized right away that substantial financial losses are possible. Cochran remarked, "The Pentagon thing is the scariest thing I've ever seen."

Within five minutes Osmanski and Evans had started reviewing the contract with the hotel. Millage reported to board members they were looking for "loopholes."

*8:45: Tom Brokaw has joined NBC's coverage, reviewing the events to the moment, as the network shows both the wide views of the towers and D. C. and early pictures from the ground in New York. I note several things. All network reporters are being cautious in their choice of words as well as their tone. They are serious, professional, and appear careful not to panic people. I note that Fox News's cluttered graphic treatment makes their coverage difficult to watch. Too much design in the way of the story.

*8:52: All networks report that airplane takeoffs nationwide have been canceled. Planes in the air have been diverted.

8:54 (Opryland); Those clustered around the television see a report that the White House has been evacuated amid fears that it was the next target. Within four minutes we learn the FAA ordered all airplanes to land immediately at the nearest airport. A number of people headed to Nashville found themselves in a strange city with no idea of what would happen to them next.

*8:54: Fox reports that the Pentagon event may have been a helicopter crash. ABC reports the United Nations is ordered evacuated. Debris is falling onto the street from the World Trade Center. There is a call for help to pick people off the roof of the World Trade Center. From the Pentagon—an eyewitness report that a plane crashed near the Pentagon and there appears to be a fire in the courtyard. Quote an AP report saying a U. S. official says “One of two planes hijacked after takeoff from Boston was American flight number 11 for Los Angeles.” Jennings, clearly concerned, says “I realize we are going to put the fear of God into the West Coast and a lot of people waiting for that light.” Jennings is having problems knowing which of several video feeds are being shown to viewers—calmly, politely he asks his crew to give him the information he needs. I think about the value of professional, well-informed, well-known anchors and reporters. When you hear the voices of journalists you recognize and respect, you view with greater confidence, if not comfort. I note that despite the gravity of the story, the likelihood of it being a terrorist attack, there is no jingoism in the delivery of this news.

8:59 (Opryland) We watch, stunned, as the south tower collapses.

****New York 1 reporter Kristen Shaughnessy was on the street talking on the phone when the building came down. “I thought I was far enough away, but within seconds it was there,” she later wrote. “The FBI agents were all running and looked scared. One grabbed my arm and said, ‘Run or you’ll die.’” For several hours, her news director had no idea where she was until she started phoning in reports about noon, New York time.**

***9 a.m.: NBC reports a spokesman for the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine denies responsibility. Brokaw notes that in situations like this, there are always “claims and counter-claims.” CBS reports the Sears Tower has been evacuated in Chicago. Dan Rather has joined the coverage. During a morning filled with video instead of anchor faces, we got Dan full frame saying, “There is much that is not known. The word for today is ‘steady.’” ABC shows video of the southern tower of the WTC folding, noting it happened just moments ago. “My God,” says Jennings, “We’re talking about massive casualties.” Jennings begins to speculate that in order to demolish a building, there must be detonation at its base. He seems to be suggesting further bombs. Reporter Don Dahler steps in to change the direction of the thinking. “The top part was totally involved...the weight at the top collapsed the building...there was no explosion at the bottom.” Jennings invokes Pearl Harbor...and massive casualties. Dahler reports hearing rescue workers on radios screaming for help at the triage center.**

***9:06: NBC talks about “a real breakdown of anti-terrorism.” Efforts in the U.S. CBS’s Harold Dow is breathless as he reports from a subway station around the corner of the fallen tower. He describes the scene from which he just escaped as “surreal and devastating.” Rather asks if the building came down. “Yes,” is the painfully obvious reply.**

9:06 (Opryland): Roz Stark, the executive director of the Radio and Television News Directors Foundation comes into the suite. We did not learn until later the personal stress she was under. Nor did we know until later in the morning the anxiety of another of our staff members.

9:08 (Opryland): Osmanski came back to the suite, contract in hand, and suggested we close our Washington office because the Washington Metro system had been shut down. No cabs were running. He reported that staffer Laura Strobe, alone in the office, was “scared to

death.” Cochran called Laura while Osmanski began discussions with our chief financial officer, Jane Nassiri and began going over the contract with Millage.

*9:10: ABC reports it was a plane that crashed into the Pentagon. Fox News goes to reporter Rick Leventhol on the ground near the collapsed tower. He cannot hear the Fox anchors, so he just talks. Talks about the victims with soot and dust covered faces headed his way. Tries to talk with some. Asks a man in fire fighting gear, “What’s your assignment?” He gets a two word reply: “Help people.”

9:12 (Opryland): Board member Angie Kucharski arrives to announce that she had arranged a 2 p.m. flight back to Denver if the planes had resumed flying by then. Several people in the suite have begun what millions throughout the country are doing: speculating about what these events were all about. Millage wonders if they had any connection with the execution three months to the day earlier of Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber.

*9:16: CBS’s Jim Stewart in Washington reports the House and Senate are shut down. Metro police are on full alert. All flights grounded. The FBI offices are open. I remind myself that I have been raptly monitoring ABC, NBC, CBS, and Fox. What about other outlets?

*9:20: CNN Headline News has changed from its ultra-busy graphics to streamlined information about the event. Reports that the Capitol, State Department, and Treasury Department have been closed. The West Wing of the White House has been cleared due to a “credible terrorist threat.” MSNBC has ground footage, taped outside the Pentagon. Interview with an MSNBC.com employee by phone with an eyewitness account of what now seems like old news about the initial crash.

(Opryland): By 9:20, Evans was able to provide some assurance that the loss of the convention would not be as devastating as we already had begun to fear. He told us it appeared we were insured for the full budget amount of the convention and that we would make refunds to exhibitors and attendees. The closure of the airports worked in our favor, he said. Evans and Osmanski decided to alert the insurance company to the situation.

9:23 (Opryland): A somber Busiek notes the options are to cancel or to “muddle through.” But Osmanski had no reservations. “We have to cancel,” he said. Cochran noted, “Symbolically it would be unseemly to have the convention and to hold the Murrow Awards on Wednesday night.” Millage noted, “We’ll have workshops without panelists and moderators.”

Evans told us the contract with Opryland said that the contract would be voided if there was any peril to the hotel. RTNDA’s insurance policy talked of cancellation, postponement, or abandonment of the convention. But, he said, if people stay away to cover the news, the coverage might not apply.

*9:25: On ABC, Peter Jennings says, “I’m still confused about what caused the buildings to collapse,” over powerful closeup video of the first tower breaking apart and falling. Jennings notes that “the other tower is leaning. Fire is spreading downward.” There is concern about the safety of rescue workers at the scene. Says Jennings: “New York firefighters have a reputation for staying until the very end.”

9:27 (Opryland): “Let’s get together around the table,” said Cochran, wanting to discuss our situation now that we had some information to work on.

9:28 (Opryland): As we gathered for the discussion, the second tower fell. Within five minutes, board member Robert Garcia, news director of CNN Radio, tells the group that CNN, our biggest vendor, had volunteered to leave its booth in place if the convention were pushed back a week. But he said it was impossible for CNN to tear down the exhibit and come back in a month.

*9:30: NBC has ground level video. Lauer and Couric talk about the rubble following the bombing of the Murrah building in Oklahoma City. “Mik” reports that security officials have evacuated the entire area around the State Department following reports of a car bomb outside the department. He says another plane has been reported hijacked and is 20-25 miles outside Washington, D.C., headed for D.C. Reports Donald Rumsfeld refused to leave the State Department. Admiral Clark was taken to an alternate command site. Another hijacked plane headed to D.C.? I think about the people on board. So far, in all of this reporting, we have seen buildings, and dust...and only a few people. This has been

a “macro” view so far. I think about the thousands of personal stories that must be told.

*9:32: ABC reports that an American Airlines plane headed from Dulles to LA was hijacked, with 60 passengers and crew on board. Jennings reads an AP report of a car bomb outside the State Department. MSNBC is checking hospitals, including those in New Jersey, that are poised to take in victims. CNN is carrying video from WNYW in New York—the remaining tower is falling. “Good Lord,” says correspondent Aaron Brown, “There are no words.”

**NBC producer Allison Gilbert has been moving against the crowd rushing from the area of the collapsed first tower when “I heard someone yell, ‘Get out of here! Get out of here!’ Then I heard the second tower falling. A horrendous rumbling,...a thunderous sound. The scariest part for me was thinking the building was to fall like a tree. I literally ran out of my shoes; I was barefoot. I was running over debris and rocks, but I didn’t even feel it.” She was engulfed by the cloud of smoke and debris. “It was so scary I was didn’t think I was ever going to see the sky again,” she wrote. She wound up being taken to a hospital with severe breathing problems. She did a live report from her hospital bed.

**Former NBC reporter Jim Plante, who had been working at an exhibit table at a convention of the National Association of Business Economists at the Marriott Hotel near the WTC when the first plane hit, is being interviewed by a WNBC-TV street reporter when the second tower comes down. “People started running past us and emergency workers started pushing all of us further up West Street,” he later wrote. He wound up in a Greenwich bar run by an old friend. Plante hoped to use the bar’s phone to call his daughter. An old lady who lived in an apartment building that gave her a clear view of the WTC entered the bar with her daughter, sobbing. The rumble of the tower collapse could be felt in the bar. “Flo started going hysterical and ended up grabbing on to me. I talked to her a long while and she finally calmed down,” he wrote. He looked at his friend who ran the bar and told him, “I think we lost a lot of friends today, you more than me.”

*9:35: Over video of the second collapse, NBC’s Tom Brokaw says, “The profile of the United States has changed. Terrorists have

declared war on the United States.” Fox reports a hijacked plane is headed to Washington and military aircraft have circled the capital. NBC reports a huge, gaping hole in a Pentagon wall. CBS shows one of the shots I will never forget. It is a wide, wide aerial view from the harbor. The Statue of Liberty stands proud and strong in the foreground. Behind her, Manhattan—all of it—is shrouded in smoke.

*9:36: ABC is showing video from ground zero near the WTC. People are walking toward the Brooklyn Bridge exit. The air is gray. People are covered with ash and dust, cell phones on their ears.

9:36 (Opryland): Cochran to Evans, “You’re saying it would be unwise from an insurance standpoint to cancel?” Treasurer Loren Tobia says the shutdown of all flights across the country is a reason for canceling the convention. But Evans advises against a quick decision and Osmanski suggests we meet with exhibitors who already had spent a lot of money getting to Nashville and starting to set up their facilities in the exhibition hall. He felt the association, as a courtesy, needed to let them know whether to stop their work or continue. Evans suggested we have more talks with the association insurance carrier but warned that there was risk because no matter what the association did, the insurance company was likely to take the opposite position.

Tobia told the group at 9:40 that the Nashville airport had closed but people were being booked on flights leaving the next day—although there were no guarantees.

Cochran called for a meeting of the exhibits advisory committee, a group of exhibitors, for 10:30. Osmanski was dispatched to the hall to announce that the executive committee and the board were examining options.

Staff member Stacey Staniak suggested the organization needed to post some information its website. Not yet, said Cochran.

*9:40: Fox reports it was US Air Flight 737 that crashed into the south end of the Pentagon. At the bottom of the screen, the super reads “Hijacked plane now en route to D. C.” Fox is relying on video from local ABC affiliate WJLA in Washington. On CBS, Rather describes the story aptly as “A well orchestrated orgy of terrorism” as we again see the unforgettable harbor view of the event. NBC shows and describes people fleeing from the second building collapse, from a round vantage

point 10 blocks from the WTC. “Emergency workers are coming out stunned,” says the reporter, “struggling for breath, with breathing problems...emergency workers had to get out to survive...Now they are trying to regroup and go back in.” And that’s when I witness the second signature scene of the morning. Two firemen in full gear reach to one another. They embrace. This is, after all, a story about human lives.

9:46 (Opryland): A critical moment. Busiek says, “There’s just no way” to have a convention. While those in the room at that moment knew he was right, the timing of the announcement was important. Cochran warned, “If we cancel too precipitously, we screw ourselves with our insurance company.” The group breaks up and clusters around televisions in the suite. Prato, watching news coverage on one of the TVs in the suite, remarks, “This is the day America changed.”

9:48 (Opryland): Our television sets and our Walkmans tell us police have confirmed a plane crash in Pennsylvania.

***Former RTNDA board member Paul Paolicelli, in Palermo, Sicily receives a call from a friend in Rome. “Get to a television,” his friend said. Paolicelli stumbles into a general store and commandeers a TV set in time to hear that something has happened in Pennsylvania. He is able to reach his sister “who, on the verge of tears, recounted the morning’s events.” He also gets through to his wife in Columbus, Ohio. “The Italians in the store watched me with sympathy and interest. They wanted to make sure this Americano’s family was okay. I relayed the conversation to them when I finished. They treated me as if there had been a death in the family...I felt so alone, impotent, isolated.”

*9:50: Fox has slapped a label on its coverage: “Day of Terror.” CBS reporter Byron Pitts is with a New York firefighter. Over video of the chaos we are allowed to listen in as the firefighter talks by phone to his wife. He tells her he is all right.

9:54 (Opryland): Tobia says he has learned people are NOT being booked at the Nashville airport for tomorrow’s flights. CNN reports Washington’s K Street (where the association had its headquarters at 1717) was in “absolute gridlock” with cars pouring out of parking lots. Cell phone circuits were jammed.

*9:55: ABC reports there is no car bomb at the State Department. On CBS, Rather quotes Edward R. Murrow: “No one can terrorize a

whole nation unless we are all accomplices.” NBC reports that Osama Bin Laden may have predicted this event three weeks ago when he warned there would be a future terrorist event. CBS labels its coverage, “Attack on America.”

9:57 (Opryland): We watch as CBS reports a large plane crash in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, eighty miles southeast of Pittsburgh. Another report citing FAA sources says a United Airlines plane has crashed in the vicinity of Camp David. Garcia mentions in the meeting room that he had heard a half hour earlier that seven planes had been hijacked and five were unaccounted for. Someone else notes that September 11th was the anniversary of the Camp David accord.

Shortly after 10 a.m., Roz Stark is seen standing next to another table in the Chairman’s suite wiping her eyes, quietly crying. She explains a few minutes later that her son works at a Times Square office in New York, not far from the World Trade Center, and could watch the events from his office.

“In the movies, Bruce Willis would show up to save things,” remarks Millage just before ABC switches to Florida where President Bush had been earlier in the day. By now he has left for a secure location, leaving behind ABC White House correspondent John Cochran, Barbara’s husband. She gasps, puts her hands to her mouth, and listens intently to John’s report.

@With the President is AP reporter Sonya Ross: “We didn’t know where we were going, but they must’ve been circling, because we ket watching the local feed of a Florida station going in and out. That was our tiny window into the outside world...I was nervous. I was thinking---it seems really morbid---but I was thinking, *What if they come after the president? We all turn into ‘and 12 others.’ No one knows your name if you go down with the president.* But Eric Washington, he was the CBVS sound guy, he had his seat reclined, his feet up. He said, ‘What are your worried about? You’re on the safest plane in the world’”

Other board members Dave Baer and Jim Turpin have arrived in the suite now, about the time the meeting of the full board was to start. Turpin reports that CBS was saying several commercial flights remained unaccounted for. Moments later board member Joe Coscia reports his

wife has been told Hertz is not releasing any more rental cars. Turpin says his travel agent has assured him he had one.

*10:20: Fox reports US Airways says all its planes are accounted for, contrary to earlier Fox reports.

*10:21: NBC reports live from outside Stuyvesant High School near the World Trade Center. The area is being evacuated because of bomb threat. I walk through every channel on my cable system and see how other media outlets have responded. ShopNBC is carrying MSNBC coverage, reporting 156 lives on two American Airlines planes have been lost. There is a message on screen: "In light of the tragedy that occurred this morning and the impact on each of us as American citizens and particularly those who have been directly affected either in person or by family and friend, we here at ShopNBC have temporarily suspended programming." The Shop at Home Network, the Home Shopping Network, and QVC also suspend programming. Onscreen messages direct viewers to turn to "your news channel."

TBS is carrying CNN coverage. TNT is carrying CNN coverage. CSPAN2 is running the live broadcast of Washington CBS affiliate WUSA. Univision has a statement about the tragedy from Mexican President Vicente Fox. ESPN2 shows ABC live coverage. FX is running Fox News live coverage. Court TV is covering the story. VH1 is broadcasting coverage from WCBS, the local New York O&O, instead of its originally scheduled program, "Rock and Roll Jeopardy." I continue to shift from channel to channel for the latest information. It is nearly 11 a.m. and I need to file this report.

Before I stop taking notes, I check another channel: The Eternal Word Network. The religious haven is running an old, taped program. They should have been live today.

10:21 (Opryland): Moments before board members leave the suite for the meeting with exhibitors, NBC reports Canada has shut down its airports although it would allow incoming flights to land. As we enter the area we meet Membership Services Director Missy Snodgrass and learn that her brother was working in the Pentagon only 200 feet from the place where the hijacked airplane had struck the building. She is shaken but relieved to learn he is okay although, she says, all of his bosses have been killed.

10:24: We meet with Osmanski outside the RTNDA office. He tells us the exhibitors think we should cancel the show. By 10:31, thirty people have gathered in the office. Evans is on the phone with the insurance company.

10:35: Evans tells Millage, Busiek, Garcia, Salsburg, Prato, Busiek, Cochran, and Priddy he has been assured by Debbi Wistafke, a spokesman for our insurance company, Sedbury and Smith, that they were trying to contact their underwriters. He says he told her RTNDA needed information and she told him "Everyone understands the situation. This is not a pre-existing condition. You have no worry that RTNDA will be compensated for reduced attendance if you are going on or for total loss if you cancel." Evans says he asked her to tell us the amount of coverage for a total loss. The answer: \$2,041,566. But Evans is not sure yet what the situation is with the hotel although he plans to talk to Opry land about mitigating the damages.

10:41: Cochran makes sure the message she will give exhibitors is correct: "I'll say we're trying to figure out what to do. We'll meet with the board. I'll call on you (speaking to Evans) and you can explain what we've done and ask them what helps them the most." Evans said getting the thoughts of exhibitors was important to our decision-making. Osmanski joined the group, saying he has told exhibitors we might have to cancel the convention. He said the exhibitors understand the situation because of the national tragedy.

Twenty-two people are seated around a long table. Twenty-one more are standing when the meeting begins at 10:43. Evans tells the group that today is the big travel day for our attendees and there is great uncertainty about people getting to Nashville today or tomorrow. But, he says, many who planned to come or who are already in Nashville are leaving or not coming. He says negotiations with the insurance company and with the hotel are ongoing. But the opinions of exhibitors are important.

One exhibitor wonders about options. Cochran says the only ones are a reduced convention or cancellation. There is no possibility of rescheduling. "It's on to Long Beach," she says, referring to the 2002 convention already scheduled to be held there. Another exhibitor noted that he felt the 2001 convention was going to be a "hard convention"

anyway in terms of attendance. He doubted the news directors would come to Nashville, especially with the events in New York. A third one doubted that anyone not already in Nashville would arrive later. He had talked to people who had landed in Nashville and said they were trying to immediately get home with rental cars or trains.

The clincher seemed to come from a SONY representative who told us, "We're working now to tear down our space. We're pulling out. We have a lot of people here with family and friends in New York City and we don't have enough people to support our exhibit if we go ahead."

The meeting ended at 10:54. There wasn't much doubt in our minds about our decision as we headed to the board meeting. As we gathered in the meeting room, Turpin told fellow board members that if they had a confirmation number from Hertz, they could get a car. But if they went to the counter, they could not get one.

@10:45: Air Force One lands at Barksdale Air Force Base. When Andy Card told passengers they had time to call relatives but could not tell them where they were, Florida Congressman Adam Putnam told his wife, "I'm safe. I can't tell you where I am." She answered, "Oh, I thought you were in Barksdale? That's what I saw on TV." The AP's Sarah Ross provided a brief report to her Washington office and kept her telephone on so she could hear President Bush: "our military at home and around the world is on high alert status. We have taken the necessary security precautions to continue the functions of your government." He urged the public to be calm.

Mid-day in Washington:

@NBC-4 has terrorism expert, Paul Bremer, former chair of the 1999 National Commission on Terrorism. Anchor Doreen Gentzler asked him to discuss "the small number" of groups that could be behind the attacks. Bremer's answer: "This is a very well planned, very well coordinated attack, which suggests it's very well organized centrally. And there are only three or four candidates in the world really who could have conducted this attack." Anchor Jim Vance suggested "Bin Laden comes to mind right away," to which Bremer responded, "Indeed, he certainly does."

**11:04: Los Angeles International Airport evacuated. Former RTNDA elected President (the position is now the Chairman of the

Board) Paul Davis already had checked in for his flight to Nashville. “Reclaiming my bag was a zoo as all bags were being ‘jettisoned’ into the four United carousels and stacking layers deep with hundreds of passengers grappling with bags or other people.” Another former elected president, Spence Kinard, had a similar experience in Salt Lake City where he had just checked his bags curbside when that airport closed. Kinard, working with the Utah Tourism Office, spent the day keeping his office open, “helping stranded passengers at the airport find hotel rooms, retrieving my bags, canceling and changing RTNDA plans (being also an exhibitor made things more complex, like trying to get everything we’ve already shipped to Nashville back to SLC...” Salt Lake City was to have had a display in the exhibit hall promoting its upcoming Olympics. “Security for the Olympics just jumped to a new level. Life and the Olympics will never be what they were,” he wrote.

11:06 (Opryland): The board meeting begins with ten empty chairs, just short of three hours since Millage had walked into the same room to tell a few of us of the first crash in New York. Everybody, staff members included, is allowed in the room although the board meets in executive session to discuss the legal situation. Cochran reported on the exhibitors meeting and told the board we had two choices: continue at a reduced level or cancel. She told the board that the exhibitors executive committee was doubtful news directors would be in Nashville and that SONY had been told to extract its booth and send people home. “There’s no practical way to re-schedule this,” she said. But RTNDA faced some fiscal issues. Exhibitors had paid up-front and had expenses. Registrants would be seeking reimbursement. The hotel had an attrition clause in its contract saying RTNDA would pay stiff penalties if our room rentals were less than 80% of the guaranteed numbers. Evans told the board the organization had paid its annual \$6,533 convention insurance premium and the insurance company had committed to reimburse the association for its losses. He did note the policy had a clause allowing denial of claim for an act of war and said underwriters might use that language to deny coverage but, he said, “I wouldn’t think this would apply.”

Six minutes into the meeting, Osmanski reported SONY wasn’t the only exhibitor pulling out. AP, Leach, Fuji, and several others also were

leaving. That was “helpful” news to Evans who noted the circumstances would “create an inability to hold this event.” But he wanted to board to fully understand the gravity of the circumstances. “Our insurance wasn’t designed to cover all potential liability of the hotel and the viability of RTNDA could be threatened,” he said, “We’re at risk.” But he said the organization did have a lot of insurance money and hoped its claims are not contested. “We’re not alone,” he said, but the question was who would pay for the cancellation of the convention.

He said the hotel had told him it was not surprised the organization was thinking of canceling in the face of a national emergency. But the hotel would lose a lot of revenue from cancellation of the entire room block. In addition, RTNDA had several other costly contracts for labor and equipment.

Garcia observed, “It’s a moot point. It’s over. I have a feeling people know that.”

Evans noted there was a potential that damages would exceed revenues. It was important for the organization to protect its position that the cancellation was justified. My sense is we have extensive information from exhibitors they are pulling out, so we can cancel. We need to notify people who are trying to find alternative means to come in,” he said.

The next step was to notify the insurance company of the cancellation and the reasons. I started drafting a resolution setting forth the reasons for the cancellation. Board members suggested some changes until the final handwritten resolution read:

“Whereas a national emergency has been caused by multiple acts of violence involving public and private entities, and

Whereas the members of RTNDA feel a deep obligation to serve the public in this time of national crisis, and

Whereas the shutdown of the nation’s air traffic system renders it impossible for thousands of potential attendees to reach the convention sites, and

Whereas the exhibitors at the meeting have informed the board they are unable to conduct business under these circumstances because of the crisis,

Therefore the Board of Directors of the Radio-Television News Directors Association hereby cancels the 2001 RTNDA International Conference and Exhibition.”

It was unanimously adopted by a roll call vote called by President Cochran.

But the cancellation caused another problem that had to be addressed before board members could begin a scramble to get back to their newsrooms. Priddy noted that the cancellation of the convention also meant the cancellation of elections for chairman-elect, treasurer, and at-large directors. The organization constitution had nothing in it to address the situation. Millage was still the Chairman. Busiek had lost his year of work as chairman-elect and could not yet move up to chairman. Bob Salsberg could not be elected chairman-elect to plan the convention for Long Beach. A new executive committee could not be picked because that was done at the post-convention board meeting. And newly-elected regional directors could not join the board because their terms began at that post-convention board meeting. No convention, no elections, no post-convention board meeting.

12:08: The board adjourns for lunch. Evans and Priddy remain at the table to work on proposed constitutional changes to deal with conducting association business when conventions are canceled.

The board reassembled at 1:40 after lunch, and after many members had checked out of their rooms, to approve constitutional changes that would allow the elections to be held with mail ballots with the new board members and officers taking office upon completion of the ballot counting. The new executive committee would be done at the December board meeting. By 3 p.m., the board was done. Farewells had been shared. The world had changed for RTNDA in those seven hours. All of us knew it. None of us could anticipate that the change would go on for a decade and beyond.

Most board members and several of the other attendees who had arrived early scattered after the meeting to look for ways home or to hit the road by whatever method possible.

One final piece of business remained. As Bob Priddy, who had driven to the convention from his home in Missouri, and board member Dan Shelley were heading out the door, RTNDF Executive Director Roz

Stark stopped them. There, in the lobby of the hotel, she presented Priddy with the Barney Oldfield award for service to the foundation. She, Shelley, and Angie Kucharski gave Priddy a standing ovation.

Kucharski caught a cab to the airport where she rented a car and got strict instructions that it was not to leave Nashville. She promptly went back to the hotel, picked up Busiek and headed to Kansas City at 90 mph where Busiek's wife met him. "Once we stopped for gas and there was a really long line as people had started hoarding," he recalled later, "That was pretty scary...like society was teetering on the edge pretty quickly." He got back to Des Moines at 3 a.m. and was in his newsroom five hours later.

Kucharski headed for Denver in her "local" rental car that got her into Kansas before a couple in an RV smashed into it at a gas station and someone from her station in Denver had to drive out to pick her up.

Former elected RTNDA President John Spain, who had flown in to assume his annual role at the auctioneer at the annual RTNDF auction, recalled many years later, "We were fortunate to get the last rental car available and drove to New Orleans where we had left our car," and then on home to Baton Rouge.

Priddy and Shelley set out in Priddy's minivan, listening to NPR's coverage, aiming for Litchfield, Illinois, about 60 miles north of St. Louis, where someone from WTMJ, Milwaukee, picked up Shelley while Priddy headed toward Missouri, where the fall legislative session was to begin later in the day. Shelley arrived in his WTMJ newsroom at 4 a.m. Priddy made it to a motel in Missouri before holing up for a few hours after which he put on the coat and tie he had planned to wear to the Prato dinner and drove to the state capitol in time for the convening of the state senate.

Priddy and Shelley were on the road at 7:30 when President Bush addressed the nation. He spoke for five minutes:

Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. The victims were in airplanes, or in their offices; secretaries, businessmen and women, military and federal workers; moms and dads, friends and neighbors. Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror.

The pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge structures collapsing, have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet, unyielding anger. These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed; our country is strong.

A great people has been moved to defend a great nation. Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve.

America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining.

Today, our nation saw evil, the very worst of human nature. And we responded with the best of America -- with the daring of our rescue workers, with the caring for strangers and neighbors who came to give blood and help in any way they could.

Immediately following the first attack, I implemented our government's emergency response plans. Our military is powerful, and it's prepared. Our emergency teams are working in New York City and Washington, D.C. to help with local rescue efforts.

Our first priority is to get help to those who have been injured, and to take every precaution to protect our citizens at home and around the world from further attacks.

The functions of our government continue without interruption. Federal agencies in Washington which had to be evacuated today are reopening for essential personnel tonight, and will be open for business tomorrow. Our financial institutions remain strong, and the American economy will be open for business, as well.

The search is underway for those who are behind these evil acts. I've directed the full resources of our intelligence and law enforcement communities to find those responsible and to bring them to justice. We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them.

I appreciate so very much the members of Congress who have joined me in strongly condemning these attacks. And on behalf of the

American people, I thank the many world leaders who have called to offer their condolences and assistance.

America and our friends and allies join with all those who want peace and security in the world, and we stand together to win the war against terrorism. Tonight, I ask for your prayers for all those who grieve, for the children whose worlds have been shattered, for all whose sense of safety and security has been threatened. And I pray they will be comforted by a power greater than any of us, spoken through the ages in Psalm 23: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me."

This is a day when all Americans from every walk of life unite in our resolve for justice and peace. America has stood down enemies before, and we will do so this time. None of us will ever forget this day. Yet, we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world.

Thank you. Good night, and God bless America.

Board member David Louie caught a break when he was able to retrieve his rental car that he had turned in at the hotel in the morning. He, Mark Miller, and Bob Salsberg left Nashville at 2 p.m. Louie's San Francisco newsroom had decided to send him to Washington to report from there. They arrived at midnight. "D.C. was eerie because there was no traffic and the skies were quiet with no commercial aircraft taking off from or landing at National Airport," he remembered. One of Salsberg's strongest memories of that long drive was "how good and how damned important radio was that day...I was so proud of the service radio offered and it wasn't just the all-newsers either. Music stations, even religious broadcasters stopped normal programming and went to their networks or read wire copy or did whatever they could to keep listeners informed." Louie let Miller and Salsberg take the car to Miller's home in Baltimore, where they arrived at 2:45 a.m. Salsberg snatched a few hours of sleep on Miller's couch, then drove the car to his home in Boston. Louie and his photographer were among the few guests at the Mayflower Hotel. He recalled a decade later, "We never heard footsteps in the hallways nor room doors opening or closing. But we did see and hear tanks stationed right underneath our corner windows overlooking Connecticut Ave., just a few blocks from the White House."

“The eeriest part of the trip,” said Salsberg, “was when I made the pass near New York City on I-95. Flashing signs informed motorists that all routes into the city were closed and police were stationed at some interchanges to turn traffic away... While I could not see Ground Zero from the angle of that highway, when I opened the car window I could swear I smelled the smoke drifting from the ruins of the World Trade Center.”

A few people were still at the Opryland Hotel that Tuesday evening for the scheduled dinner honoring Prato for his service to the organization and the announcement that a Lou Prato scholarship had been established by his friends. Prato’s service as treasurer continued for another month, however, until the mail ballots were counted that elected Loren Tobia his successor. Former RTNDA President Jack Hogan and his wife drove Lou and Carole to Indianapolis where they rented a car and drove to their Pennsylvania home on Thursday while the Hogans continued on to their home in Michigan.

For Prato’s eventual replacement, a little bribery was necessary to get home. Tobia got nowhere with all the car rental companies until he went to the airport and saw a lot full of cars. “But when I told him it was one way to New York, he said no. It didn’t matter that Syracuse was four hours from NYC, he wasn’t letting a car go to NY,” recalled Tobia, “So first I gave him \$100, then another \$100. Finally after he put \$300 in his own pocket, I got a car.”

Board chairman Mark Millage remembered that Osmanski “commandeered” a rental car for him. He left at 4:30 a.m. Thursday with board member Derrick Hinds, whose home was in Mankato, Minnesota. Hinds’ sister met them at Owatonna, Minnesota and took Hinds to Minneapolis, where he’d left his car at the airport. Millage reached his home in Sioux Falls, South Dakota at 10 p.m.

The RTNDA staff cleared up convention business in Nashville on Wednesday, chartered a bus, and spent all day Thursday traveling to Washington, reopening the RTNDA office on Friday.

The hotel let us out of our contract without penalty, charging only for services and goods actually used. Insurance money took a few months to arrive. By the December board meeting, Busiek had become chairman and Salsberg had become chairman-elect and therefore the

executive producer of the 2002 convention At the meeting, NAB President Eddie Fritts suggested RTNDA hold its convention in Las Vegas in conjunction with the NAB convention, an offer the board accepted, meaning Salsberg had just three months, not a full year, to put together a program. Fortunately he and his committee were able to move some of the planned Nashville workshops to the spring convention. “We rolled up our sleeves, kept it as simple as possible and got the job done,” he said later. The multi-year agreement with the NAB also meant RTNDA had to cancel its dates in Long Beach, Denver, Orlando, and Seattle. Months of negotiation through counsel David Evans got the association out of those commitments with little financial penalty.

It wasn’t long before RTNDA began campaigning against efforts to limit news coverage in the post-attack era. FAA flight limits included a ban on news helicopters, a ban the organization quickly protested. Although RTNDA’s protest that the limits infringed on First Amendment Rights seemed to be generally appreciated within the broadcast news industry, some in and out of the industry objected. One writer to *Shoptalk* observed, “News Directors are just limited from airing live yet another police chase in LA...I doubt the average American is interested in this latest, self-absorbed, self-interested TV News whine.” The FAA restored general aviation access in 27 of the nation’s top 30 metropolitan areas on December 20. In Washington, New York, and Boston, increased access was allowed with some local restrictions around sensitive areas.

RTNDA also protested the Department of Defense renewing its exclusive contract with Space Imaging, Inc., which denied media access to satellite imagery over Afghanistan and surrounding territories from the IKONOS satellite.

Within two weeks of the attacks, RTNDA asked Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld “to work with the news media to provide as much media access as possible to military actions that may be taken against the perpetrators of the...attacks.” .

The mail arriving in the RTNDA office on January 10, 2002 contained an insurance check for \$1,465,320, the full amount of the claim the association had submitted. Refunds began within days to registrants and exhibitors that asked for them. Many did not.

Shifting the convention to April, however, enabled the organization to do something it had talked of doing for several years-- create a high profile event in New York City. The presentation of the Edward R. Murrow Awards became that event in September, 2002.

The situation also meant the organization had a choice to make—hold another election at the Las Vegas convention, meaning Busiek would serve only a few months as chairman, or delay the elections until the 2003 convention. The decision was made to delay the elections, meaning Salsberg would wind up planning two conventions before his term as chairman began. He remembers, “I actually had the chance to learn from the mistakes of the first convention and get it right the second time. And since the format was very different from the stand-alone conventions of the past, the first go-around gave us all an opportunity to figure out what was going to work in Vegas, and what wasn’t.”

Times already were changing for RTNDA when the airplanes hit the twin towers in New York that day. Industry support was softening and the terrorist attacks further weakened it as they did the entire national economy. It was clear that convention exhibition income was beginning to decrease as industry economics were reducing attendance at national conventions and exhibitors were recognizing they could not afford participation in both the RTNDA convention and the competing NAB Radio show in the fall. Part of the arrangement with the NAB called for the NAB to make annual payments to RTNDA and to take over responsibilities for selling the RTNDA exhibit floor. The annual payments were to decline during the contract with the expectation that the decline would be offset by the sale of additional exhibit space. But the economic decline in the wake of the terrorist attacks led to reductions in NAB exhibit sales. RTNDA’s major exhibitors wound up on the NAB exhibit floor and the RTNDA exhibit floor essentially disappeared during the relationship with the NAB. Advertising in the COMMUNICATOR magazine began to decline.

The contract with the NAB ended after the 2010 convention.

Association leaders were faced with trying to resurrect the stand-alone convention or finding another partner. Former Chairman Dave Busiek wrote a decade after these events, “The economics of our business have changed so much in these ten years. There simply isn’t as

much money as there was for employee training, kicking the tires on equipment, etc. I always felt the main goal of our convention was to give...news people outstanding training opportunities. But if companies are not willing to spend a few bucks to send their employees, then the convention business is going to be drastically hurt. It's not just the media business. Many other industries have experienced the same thing." Those changing economic conditions led to joint conventions for a few years with organizations such as the Society of Professional Journalists.

RTDNA was steadfast in the next decade of shrinking resources and industry change that could not have been anticipated by those who started gathering for breakfast that Tuesday morning at the Opryland Hotel. It even changed its name to reflect the growth of what we were calling "new media" in 2001. It is a far different organization in a far different media environment today but it never has retreated from the standard of excellence in electronic news that it has held for these 80 years.

Those who lived through those seven hours in Nashville are dwindling in numbers but the memories of that day forever binds them together. They recognize the organization is not what it was then but also recognize the trends already had begun that have led the organization to what it is now. Their great wish is that RTDNA survives and continues to stand for the best the electronic journalism profession can be and continues to fight without tiring those who would seek to infringe on the public's right to know and the freedom of all in the press to protect that right.