BOB BELL

Robert Lewis Bell was born in 1922 in Flint, Michigan, the youngest of three brothers. His show business career began as a U.S. Cavalryman extra for the motion picture *Arizona* (1940). Bob served in the Marine Corps and Navy from 1941 to 1946, before returning to Flint where he landed a job as a disc jockey at WMRP Radio. A year later, he moved to South Bend, Indiana's WHOT Radio where he met and married copywriter Carol Atkinson. They moved to Indianapolis where he broke into television on WFBM-TV.

Bob's flair for comedic character acting surfaced in 1953 when he was paired with talk show host Wally Phillips at WLWT-TV and WLW Radio in Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1956, their boss, Ward Quaal, became General Manager of WGN Continental Broadcasting Company in Chicago and brought Bob and Wally along. In 1960, WGN-TV asked Bob to portray the character that would make him a Chicago television legend, “Bozo the Clown.” Chicago's Bozo debuted as a 30-minute live weekday program at noon. The show expanded to an hour in 1961 with an orchestra, comedy sketches, circus acts, cartoons, games, prizes and a studio audience. The show succeeded unlike any children's show in Chicago television history. Bob's improvisational skills and double-entendres even attracted a huge adult following. The program began airing nationally via cable and satellite and studio audience reservations surpassed a 10-year wait. Bob retired in 1984 and was immediately honored by the Television Academy with its prestigious Governors' Award. After raising four children, Bob and his wife Carol moved from Deerfield, Illinois, to Lake San Marcos, California. In 1986, he was greeted with a lengthy standing ovation when he appeared in the live broadcast of The Bozo 25th Anniversary Special from Medinah Temple in Chicago. Ten years later, Bob became the first portrayer of Bozo to be inducted into the International Clown Hall of Fame in Wisconsin. On December 8, 1997, Bob Bell died due to heart failure at the age of 75. Governor Jim Edgar and Mayor Richard M. Daley proclaimed April 18, 1998, “Bob Bell Day” in the State of Illinois and City of Chicago as Addison Street near the WGN-TV Studios was named “Bob Bell Way.”

RENEE FERGUSON

Award-winning investigative reporter Renee Ferguson brings more than 30 years of reporting experience to the NBC5 News team. During her career, she has covered major stories locally, nationally and internationally with insight and expertise.

For her work, Renee has received some of the nation’s most prestigious journalism awards including: the DuPont Award, given by Columbia University in New York; the Goldsmith Award, given by the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard; the Gracie Award, given by American Women in Radio and TV in New York; and, most recently, the Associated Press Award for Best Investigative Reporting. She has received seven Chicago Emmys and reporting awards from The National Association of Black Journalists and its Chicago chapter.

Among her many community service awards, Renee has been given recognition by the National Organization for Women, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law, the Chicago Black Women Lawyers Association, and numerous other religious and civic organizations.

Renee’s work with the Unit-5 Investigative Team often leads to major change in the lives and working conditions of people. Renee’s undercover investigation into allegations of sexual harassment at Ford Motor Company led to a class action lawsuit, a multimillion-dollar settlement and changes in corporate policy to better protect women. Her investigation into allegations that minority women were unfairly targeted as drug couriers and strip searched at O’Hare Airport led to congressional hearings and major changes in search policies nationwide. Renee’s undercover look at working conditions inside the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District’s treatment plants led to the appointment of an outside investigator. After Renee began investigating the deaths of children involved in a clinical drug trial, the trial was suspended and a government probe was launched.

Renee began her career in broadcasting at WLWI-TV in Indianapolis. There she covered migrant labor issues, traveling between Mexico and rural Indiana farms. Her investigation of a loophole in state law governing the criminally insane led to public hearings and legal reform. Renee received her Bachelor’s Degree in Journalism from Indiana University in Bloomington. She lives in Chicago with her husband, Ken Smikle, and their son, Jason.