ROBERT TRENDLER (POSTHUMOUS)

Hundreds of thousands of kids (and adults) grew up listening to Robert “Bob” Trendler and his Big Top Band. When WGN-TV’s Bozo’s Circus went on the air in 1961, Trendler was tapped to lead the 13-piece orchestra, which he did with a showman’s flair until his retirement in 1975. More than a bandleader, Trendler was an integral part of the program, and his music often provided lively accompaniment to the raucous gags perpetrated by Bozo and his clown friends. But Bozo wasn’t Trendler’s introduction to WGN audiences.

Trendler began work at WGN Radio in 1935 as a freelance arranger and musician. It was the heyday of live music on radio, and by 1941, Trendler was WGN’s Choral Director as well as leader of the WGN Dance Band. He made the transition to WGN-TV when the station went on the air in 1948. On WGN-TV, Trendler worked with musical greats like Sammy Davis Jr., Rosemary Clooney, Tony Bennett and many more. He performed on nationally syndicated shows seen around the country, including Great Music from Chicago, playing with artists like André Previn and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Born in Cincinnati, the only child of European immigrants, Trendler began playing piano at age 6. He first performed musically with his mother, Kathryn, an operatic soprano, at age 11 on WLW radio in his hometown. Kathryn worked at the station, and that may be where he first got the broadcasting bug. The young Trendler was more interested in jazz than classical music, and moved to New York City, eventually getting to work with legends like George Gershwin, Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington. He came to Chicago for a piano-playing job at the 1933 Century of Progress World’s Fair before hooking up with WGN.

Trendler met his wife Annette at Chicago’s LaSalle Hotel. She was performing in a vocal trio with pop star Rudy Vallée. Trendler and his wife raised their two children in suburban Lake Forest. Trendler died in 2011 at age 99.

BILL FRINK (POSTHUMOUS)

There was never much doubt about what Bill Frink would be when he grew up. He was raised in Elkhart, Indiana, where his father was managing editor of the Elkhart Truth. He went to work as a sports announcer at local radio station WTRC while still in high school. He also met his future wife, Willa, while in high school, but marriage would have to wait until after a tour of duty with the U.S. Navy. Frink broadcast sports while stationed in Guam, and then returned home where he spent four years at Northwestern University on the G.I. Bill, and married his high school sweetheart.

The couple bounced around the Midwest for much of the 1950s and 60s, landing sports gigs in Illinois, Michigan, Ohio and Kentucky. In 1963, Frink made it to Chicago, watching information come across a ticker tape at WCFL Radio and using that information for play-by-play “baseball recreations.”

Frink landed at WLS-TV in the mid-60s, and was teamed with Fahey Flynn, Joel Daley and John Coleman to form the Eyewitness News Team. They established a highly successful and widely copied news format often called “happy talk.” Frink was a good fit, known for his knowledge of sports but also for his sense of humor. Daly thought highly of Frink, saying: “He knew sports. He covered it personally. He was just a regular guy. I think that was part of his charm.”

Frink left WLS in 1979 and went cross-town to WGN radio and television. He had a great run on The Nine O’Clock News, being teamed with the likes of John Drury, Len O’Connor, Tom Skillings and Denise Cannon. He retired from WGN in 1984 but remained active in sports reporting doing both talk shows and play-by-play on several cable stations.

In retirement, Frink volunteered at the Mitchell Museum of the American Indian, something that grew out of his family’s respect for Native Americans. Bill and Willa had two daughters, Nancy and Edith, and four grandchildren. Bill leaves behind a legacy of a man who loved sports from all angles – the game, the player and the fan.