

NORTH CAROLINIANS *of* NOTE

Charles Kuralt

America's beloved storyteller

By Michelle Cerulli

Tucked away on the second floor of Carroll Hall, home of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at UNC-Chapel Hill, is a treasure of American journalism history.

It's a replica of the New York City penthouse office where journalism legend Charles Kuralt spent his later years. The Kuralt Learning Center—complete with mahogany bookshelves, his desk, fireplace and a large collection of his books—is a three-dimensional snapshot of his working life.

Widely known as the first face of CBS News' Sunday Morning program, Kuralt enjoyed a successful career in print and broadcast journalism for about 40 years. Twelve of his 13 Emmys and three Peabody awards line the Kuralt Center's bookshelves. The thirteenth Emmy sits in a glass case in the main lobby of Carroll Hall. His commencement robes and honorary degrees can be found in the center. His eyeglasses are still on his desk.

Kuralt was born in Wilmington in 1934. The writing bug bit him early. He wrote for his junior high school newspaper and announced sports games as a teenager. He attended UNC-Chapel Hill, where he served as editor of *The Daily Tar Heel*, the student newspaper. His first job after college was writing human interest pieces for *The Charlotte News*.

In 1957, Kuralt joined the ranks of CBS, where he enjoyed a 37-year career of everything from general-assignment TV news to radio news commentary to Latin America correspondence.

In 1967, Kuralt began his notable "On the Road" series for CBS Evening News. The segment featured him traveling across the country to bring untold, often folksy stories of American life to viewers at home. After 13 years with the show, Kuralt moved on to become host of CBS's Sunday Morning.

Kuralt retired from CBS in 1994 to

write books, fund-raise for different causes and speak at events.

He died from complications of lupus at age 62 on July 4, 1997, a fitting date for a person who devoted much of his life to telling America's stories. He is buried in the cemetery on his beloved UNC-Chapel Hill campus with his wife Suzanna "Petie" Kuralt.

Two days before his death, Kuralt had written a letter to former UNC system President Bill Friday, asking if there was space for him in the UNC cemetery. Friday assured Kuralt there would be a place for him. Kuralt's letter to Friday is framed and on display in the center along with a photo of blooming daffodils on his grave. A daffodil breeder Kuralt met on his travels specifically bred a species of daffodil for him.

After Kuralt's death, in 1998, Petie Kuralt offered to give the contents of her husband's penthouse office suite to the school. At the time, the journalism school was moving from Howell Hall to its new home in Carroll. Karen Beckers, Kuralt's assistant and CBS colleague, and Richard Cole, then dean of the school, led the project.

Generous donations by UNC alumni Gene and Saralyn Oberdorfer and Jim Babb and many other friends and colleagues of the legendary journalist made the Kuralt Center a reality. The project raised \$150,000, and the center opened in 1999. An impressive brass plaque listing the names of the project's donors hangs by the entrance of the center, which is near the Park Library on the second floor of Carroll Hall.

"It is a rich treasure of one of the best broadcast journalists our country has ever produced," said Cole, John Thom-



Courtesy of the N.C. Collection, UNC-Chapel Hill

as Kerr Jr. Distinguished Professor.

The center is frequently used as a conference room for special meetings, small seminars and graduate student oral exams. An ever-growing guest-book rests on the large oval table in the middle of the room.

"I think he would have really liked the Charles Kuralt Center being here," Cole said.

Lois Cranford, a 1945 alumna of UNC and lifelong admirer of Kuralt, is one of the center's two docents. She and Marilyn Bilpuch, also a UNC alumna, oversee the centers open hours from 2 to 4 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays. They are eager to tell Kuralt's story and the rich history of the center.

"He had this wonderful, booming voice and perfect diction," said Cranford, who can effortlessly detail the milestones of Kuralt's life. "Anything he wrote was beautifully done. He found interesting things in everybody."

Kuralt Learning Center, UNC-CH, School of Journalism and Mass Communication

The Kuralt Center is open to visitors from 2 to 4 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays. Special arrangements for groups can be made as well. Docent Lois Cranford can be reached at LRcranford@aol.com.

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