

# Maer remembers his SIUE experiences



Segue • SIUE

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Southern Illinois University Edwardsville takes immense pride that its alumni, through leadership, character and hard work, have made incredible strides to shape a changing world.

On this week's episode of Segue to air at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Feb. 4, the University's premier radio show that discusses the ideas and issues on campus and beyond on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound, SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembrook, PhD, welcomes Peter Maer, former CBS White House correspondent and SIUE alumnus, for a chat about his extensive career.

Maer was a member of the first class of SIUE mass communication majors and graduated with his master's in 1970. The Granite City native was a voice for national news for more than a quarter century. As a CBS White House correspondent, he provided coverage for presidents from Jimmy Carter to Barack Obama, and reported major national and international disasters.

He received many awards during his time as a reporter, including the Edward R. Murrow Award, five Merriman Smith Awards for Presidential Coverage and the Overseas Press Award. He was inducted into the SIUE Alumni Hall of Fame in 2012, and in 2015, he formally retired from CBS. Despite his retirement, he was called back into action as a CBS news contributor during the 2016 presidential election.

"You've had quite a career, and we're proud to call you an SIUE alum!" Pembrook says. "When you were young, did you always know you wanted to be a news reporter? What piqued your interest in media?"

"I was eight-years-old when I knew I wanted to be a newspaper reporter," Maer says. "Then, through a number of experiences, I fell in love with radio as a teenager. I got a lucky break when I got a job in high school at a local radio station in Granite City.

"I had wonderful experiences at WIBV Radio in Belleville while I was majoring in mass communications here, and my passion was just something that sprouted early on."

Along with his love for reporting, Maer also fell in love with politics. His father, Dr. Stanley Maer, an optometrist, was active in political associations and often lobbied in Springfield. As a child, he would tag along on these trips to Illinois' capitol to visit various political venues.

As a young reporter, he covered many of the local beats in the St. Louis metropolitan area before moving to radio stations in Nashville and Atlanta.

"When I got to Atlanta, I covered state politics and got intensely into politics," Maer says. "As luck and timing would have it, the Governor of Georgia, Jimmy Carter, was elected President. Mutual Broadcasting came calling and was looking for someone who was familiar with him and had a radio background."

"As you interacted with presidents, were there some that were more likable than the others, or did you develop closer relationships, or perhaps friendships?" Pembrook inquires.

"I was taught by someone who had been on the beat for many years, and one day, this reporter said to me, 'you know, we're not here to be their friends,'" Maer says. "That didn't mean we had to tear them down, but we

were there to give an objective accounting of what was going on in terms of policies, decisions and announcements that the presidents would make.”

Over the course of his career, Maer has seen a monumental shift in the way that news organizations operate. His experience, which spans nearly a quarter of a century, has led him to believe that there is an immense need for an emphasis on media literacy.

“Students coming up need to be taught and it’s important for everyone to read conservative and liberal pages, and know the difference between some person on a radio talk show or TV, and realize they are not journalists.

“They are commentators and opinion drivers, and people need to know the difference between those people and straight reporters.”

Throughout the course of the interview, the distinguished reporter shares some of the most powerful moments from his time as a White House correspondent. The must-listen session features anecdotes from the tension and suspense inside the White House following the attacks on 9/11 to traveling alongside George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton to visit tsunami and earthquake-ravaged Asia in 2004.

“At the time, I was assigned to be the pool reporter and represented all broadcast networks,” Maer recalls. “When we traveled to these countries that were hit by this terrible tidal wave and earthquake, we spoke about the fragility of life and what we witnessed on the ground. That experience will always stay with me.”

For more of Maer’s first-hand accounts from his time as a White House correspondent, tune into this week’s episode of Segue, which airs at 9 a.m. this Sunday, Feb. 4, on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound.

*By Madelaine Gerard, SIUE Marketing & Communications*