

Christian Broadcaster Ron Hembree Mourned

Christian broadcasters are mourning the loss of Cornerstone TeleVision President Ron Hembree, who died in his home June 10 from an unknown illness. He was 72.

Frank Wright, president of the National Religious Broadcasters (NRB), said Hembree, who served on the group's board, was an "encourager, teacher, godly example and friend" whose "steady leadership and optimistic outlook will be sorely missed."

"Ron had a zeal for the Lord, a profound appreciation for the impact of Christian television and a clear understanding of the issues that confronted those in gospel broadcasting," added Craig Parshall, NRB senior vice president and general counsel. "His labors in God's vineyard, I am sure, will continue to yield a great harvest for years to come."

Hembree, who in 2002 became president of the Pittsburgh-area Christian station, was born in Missouri, the son of a preacher, and served as an Assemblies of God (AG) minister before beginning his media career. He was a writer for the national headquarters of the AG and was later a news editor for KWTQ radio in Springfield, Mo., according to the NRB.

He also wrote more than 70 books and hundreds of articles that were published in Billy Graham's *Decision* magazine and in *Christian Life*, which united with *Charisma* magazine in the 1980s. Once aspiring to be a missionary, he also operated Good Friends, an outreach ministry that supports orphanages worldwide, among other work.

Hembree, however, is best known for launching the program *Quick Study*, which takes viewers through the Bible in one year. The show has been airing for more than 20 years, and Hembree had just finished filming 11 new episodes hours before

he died. For a time Hembree also hosted Cornerstone's popular show *His Place*.

In addition to developing programming, Hembree is credited with leading Cornerstone out of deep debt. His son Chad Hembree, who produces Cornerstone's flagship show *Focus 4*, said the station was in millions of dollars of debt when his father took over.

"The last I heard, we were \$200,000 ahead of budget right now," he told the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. "We're far out of the red. That's something you can attribute to his leadership. He fulfilled the goals that he had."

Chad Hembree told the newspaper his father's death was unexpected. He said Ron Hembree suffered what was thought to be a mild heart attack about a month ago in Canada, but doctors said it was the effects of stress. Hembree was told to make some lifestyle changes and two days before his death was given a clean bill of health.

On June 10, when Hembree returned home from filming episodes of *Quick Study*, he sat down and lost consciousness.

Richard Hatch, who hosted a talk show on Cornerstone in the 1980s and was in talks with Hembree about returning to the station this fall, told the *Gazette* that Hembree was "the most godly" man he ever knew.

"He had all the flaws of human nature, but I found no guile in him at all," Hatch said. "There was never anything on his mind except the Lord's work."

Norma Bixler, who founded Cornerstone in 1979, said Hembree was "a great teacher and my friend."

"We all loved him very much," she said, "and he loved us."

Hembree is survived by his wife, Cathy; his mother, Lucy; six children and six grandchildren. A memorial service is to be

held July 7 at 11 a.m. in Delmont, Pa.