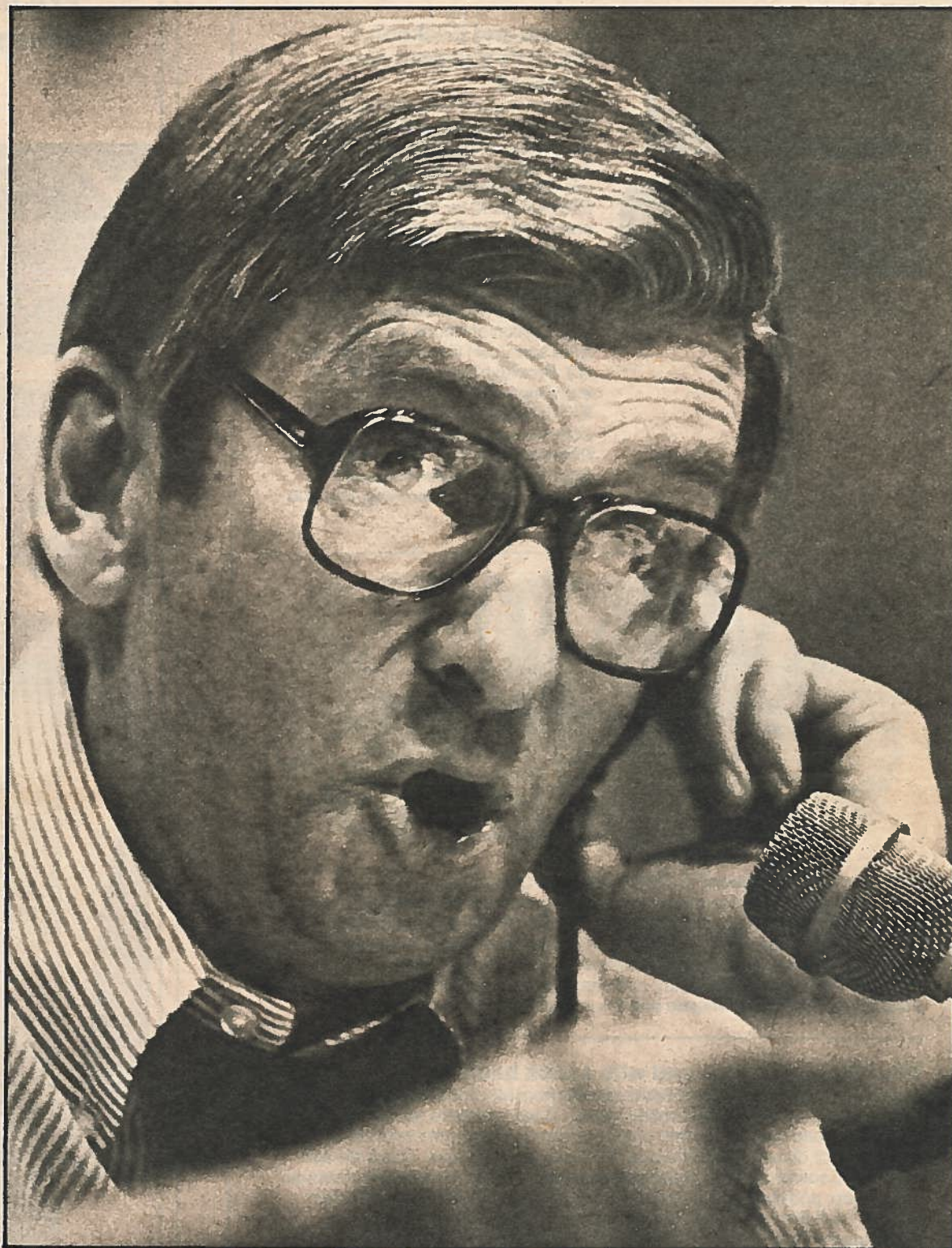
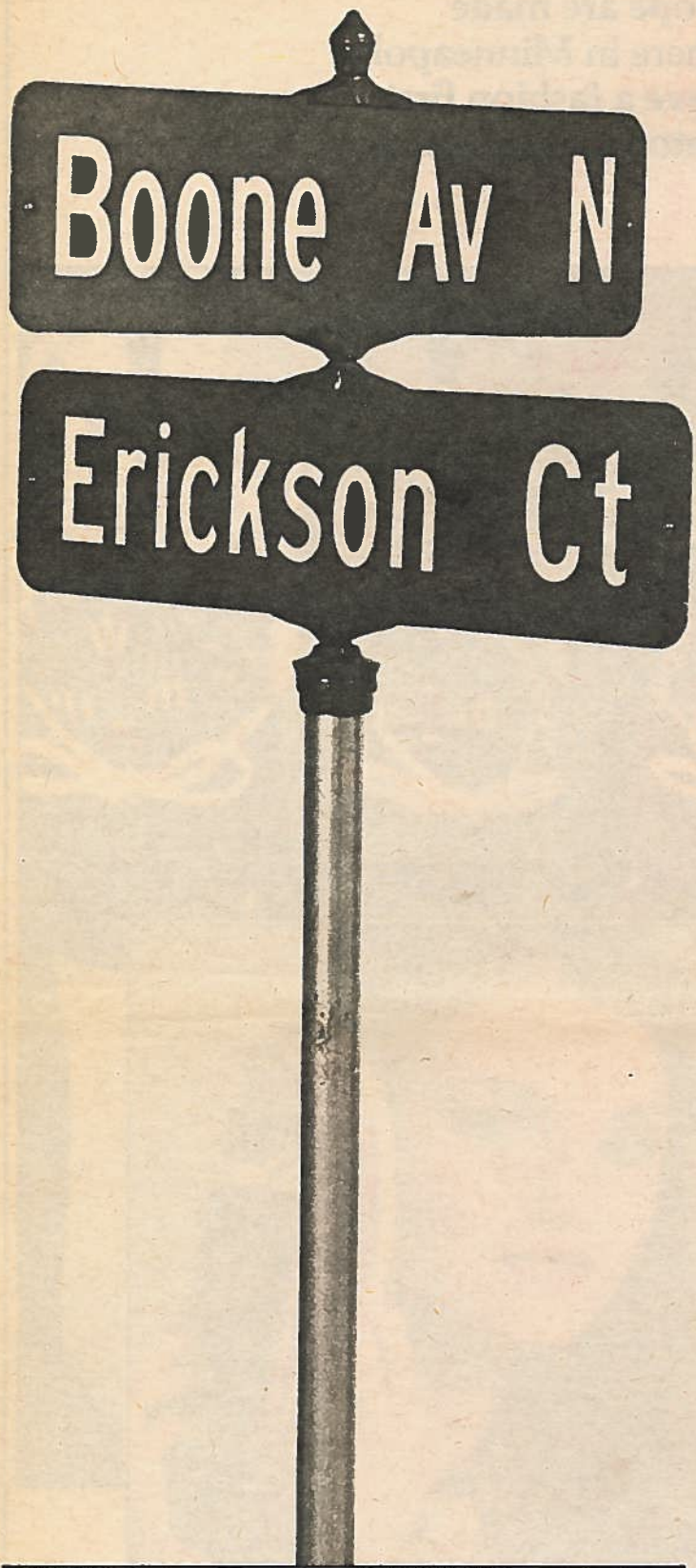
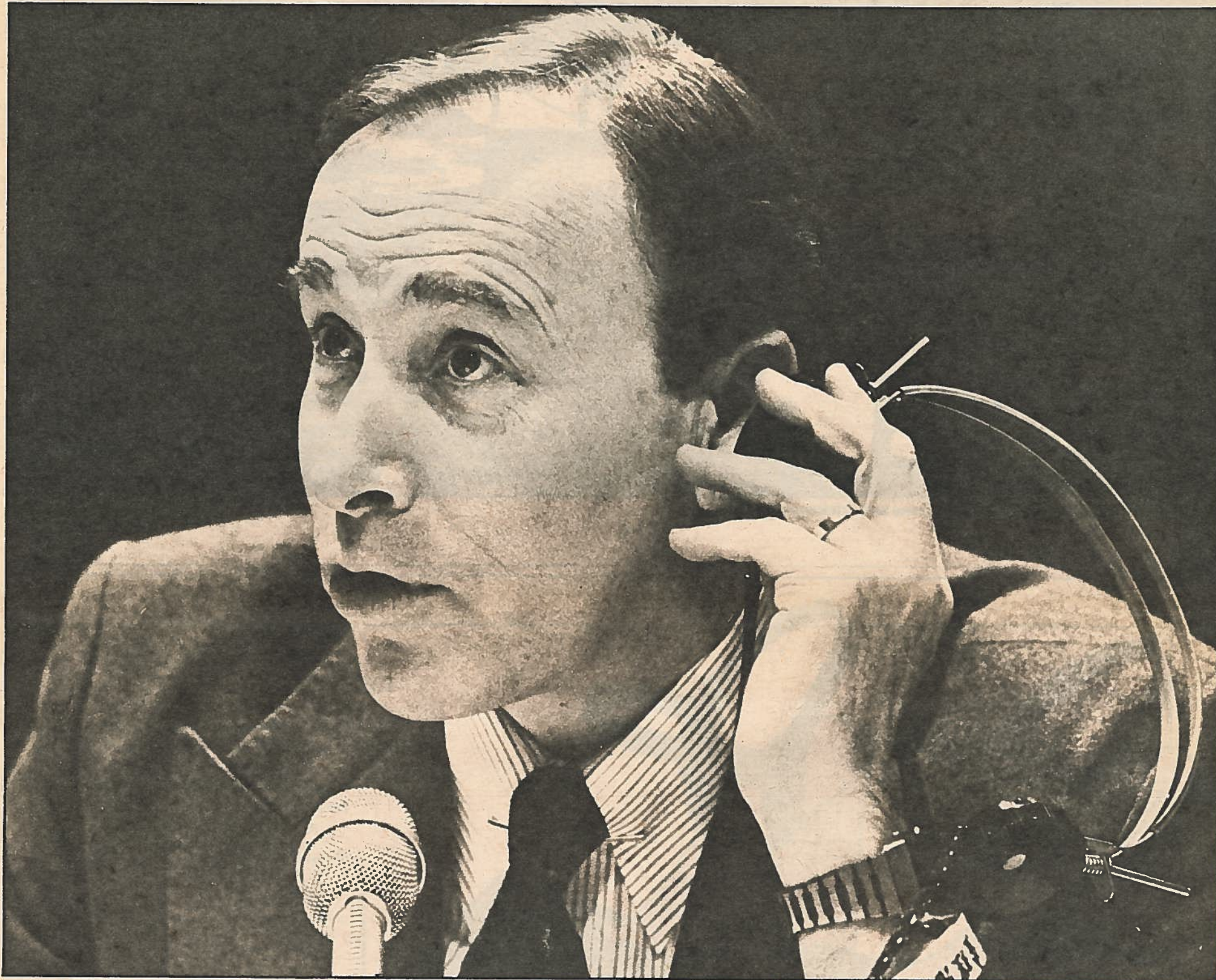


Staff Photo by Kent Kobersteen



You probably know their voices but you may not know their faces. They are Roger Erickson, above, and Charlie Boone, at right — at their mikes.



**By Ron Meador
Staff Writer**

At 7:53 a.m., Charlie Boone is at a typewriter in WCCO Radio's music library, choosing the last tunes for the day's broadcast with all of seven minutes to spare.

Roger Erickson, finished with his morning show, is in his office around the corner, reading over the day's gags and typing in some last-minute additions.

At three seconds after 8, Boone and Erickson are in the big studio of WCCO

Radio, listening to the five-minute CBS news broadcast that precedes them, arranging the scripts and schedules, settling in. There is no particular hurry, no visible tension, only the slightest quickening of step and gesture as the end of the news nears.

And then, at 8:05:45, Boone drops his voice to its richest, most resonant reservoir and says, "You're listening to Boone and Erickson . . ."

"Booooooone and Erickson," his partner injects, his voice tracing a high curve.

"A legennndddddd . . . in their own minds."

And, perhaps, in the minds of tens of thousands of listeners now tuning in at kitchen tables, office desks and steering wheels in five states.

After one easy-listening tune and one bad joke, Boone gets to this week's running gag: the Boone-Erickson 500-Mile Celebrity Dogsled Race, held as a substitute for the canceled snowmobile race of the St. Paul Winter Carnival. He takes a tele-

phone-update from Malcomb McKennel of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, who has been reporting on various legs of the race between Winnipeg and Park Rapids, Minn.

Erickson has moved to a phone in the small studio next door, contorting his features and clutching a telephone as he reports weather conditions and racers' progress in a rich blend of Scottish and Canadian tones. Today, Mayor Labrador and his team of Latimers are in the lead, Mayor Fraser having taken a bad left turn and gotten lost. Tommy Kramer continues to trail, his hounds having partied too late ▶



The pace is fast but never frenetic as the two calmly shuffle papers and move from gag to commercial to news and back again.

the night before.

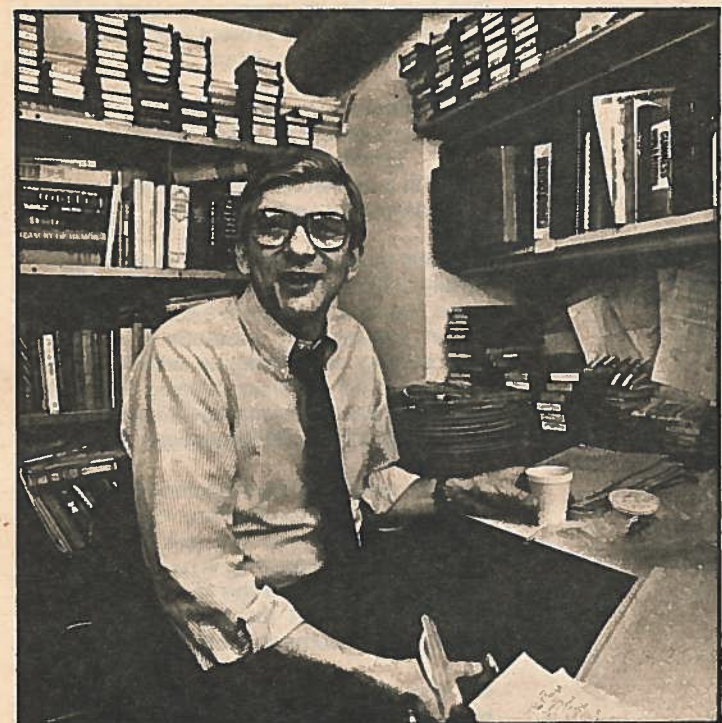
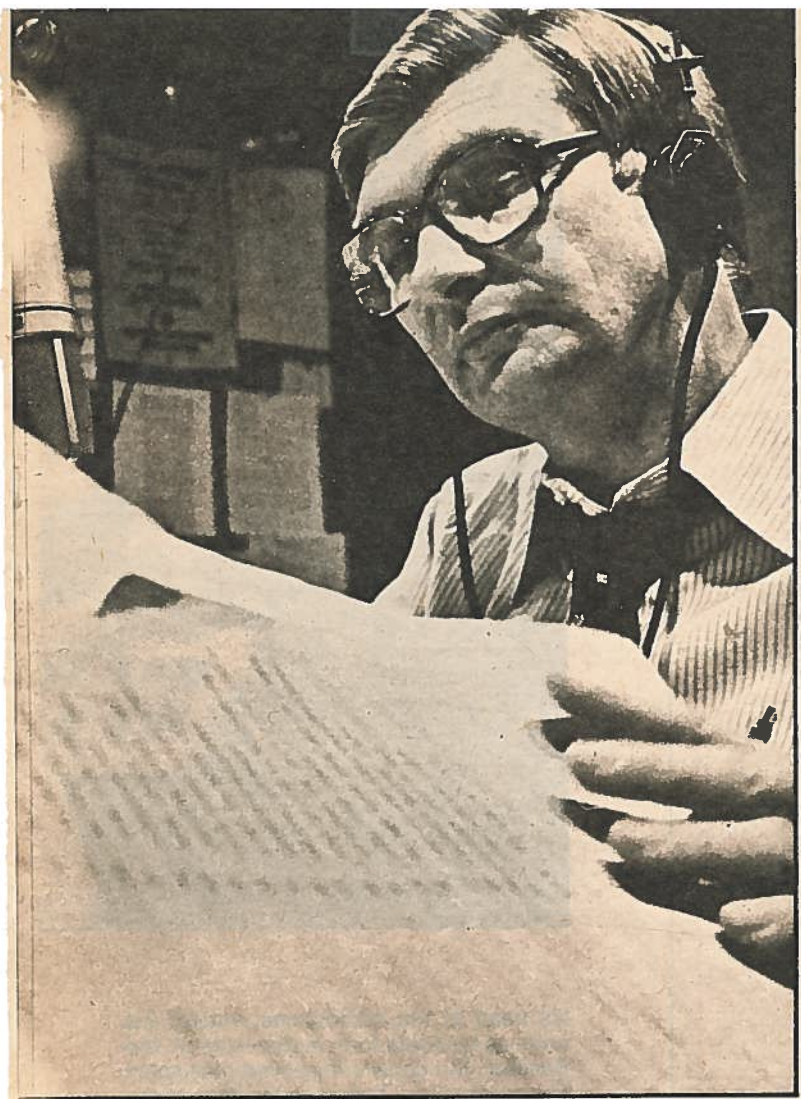
Later a receptionist outside the studio will say that the race broadcasts have prompted dozens of calls in the last three days. Many of the callers, she says, wanted to know whether the race was real.

Now, these gags are not funny on paper. Nor are most of the one-, two- or three-liners that will be told on the show today or any other day, often as the tellers themselves grimace in acknowledgement that the material is corny, predictable, even dated. A television comic would not last 15 minutes on this stuff.

But it is funny, often very funny, on the radio. The scripts are only the barest outline of what Boone and Erickson do, a sort of schedule to follow as they fool around with the advertising copy, jest with the telephone callers and, especially, use their throats to populate the airwaves with elderly Swedes, whiny children, fluttery young women, grumpy old Vermonters and dozens of other characters.

It is the old magic of radio—"a kind of radio drama, really," says Erickson—the deft manipulation of voice and timing that these 53-year-old broadcasters, students of theater in their college years, have polished and preserved in the television era.

Twenty years ago they had individual shows on WCCO, but sat in with each other to do the gags and voices. The maker of a laundry product liked the result and asked to buy time on their show, so a show was created. Two decades later it



Erickson in his office before the show, having his usual cold wiener for breakfast.

occupies the station's prime slot, the heart of radio's morning "drive time," and its audience has grown to 400,000 weekly listeners in Minnesota and parts of Iowa, Wisconsin, North Dakota and South Dakota. In any given quarter-hour, surveys show, 140,000 people are listening.

Boone hunches his shoulders and thrusts ▶

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his head at the microphone, waving his arms as he holds forth in the voice of The Senator, the show's long-lived monument to congressional bombast. He jibes at the actor-turned-president—"I thought I was watching a rerun the other day, and I realized it was the inauguration"—and at the Russians seeking to protect their "privacy of invasion" in Afghanistan.

"The Senator can say things that, if we said them ourselves—jeez, would we get calls," Erickson says. "You can say things in a character voice that you could never say on the radio yourself."

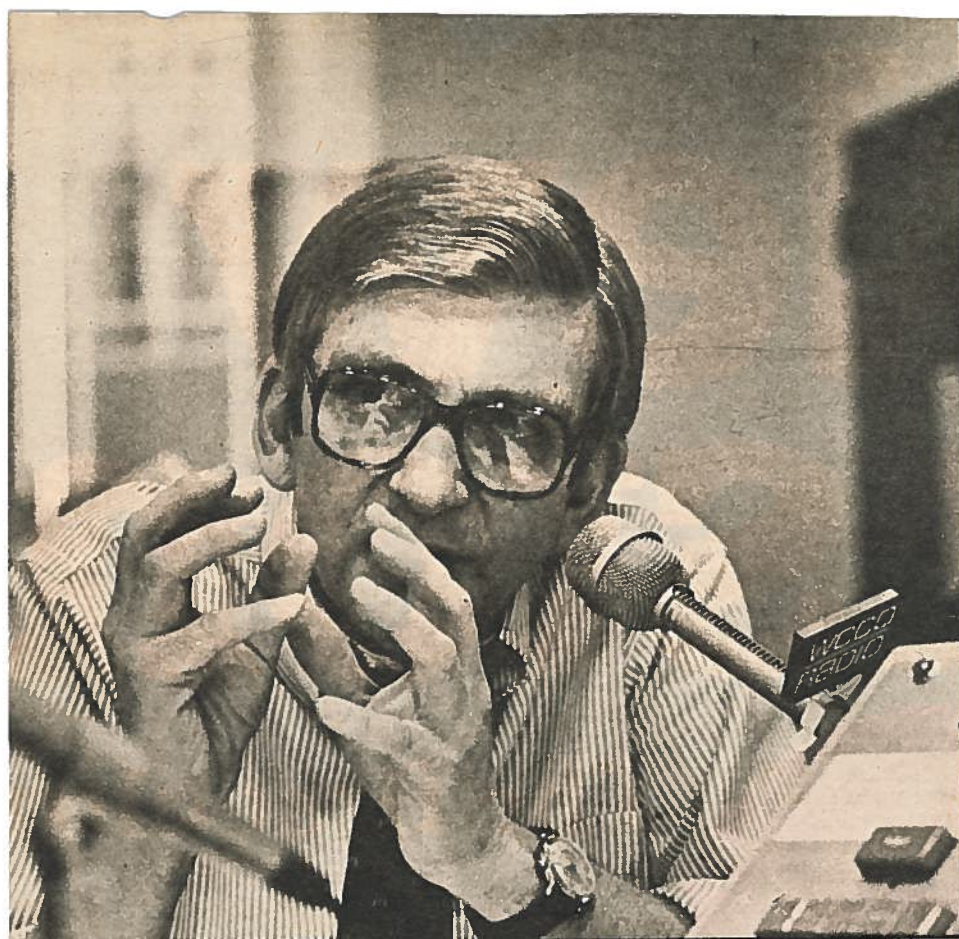
Erickson taught a dialect course in the University of Minnesota's theater department in the 1960s, and he enjoys demonstrating the art, jumping from character to character, carrying on a dialogue with himself, taking a single voice and running it up and down a scale to demonstrate it at different pitches, to show its different uses.

"Charlie grew up in New England (Rutland, Vt.), and he does the Eastern voices, Yankees and Italians and that kind of thing," Erickson says. "I grew up in rural Minnesota (Winthrop), so I do the Midwesterners, the Chermans and the Norwegians. And then there are some we both do."

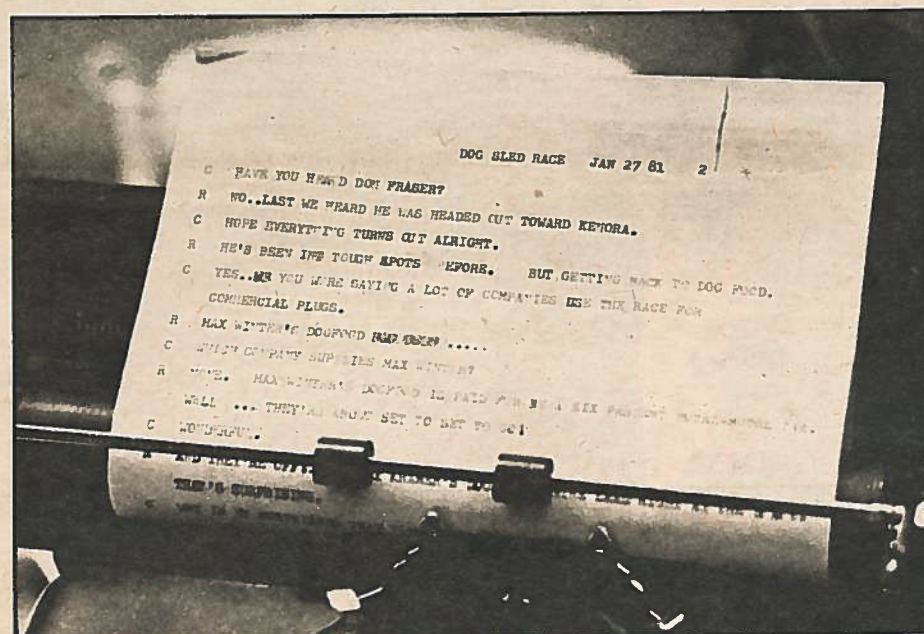
On cue, Boone begins to muse in the sharp, quick-tongued accents of a proper Sherlock Holmes, and Erickson joins in as a befuddled Watson, sputtering up the words as if his mouth were filled with cotton.

A listener phones in to offer a joke. He gets a chuckle and a polite decline from Erickson.

The show moves along to the 9 o'clock network news, jumping from gag to commercial to gag to tune. Ray Christensen



Boone and Erickson in the midst of one of their sketches.



The gags, carefully scripted, don't seem funny on paper.

comes in to do local news briefs, Chuck Lilligren to quote farm prices and Joyce Lamont to read the public-service announcements. McKennel provides an update on the dogsled race, and a caller from the St. Paul Athletic Club is put on the air to offer Boone and Erickson a chance to be hurled aloft from a blanket in the Winter Carnival parade.

The pace is fast but never frenetic, and it is hard to know, without looking at the microphone lights, when the patter between the hosts is leaving the studio. They talk to each other, not to the mikes, moving smoothly through the ad schedule and scripts, working at the low-pressure pace of cabinetmakers putting the finishing touches on wood that has been carved, shaped and joined over the last 20 years. There are very few slips, and the ones

that happen are quickly transmuted into gags.

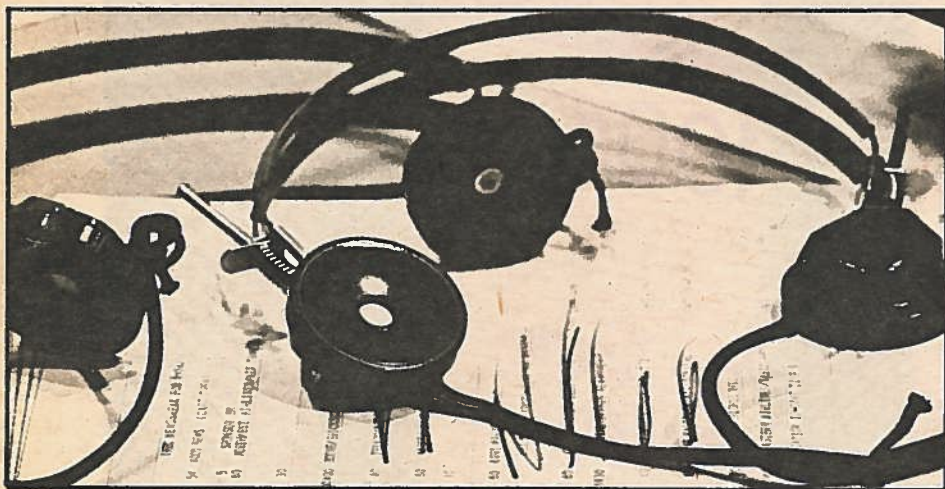
Things were a little different the day before when CBS was carrying, live, the West Point, N.Y., news conference of the Americans just freed by Iran. Boone was pacing in the news studio, making and awaiting phone calls as he appealed a decision against carrying the 45-minute conference.

"We've got to carry it," he was saying. "Who cares if it runs 45 minutes? It's one of those things that goes beyond business."

"It's the absolute worst time of day to have a news conference, from our stand-



At 8:05, the show had just begun and Walter Mondale was guest for the day.



point," Erickson said. Ads are sold by time placement and scheduled by quarter-hours, he explained, so some ads would be lost and others would be bunched up in the show's remaining hour and a quarter.

"But it's also the best time for us," he said. "Radio has the whole audience now. People are in their cars—they can't watch TV, and we've got all of them."

In the end the conference went live, and Boone and Erickson, self-described "news junkies," joined in the applause and cheering of the news room.

At 9:11, Boone introduces the day's guest—Mike Steele, drama critic for the Minneapolis Tribune—and for more than a half-hour the three discuss the work of critics and the state of theater in the Twin Cities. Callers join in on the "open line."

The hosts are practiced interviewers, especially Boone, and they make guests and

the open line essential elements of the show.

Two days earlier the guest was Walter Mondale, a new lecturer at the university. The three sat around a small table in the studio, and, if the microphones and cables and control panels were cleared away, they could have been three men chatting over breakfast.

Mondale solicited and received questions about his White House term and his visit with the hostages in Wiesbaden, West Germany; endured some gentle baiting about his political plans for 1984, and laughed heartily when Boone cued a silly march, entitled, "I Ain't Down Yet," from "The Unsinkable Molly Brown."

Who makes Boone and Erickson laugh?

"George Carlin is one of my favorites," Boone says. "And I love impressionists, Rich Little for one. British burlesque—



Erickson huddled with Mondale off-mike.

Benny Hill—knocks me out. Roger laughs at anything."

Erickson agrees, more or less. "I think almost all comedians are funny. I love storytellers the most, I guess. Jack Benny was one. Do you know Judge Barbeau (Donald T. Barbeau of Hennepin District Court)? He's a fantastic storyteller."

After Boone introduces the livestock report from South St. Paul at 9:45, the show begins to wind down.

There is time for an episode in the life of Boone's Ed Whiskey, Frontier Doctor, and for some ads and a tune. Then it's time to close.

"You've been listening to Boone and Erickson..."

"Booooooone and Erickson..."

"A legennndddddd ... in their own

minds."

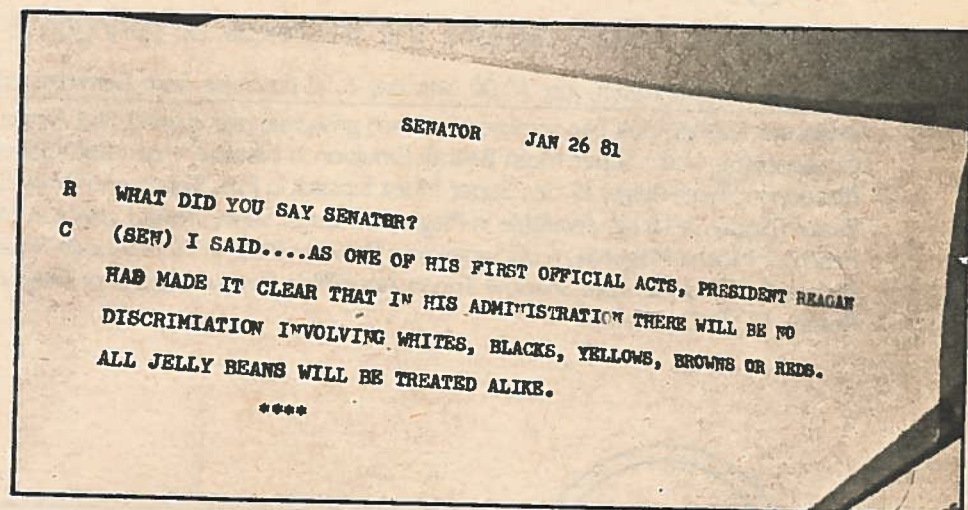
Simultaneously, at 9:55, they turn off the mikes.

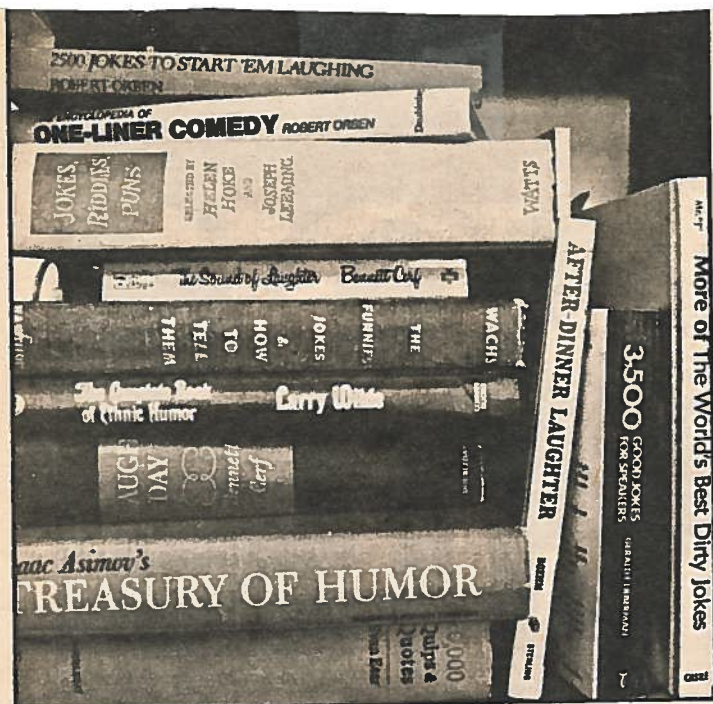
Boone will stay in the studio for the hour-long show of his own that follows; Erickson will go back to his office to start on the next day's show.

In the afternoon they will write together, tossing lines around with others on the station's staff, testing and refining the material. Late in the afternoon Boone will leave for his home near Lake Nokomis, Erickson for his in Mound.

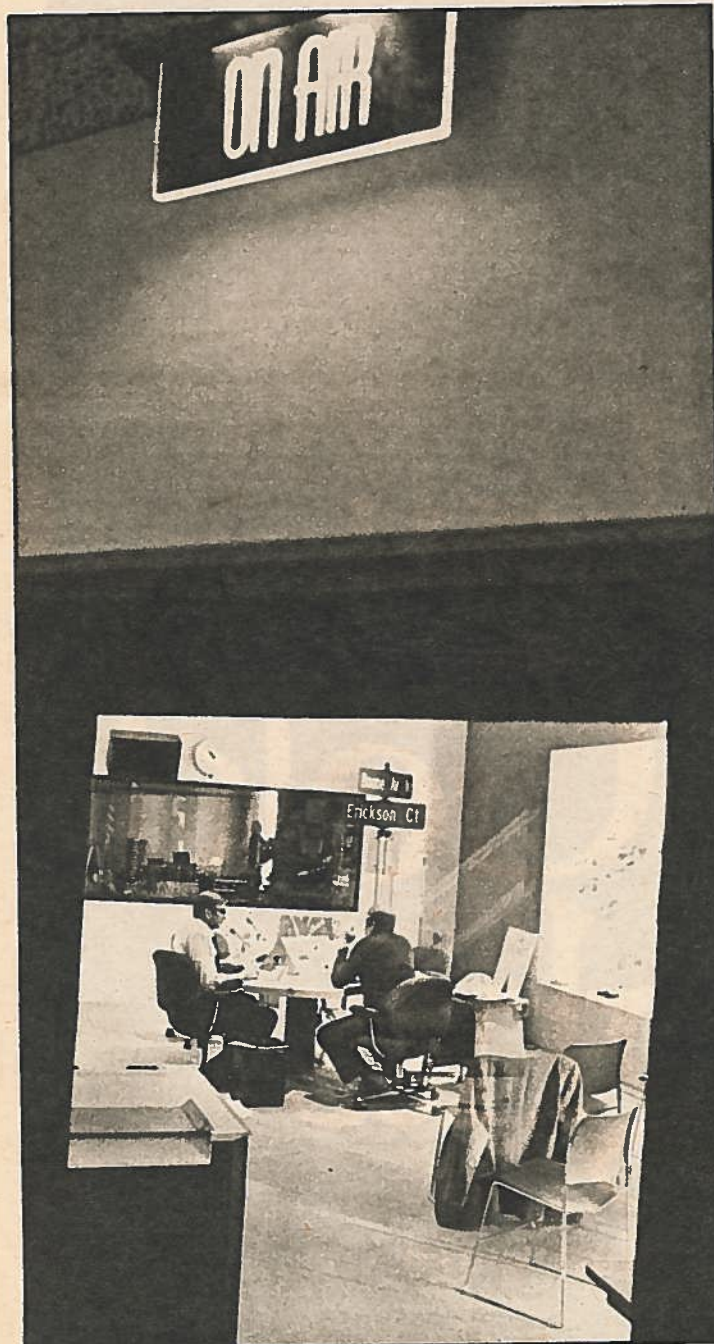
They do not spend time together away from the studio.

"We see each other maybe four or five times a year," Erickson says. "It's an unspoken thing, and it's never been a problem. We get along just fine in here, but when you work together every day for 20 years, that's enough." ▶





Bookshelf in Roger Erickson's office.



A glimpse through the door of the studio. It's casual and calm. ■