

Jack Mitchell Biography

Jack Mitchell is indelibly associated with public radio.

With a degree in journalism from the University of Michigan and after working in news at commercial radio stations in Detroit and Flint, he found a home at Michigan's educational radio station WUOM.

Deciding to pursue a Ph.D. at the University of Illinois, he assumed he would become a journalism professor somewhere and dabble in educational radio. That changed when Congress passed the Public Broadcasting of 1967. While intended to develop a national system of public television, the act's fine print required support, too, for a public radio system. Mitchell was one of the few young people at the time to see the possibilities for public radio.

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting selected him to spend a year in London studying and working at BBC radio. His return coincided with the formation of National Public Radio and he became its first employee, the author of its first strategic plan, and the first producer of its seminal program, *All Things Considered*.

After six years, Mitchell returned to his academic plans as manager of the University of Wisconsin radio station, WHA, and faculty status in UW-Extension. In that role, he forged the partnerships with the Educational Communications Board and several university radio stations that became Wisconsin Public Radio.

Elected to the board of directors of National Public Radio in 1982, he found the organization in a state of near bankruptcy. As part of a team to save the organization, he headed programming as NPR retrenched and achieved stability. He then chaired the board for three years, during which the organization reoriented toward station and listener support of its programming. His contributions were recognized by NPR's Edward Elson award in 1988.

In 1998, Mitchell moved to the UW-Madison School of Journalism and Mass Communication as a full professor. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting marked his departure from public radio by awarding him its highest honor, the Edward R. Murrow Award. In the journalism school, his primary responsibility was the gateway course for 400 freshmen and sophomores, Journalism 201.

Retiring from the journalism school ten years later, he continued teaching one course a semester, chairing the advisory committee for the Center for Journalism Ethics, and helping launch the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism (Wisconsin Watch.)

