

# Community remembers career journalist

## Former colleagues, friends honor Petrucelli; memorial service set Monday

*By Cindy Beckman Staff Writer*

Fred Petrucelli began his 73-year newspaper career just as World War II was ending. A veteran journalist, he loved to tell people's stories and never stopped writing, even after turning 100 years old this past March 24. Petrucelli died Sunday evening, Sept. 2, surrounded by family at his lakeside home.

Petrucelli's first newspaper job was at the Arkansas Democrat, working his way up from beat reporter to city desk. He then served on the staff of Gov. Winthrop Rockefeller in public relations. Later, he worked for the Arkansas Department of Human Services' public information office.



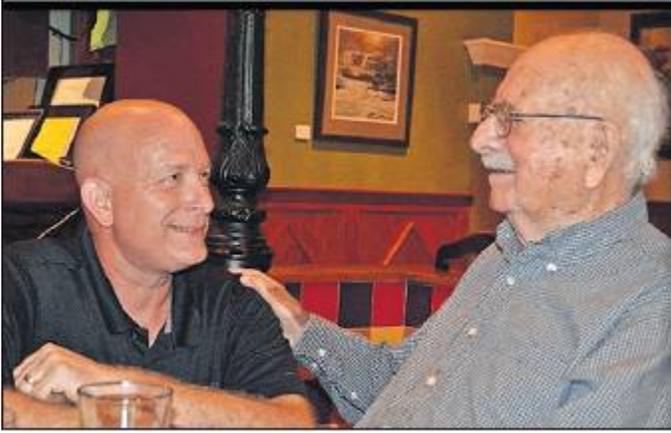
**Longtime journalist Fred Petrucelli is pictured at top with wife, Lillian**

Arkansas. He won the award, but in the process, it came to light that he was actually 10 years older. When I asked him why he had shaved off 10 years, he told me he didn't think Frank Robins, the publisher, would hire him if he knew that Fred was almost 70 years old."

Soon after their marriage in 1987, Fred and his beautiful wife, Lillian, moved to Conway where he began writing for the Log Cabin Democrat, penning the thousands of interesting and detailed feature articles that became his trademark.

David Keith joined the Log Cabin staff in 1990 but it was only after David had been managing editor for several years that he discovered that Fred was actually older than everyone thought.

Now a UCA journalism professor, Keith recalled: "I had nominated Fred for a senior worker award from the state of



and below left at his 100th birthday celebration held April 7 with colleague and friend Mike Kemp



**Petrucelli turned 100 years old on March 24. Above right, Petrucelli's official Log Cabin Democrat staff photo. [LOG CABIN FILE AND SUBMITTED PHOTOS.]**

Journalists, photographers, historians and more reflect on the 73-year newspaper career of Fred Petrucelli, who died at age 100 on Sunday.

Keith worked with Fred for 15 years, "In the 15 years I worked with Fred, I don't know if he ever had a bad day. He would come in each morning, whistling and humming,

being greeted with a chorus of 'Fred!' from across the newsroom, sort of like Norm in 'Cheers.'"

Fred sat at his desk in the corner of the newsroom cranking out one article after another. His writing focus was always on people; he wanted to let people tell their stories in the pages of the paper. He also loved to spice up his writing with what became known around the newsroom as "Fred" words — words that required a dictionary.

Tammy Keith, now senior writer for the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette's zoned editions, also worked with Fred. "I loved Fred from the day I met him at the Log Cabin Democrat after David and I moved to Conway in 1990 to work for the newspaper," she said. "He and Lillian became dear friends of ours. We have shared many wonderful dinners and special occasions, including a trip to the horse races on Fred's 99th birthday and a family celebration on his 100th.

"Without letting him hear, I enjoyed telling people how old he was to see the shocked look on their faces. He was sweet, smart, funny and a great conversationalist to the end. When I interviewed him once, he described himself as ordinary. Fred was definitely extraordinary."

Mike Kemp, a photographer for the Log Cabin in the 1990s, worked with Petrucelli in those halcyon days at the paper, "Fred was a character! He never let too much get under his skin. Whenever I would stress over a story or situation in the newsroom, he usually would chuckle and say, 'Don't sweat the small stuff. And, it's all small stuff.'"

"We had a fun relationship that was built on needling each other," said Kemp. "One of the ways I would pick at him would be to take his coffee cup — which we'll say was always 'well-seasoned' — and wash it while he wasn't looking. He would grumble but would usually be back in the photographers' office looking for us to make another pot of coffee for him."

Kemp and Petrucelli were often paired for feature stories on the road with Kemp usually doing the driving. Kemp recalled, "It was fun to have conversations to and from our assignments. Fred was full of past experiences and insights that he didn't mind sharing. I enjoyed listening to his wisdom."

Jimmy Bryant got to know Fred Petrucelli after he became the director of the UCA Archives in 1998. During their first meeting, Bryant kept calling him Mr. Petrucelli and he said, "Jimmy, just call me Fred." So, it was Fred from then on.

Fred wrote many articles about the UCA Archives, including articles about the new collections it acquired. Bryant recalled, "Fred's work at the Log Cabin actually helped put the UCA Archives on the map, so to speak. When I received an interesting collection of materials, I would simply call Fred and he would write an article. I will always appreciate Fred Petrucelli."

After spending so many decades as a journalist, you can bet that Petrucelli could talk about how the newspaper business had changed over the years. In March 2006, he sat down with David McCollum, the late Log Cabin sports writer who was his colleague for years, to reflect on his years at the Arkansas Democrat. This interview is part of the Arkansas Democrat Project at the Pryor Center for Oral and Visual History.

When McCollum asked him how the newspaper business had changed over the years, Fred responded, "As far as I can tell, the newspapers were more concerned with news — hard news, very few frills. Today, it seems to me, that everything is frills. Those magazines and all kinds of column items, and so forth and so on. Even the columns in those days were straight, honest reporting."

Fred continued, "The way I write stuff today for the Log Cabin because I'm always looking for a colorful lead, you know, and that sort of thing. It was that, you know, old inverted triangle stuff? We did that. And if you did anything else, they would rewrite it. The guys on the desk were pretty strict about that." Fred also reflected that bylines used to be rewards for exceptional work. Writers really had to work to earn a byline; bylines were for the top stories, earned through effort or because the story was an exclusive. They were prized possessions.

Over the years, Fred dedicated himself to an extensive list of local causes. He was a lifetime member of the Conway Kiwanis Club and was named Kiwanian of the Year. Likewise, he was honored by the Conway Morning Rotary Club as a Paul Harris Fellow. Fred served on the boards of or assisted Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Central Arkansas, the Salvation Army, Faulkner County Day School, Haven House, Faulkner County Senior Citizens Program, Boys and Girls Club of Faulkner County, Conway Human Development Center's Volunteer Council, UCA Friends of Music, UCA Friends of Torreyson Library, Main Street Conway, The Faulkner County Historical Society, Conway Community Arts, Arkansas ABLE and the Conway Cancer Foundation. He was also an active member of St. Peter's Episcopal Church. In 2007, the Fred and Lillian Petrucelli Scholarship was established at UCA to honor the couple. The endowment funds an annual scholarship for a student majoring in journalism, theater or writing. On his 100th birthday, March 24, 2018, Mayor Bart Castleberry declared Fred Petrucelli Day in Conway.

"Fred was humble," David Keith recalled. "He didn't want a big party when he turned 100. He would probably think this article is a lot of fuss about nothing. And he would be wrong."

David Grimes, a longtime friend and colleague of Petrucelli's summed it up well, "Fred did not just live to be 100, he lived 100 good, full, meaningful years. You could not be around Fred and be in a bad mood. All who were blessed to know him are better off for it."

In addition to his wife, Fred Petrucelli is survived by two daughters, Lucy Terranella and Marci Brown, both of Austin, Texas; one son, Peter Petrucelli of San Francisco; and four grandchildren, Marcus Brown, Peter Brown, Michael Brown and Lainey Brown. Services will be at 2 p.m. Monday, Sept. 10 at St. Peter's

Episcopal Church in Conway with the Rev. Greg Warren and the Rev. Teri Daily officiating. In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to St. Peter's. Arrangements are under the direction of Roller-McNutt Funeral Home in Conway. The online guestbook is available at [www.rollerfuneralhomes.com/conway](http://www.rollerfuneralhomes.com/conway)