

BIO: Ken Koontz
Master of Ceremonies
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Ken Koontz is a native born Texan, who describes himself as a cross between his Longhorn father and his Tar Heel mother. But he has never been a stranger to Charlotte or to Johnson C. Smith University.

He spent his first two years of grade school here in Charlotte before his family returned to Texas where his dad was principal and classroom teacher in small towns before finally settling in Beaumont for Ken's freshman year of high school. He was an Honors Graduate in the 1967 class of Hebert High School, where he tried to play football but it didn't work out too well. Baseball was his passion and he had played since 9 years-old. On his high school team they were in State 4-A Play-offs three of his four years, making the Championship series twice, as a freshman and as a senior. They never won the crown. He was a baseball team co-captain his senior year.

He initially turned down an academic scholarship to Johnson C. Smith to enroll at hometown Lamar University, where he walked on to the football team as a kicker. He got the boot in favor of a highly-recruited scholarship player who flunked out his first semester while Ken made Dean's List. He also struck out as a baseball walk-on at Lamar and finally realized... quote... "I really ain't that good anyhow!"

After two years at Lamar, Ken fulfilled his boyhood ambition by transferring to JCSU, where his mother's five sisters and brothers had attended as well as his two older sisters. Upon his arrival and enrollment at JCSU in August 1969, then-JCSU President Dr. Lionel Newsom set up an interview for him at WBTW News, where he was immediately hired as the station's first black newsroom staffer.

Ken made his final walk-on attempt as a kicker for the Golden Bulls...and made the team in Spring practice 1970. The fulltime summer work offered by WBTW News convinced him to give it up and stay on the air. Ken's on-air presence thrust him into a regional household presence, on the air in our living rooms every night. His career in broadcast journalism took off. Though he didn't play football at JCSU, he became a permanent fixture in the announcer's booth calling all their home games for 21 years.

Ken graduated from JCSU in 1972 and held true to his plan and has stayed in Charlotte where he has proclaimed himself a "chronicler of the city, its time, its people, and its history." Even now in retirement, he steadfastly maintains that course of work and action... a newsman's newsmaker!

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He became an entrepreneur in 1983 when he ended a 14-year career at WBTV to start Ken Koontz & Associates, which was a public relations, marketing and communications consultancy. It was the first such African-American-owned agency for Charlotte.

In 1984, Ken would also purchase the popular Excelsior Club and orchestrate its official designation as an Historic Property before selling it to friend and State Representative Pete Cunningham in 1987. Who would run it for 20 years and then pass the torch to current owner, attorney James Ferguson and his family in 2007.

Ken would also impact local history when he filed an application with the FCC in 1985 for ownership designation to build and operate Channel 55 as a new TV station for Charlotte-Rock Hill market. His successful venture made him only the second African-American applicant to win rights to build and operate a new TV station in the Charlotte market. He would, however, subsequently negotiate the sale of those rights 8 years later before the station was constructed. The station is still on the air. From 1987-1994, I was an Adjunct Professor teaching Public Relations and Communications at JCSU.

After four years at the new NBC News Channel from 1991 until 1995, Ken founded and organized All-Stars Communications, LLC, which he served as Managing General Partner until 2009. All-Stars is a satellite uplink transmission and television production unit that mostly serves national TV networks for news, sports and programming. Ken made history again when he created All-Stars as only the second company of its kind in the country owned by an African-American at a time when the industry had more than 350 such trucks operating across the country.

In early 2009, Ken gave up his management duties at All-Stars, handing it over to a young black man he had hired as truck operator a few years earlier. In so doing, he created a new venture, WENS-TV, to capitalize on the new and growing opportunities for video production and programming creation across the Internet. In 2010, Ken officially retired but kept working his passion for media and communications as Executive Producer of WENS-TV and as a freelance writer, consultant, producer and independent journalist.

Ken is divorced... and proud father of three adult, college-educated children and has two precious grands.