

Let's Hear It for the Pioneers

By Amy Maclean | October 4, 2019



Cable TV Pioneers present "2019 Party Gras — A New Class, Old Friends, and All that Jazz," at the The Ritz-Carlton New Orleans in New Orleans, Louisiana, on Wednesday, Oct. 2, 2019. Photo StevePeterson.photo

The 53rd Annual Cable TV Pioneers Banquet Wednesday in N'awlins was its usual good time, with speeches that were poignant, funny and occasionally too long. Ah, but who can blame anyone for getting a little wordy given the emotions tangled up in colleagues and mentors recognizing decades of service in the cable industry.

While the rules for Pioneers consideration state that members must have a minimum of 20 years of involvement in the industry, it seems 34 years of marriage also helps given the number of inductees celebrating that milestone this year.

Several touching moments during the night, including when former **Time Warner Cable** negotiator *Melinda Witmer* referred to the late *Fred Dressler* as her Yoda. Witmer, now principal of **LookLeft Media**, said the legendary Time Warner Cable exec let her in on a "secret" of the business, which is that no one really knows what they're doing. That gave her a boost of

confidence. "I felt five feet taller."

Lovely tribute from **Mediacom's Italia Commisso Weinand** to her best friend, posthumous inductee *Joyce Reitano Salaj*, whom she met working at **Manhattan Cable**. Weinand was joined by Salaj's daughter, her goddaughter, on stage.

Consultant *Cathy Rasenberger* told the crowd she chose to join the cable industry after she graduated in 1978 because of the leadership opportunities for women. "Diversity has always been our strength," it helps the industry and our country, she said.

The **Cable TV Pioneers** asked the honorees to avoid getting political in their speeches, but retired **Cox** exec *Barry Elson* said he didn't have to follow the rules since he was the oldest inductee of the night. His political statement? "One of the finest presidents of the last 100 years who hasn't gotten the recognition he deserves is Calvin Coolidge," Elson deadpanned, imploring the crowd to go home and read his Wikipedia page.

The audience appreciated *Marc Cohen's* reflection on his success. "I wake up every morning and I try not to be a d—. When you live your life like that, things tend to work out for you," declared the **Evolution Digital** sales & marketing evp. This proved a beautiful set-up moments later for fellow honoree *Duane Dick* of **Sand Cherry Associates**, who quipped that he didn't have any choice in the matter.

Congrats to the entire 2019 Pioneers Class and the early DOCSIS innovators that also received Pioneer status Wednesday night!