



GETTING CONNECTED WITH

MARK LARSON

by David Foge

Those who've lived in San Diego for a long time know Mark Larson. Mark's become a media fixture in San Diego, ever since turning down radio offers in Baltimore and Toronto and coming to KFMB radio in 1976. Currently he hosts the 6-9AM weekday talkshow on KCBQ 1170AM. Each week his voice is also heard on a variety of programs and commercials via more than 2,000 radio and TV outlets worldwide, including "Turning Point with Dr. David Jeremiah." He and his wife, Marcia, have been married over 35 years and they have three kids. Their oldest children have now made them grandparents, with three grandchildren. Mark loves aviation and serves now in his third term as Chairman of the Board for the Air & Space Museum in Balboa Park. He's busy preparing for the 40th anniversary of Apollo 17 at the museum (December 1st). Mark's involved in many activities and I had the opportunity to speak with him recently to learn more about his work at the museum, the people he's met, and the other business activities he's pursuing.

DF: Let's start with flying. How did you get an interest in airplanes?

ML: I've been interested in aviation since childhood, growing up in Rockford, Illinois. When I was a young child, we went every year to what's now called the annual Oshkosh AirVenture celebration that brings in 10,000 airplanes. Back then it was the "EAA Fly-In." My dad was an aviation enthusiast and I guess I'm following in his footsteps. I loved the Ford Tri-Motor. I love that we have one at the museum here, restored by our volunteers.

DF: Did you ever learn to fly yourself?

ML: What's weird is that I never got my pilot's license, considering how much I'm into aviation. One day maybe...

DF: How did you get involved with the Air & Space Museum?

ML: I'll tell you a story. When my wife and I moved to San Diego in 1976, we were newlyweds. When I was first working at KFMB radio, I wanted to get to know more about the community. I had

signing on for the afternoon show at first). So during the day, my wife and I played tourist. We went to the Air & Space Museum, back when it was the Aerospace Museum at the old location that burned down in the late 70s. The visits reconnected me with the love of flying. And as we eventually raised our family, we had the kids over to the Air & Space Museum every week or so. So fast forward to about 1990, when in addition to my radio program I'm doing a TV show where we would run a really bad "B movie" (laughing) and I would come on and do some commentary and schtick.

DF: I do think I remember that show.

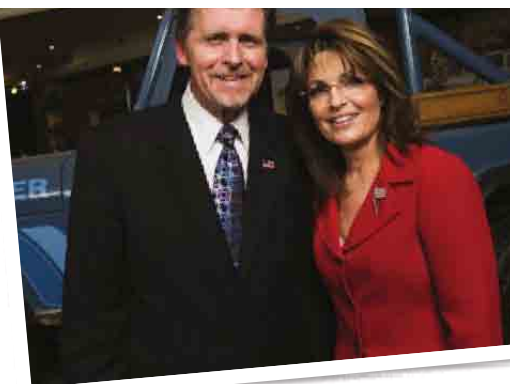
ML: "Vons Night at the Movies"...lots of fun – I won an Emmy for it, go figure! – but one time we had a film that was some science fiction space-related thing. The premise for me was to find a guest to help me with the funny commentary, and I thought maybe I could get Wally Schirra, one of the original Mercury 7 astronauts – as a kid, I was glued to all the rocket launches – and I had heard he lived here in San Diego, listed in the phone book, "Let's check." And he was, and I called and I said "You don't know me..." and he said "Oh yeah I do, I listen to your radio show." Wow. "So I also do this goofy little TV show..." and he said "Yeah, I've seen that too." Wally was happy to do it. He came down on a Friday and we hit it off really well. I asked him about going to lunch sometime and he said sure.

DF: That was a great opportunity.

ML: Well, it led to a fast friendship that lasted until the day he died in May 2007. Wally told me that since I was in marketing and doing the radio show, I needed to be more involved in the Air & Space Museum. He was on the board of directors. I got on committees, and then he got me so involved that I joined the Board of Directors. That was 2004, and now I'm in my third term as Chairman.

DF: But you never got your own pilot's license?

ML: No, but I have a lot of great friends who have theirs. And some



(continued from previous page)

have really nice jets (laughing). Hey, I've gotten to love private travel. Working with Air2Air, for example, I need to go to Santa Barbara a lot because I also serve on the Reagan Ranch Board of Governors. Going by car or train is a long trip. Once I was on the train and it stopped unexpectedly in Carpinteria and we were told to wait for the buses to come pick us up...

DF: Not good.

ML: That's when I explored alternatives. Flying there on Air2Air is great. Anyone who wants to go anywhere needs to value their time. Most people underestimate the value of that.

DF: OK, so you know getting a pilot's license really doesn't require that much time.

ML: Actually, we have ground school at the Museum.

DF: I think it would be a natural for you since you are already so familiar with how the aviation system works. And once you get a license you can record hours sitting in the co-pilot seat. Maybe even fly safety pilot for friends practicing instrument flying.

ML: (Excitedly) Yeah, that's right. But first I'm committed to learn Mandarin, so that's my next challenge. I've been to China six times...

DF: What brought you to China?

ML: I've been there mostly with Heart to Heart International, a relief and development organization, I've been on their board. The organization was started by a physician in Kansas. They had a director for international relief here in San Diego. We met and I asked how I could help. That was in 1998. I started advising them on media and infomercials. Back then, FedEx wanted to help fly in relief shipments to China, and we took in loads of supplies and about 50 doctors, then we went all over China, including Tibet.

DF: And so all of this has come just from your volunteer work...

this. Coming from a Christian perspective I don't see anything as coincidental or accidental. Things in life happen for a reason: affiliations, meeting people. I don't consciously network but I meet a lot of people and I find people interesting. I listen. I ask questions. Just asking people how they're doing, and then asking "Now, how're you really doing?" People will often open up and tell you a lot and even thank you for asking. And all of a sudden you're connected, and it makes life an adventure.

DF: You connect with people very easily.

ML: I've been fortunate with that, getting involved and getting others connected. One of my favorite things was being able to set up a meeting between my friends, astronauts Gene Cernan, Jim Lovell, Neil Armstrong and Mitt Romney this past June. I've gotten to know Gov. Romney pretty well, having emceed most of his San Diego area events since 2007. I never dreamed of being blessed with knowing people like this, but Gene had suggested that it would be good to brief Romney on space policy and I was able to facilitate that meeting while keeping it out of the public's eye. After Neil's passing, the meeting became public. I was happy to assist because of space policy, but there was a bonus. That was the last time those three astronaut friends got together before Armstrong passed away.

DF: What a great opportunity for each of them.

ML: Making connections is an affinity and a passion, and I believe there's a responsibility to take what you've been given in life and make those connections make a difference. I strive diligently to use my time effectively and maximize the time making those connections. Gene Cernan, the last man to walk on the moon, always says "Life is family, friends, and time." If you funnel everything in your life through that view, you're going to find that the time component is very valuable. It's either going to work for your family and friends, or it's going to keep you from your family and friends. When I can save hours flying on Air2Air, for instance – avoiding those wonderful people at the TSA, *bless their hearts* – but if you can save

those incarcerated (laughing), that's always a good thing.

DF: What's your typical day?

ML: The typical day is long. I'm up at 4:15 am. The dogs get up on my schedule (much to Mrs. Larson's joy, as she handles feeding them). I'm prepping the show. I'm in the studio and on the air from 6 am to 9am on KCBQ. After the show there's production and planning for the next. I'm also heard on national programs and in various capacities on sister station KPRZ 1210AM.

DF: Do you cover different topics in the two venues?

ML: There's some harmony. KPRZ has a Christian talk format, and the morning KCBQ show is more "general market" and news driven. In commentaries and special programs on KPRZ I'm able to share "the rest of my story." Throughout the day I'm in the Mark Larson Media Services, Inc. world, headquartered at the offices of Royale Energy in Mission Valley. I've consulted with Royale for years, and I've learned a heck of a lot about the energy business along the way. I also work with more than 40 speakers...astronauts, actors, people with whom I have relationships and have known for years.

DF: You're a busy guy.

ML: I am blessed, and it doesn't feel like work. I love it. I've always said this: "Be a human sponge." Get as much information as you can out of every situation. When you meet someone who's interesting, ask questions. Don't limit yourself to your own area of expertise. Read things, including things that aren't easy to read. Get out of your comfort zone. Find the people who you know and trust in diverse areas. Find things fascinating, and never stop wondering about what makes things work.

