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WGN's Steve Cochran Speaks at Associates Luncheon

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Humorous radio personality Steve Cochran entertained and informed the audience at the annual IWU Associates Luncheon on Thursday, May 7 at Illinois Wesleyan University's Shirk Center. Cochran, known for his drive-time show on WGN Radio, spoke of the lessons that could be learned from what he called "a lack of vision" in the media.

"I don't know if you have heard, but there is this thing called the Internet. I hear it's really catching on," joked Cochran, who attributed the current struggles in the newspaper industry to owners who refused to take the new online medium seriously as it emerged in the 1990s. "That was back when the Internet was something fun and cute. People in the newspaper business missed the memo that the Internet was going to be here to stay. And it cost them."

Cochran addressed more than 300 members of the IWU Associates at the luncheon. Formed in 1953, the Associates is a group of business and professional leaders interested in the advancement and support of private higher education. The Associates invest in the University, provide internships and job opportunities for Illinois Wesleyan students, and financial support for students from McLean County.

He urged those in attendance at the luncheon to take advantage of what their young interns could provide. "The new generation will help you be better with what they know best," he said. "Take the time – so they understand what they need to do with you. And let them show you what they can do," Cochran said.

If new ideas of young people had been taken more seriously, trades like the record industry could have found new markets in venues like the former free online music service, Napster. "The record industry should have recognized that the kid who invented it had a heck of an idea, instead of trying to put him and his friends in jail," said Cochran.

Whether the industry is newspapers, radio or recording, Cochran laments that leaders did not form business models that could incorporate new media. "I have a message to the many business people and students here today: You must have vision, so you don't miss the bus that is about to run you over."

Of greatest concern to Cochran is the effects the changes will have on the quality of the news. “Much of the great journalism in our country comes from great newspapers. When we lose the newspapers and the writers, we will lose the journalism. Where will we go from there?”

Looking at other options, Cochran dismissed online blogs as being unreliable and often unsubstantiated. He also decried much of television news coverage for its focus on popular culture over hard news. “When I was growing up, we had Walter Cronkite. When he spoke, you believed him. You knew what he said was well research and hashed out,” Cochran said. “Where are the new Walter Cronkites?”

Cochran encouraged attendees to inspire their young workers and interns to greatness. “The new medias, the new technologies are your friends. Don’t make the same mistakes. Use the power of the youth that you find at Illinois Wesleyan and other places. Teach them your experience and the world will be a better place because of it,” he said.

Cochran’s daughter, Amy, is one of those young people entering the workforce. She graduated from Illinois Wesleyan this May with a degree in educational studies. “Four years ago my wife and I sat in this very room and listened to orientation,” said Cochran. “And what seems like 15 minutes later, we were back to watch her graduate.”

Urging young people in the audience to “take the reins” and demand change, Cochran warned against apathy in careers, using the turbulent Illinois political scene as an example. “I think we’ve grown so accustomed to this state being shady that we shrug and say, ‘What can we do?’” he said. “Do you know why things do not change? Because we say things just like that.”

Cochran has worked at 14 radio stations in eight states over his career. He began at WGN in 2000 and appears on *The Steve Cochran Show* from 4-7 p.m. on WGN.