

a look at the life & work of  
albuquerqueans who deserve a toast

# PERSONALITY



## ON THE RADIO, *Daily*

*Bill Daily, television show icon, hits the airwaves every day  
as Bill Daily, radio personality.*

**W**hat do the TV classics “*I Dream of Jeannie*” and “*The Bob Newhart Show*” have in common with one of New Mexico’s top radio stations? The answer is Bill Daily. Playing the role of sidekick in the ‘60s sitcom “*Jeannie*,” and co-starring as the quirky neighbor in “*Newhart*” a decade later, Daily’s brilliant, light-hearted comedy skills made him one of television’s favorite sitcom actors.

Today, Daily guest-hosts at 7 a.m. Thursday mornings on Albuquerque’s country music station, Big I 107.9, heard throughout the region. “I came to New Mexico years ago to work in local theater,” Daily says. “The producer took me to lunch at a restaurant and when I tasted their green chile, I knew I had to move here!”

Photos by Liz Lopez/ATM



TV GUIDE Cover Portrait



That was 24 years ago and for Daily, it was the right move. "I just love it here. The weather, food and people are just fantastic. What more could you want in a city?" Daily says. "I've been at the station for years and it's just so much fun working with these guys. We have a great audience throughout Albuquerque and Santa Fe."

Myles Copeland, co-host of the Big I morning show, recalls meeting Daily several years ago. "We met him during our first 'Thanksgiving on the Mayflower' food drive for a New Mexico pantry," Copeland says. During the week-long event, Copeland says he and fellow morning co-host Tony Lynn virtually lived in a parking lot, collecting food for the pantry, while guests dropped by to "limit our sleep-deprived rambling."

"We heard Bill was in town, so we tracked him down. Not only did he appear, but he brought food!" says Copeland. Daily has been a regular weekly visitor to the radio studio ever since.

"At 81, he still has elite-level comic timing," Copeland adds. "He's the best joke teller I've ever been around, but he has a bawdy, '70s sense of political correctness that keeps us on our toes."

Having been in the entertainment business since he was 16, Daily says he knows what you can and can't say on radio. "But I still like to make the guys nervous sometimes," he jokes. "Besides, I'm great to have around for commentary because no matter who dies, I've probably worked with them!" After seven decades working as a musician, announcer, floor manager, director, writer, stand-up comedian, actor—and even a spell in the army—such a boast is probably true.

With just a handful of TV performances to his credit, Daily scored his "role of a lifetime" in 1965 playing the loveable but somewhat dim-witted Roger Healey on "Jeannie." But for Daily, acting has always had its special challenges because he has suffered from severe dyslexia all his life. "As long as I could get the script and memorize it, I was okay," says Daily. "But I can't read out loud, so if they changed things at the last moment, it would really screw me up. I quickly learned to ad-lib."

Fellow "Jeannie" star Barbara Eden fondly remembers Daily's quick wit during the five seasons they worked together. "None of us knew Bill had dyslexia when we started the show," says Eden from her home in Beverly Hills. "He was nervous when the series began,

and didn't always know his lines, but he would improvise and his additions were even funnier than the script. I can't imagine what 'Jeannie' would have been like without Bill, he's just naturally a funny person."

After "Jeannie," Daily's first film role was in the 1971 comedy "The Barefoot Executive," which starred Kurt Russell, John Ritter, and a monkey. According to Daily, the ape took an instant disliking to some of the cast, but became fond of Daily when he tried out for the role. "That's your career down the toilet when you have to audition for a monkey!" Daily quips.

Far from being a career-ender, the following year Daily joined the crew of the "Bob Newhart Show" playing Howard Borden, an always friendly if somewhat inept neighbor. Citing his reading problems, Daily says the Newhart show was especially challenging.

"It was a charming show with subtle humor and a lot of fun," says Daily. "Bob is one of the nicest men who ever lived and he's beyond talented—a comic genius. But I was even more terrified than when working on 'Jeannie' because Bob didn't like to rehearse. That worked for his style, but it was tough for me."

During the show's six seasons, Daily's character welcomed Newhart with a cheerful "Hi Bob" greeting 118 times. The phrase is still part of Daily's life today, reflecting his fondness for the show. "The license plate of my car is HI BOB, and I have had several dogs [including his current one] called Hi Bob."

Despite missing out on some movie roles because of his dyslexia, Daily guest-starred on dozens of TV shows post-"Newhart," as well as a couple of short-lived sitcoms of his own. "I've been extremely lucky, given my reading problems," Daily said. "I've always managed to walk through the right door at the right time. Years ago I worked on a radio show when I came out of the army. Now, I can't wait for Thursday mornings when I can walk into a radio studio again."

According to Copeland, Daily is the perfect guest host who can blend a discussion of recent news and Hollywood history with a generous dose of humor. "He stays abreast of current events—he's up on the bank failures and ladies copying Sarah Palin's style. But there are serious subjects he talks about—his love for his wife, his buddies in the Korean War—that really affect him," says Copeland. "What we look for on the show is real, fun people, and that's Bill."

—By Nick Thomas

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