

Teleprompter inventor Schlafly dies in Conn. at 91

April 26 2011, By PAT EATON-ROBB , Associated Press



Former Greenwich resident Hubert Schlafly, shown here in the Edgehill retirement community in Stamford, Conn. in Jan. 2008. Schlafly, an Emmy Award-winning inventor best known for developing the teleprompter, has died, April 20, 2011. He was 91. (AP Photo/Stamford Advocate, Paul Desmarais)

(AP) -- Hubert "Hub" Schlafly, a key member of the team that invented the teleprompter and rescued decades' worth of soap opera actors, newscasters and politicians from the embarrassment of stumbling over their words on live television, has died at age 91.

Schlafly died April 20 at Stamford Hospital after a brief illness, according to the Leo P. Gallagher & Son Funeral Home, which handled the arrangements. A funeral was held Tuesday at St. Mary Parish in Greenwich, where he was a longtime resident.

He did not use a teleprompter himself until he was 88, while rehearsing his speech for induction into the Cable Television Hall of Fame, close friend Thomas Gallagher said.

Schlaflly helped start the TelePrompter Corp., eventually becoming its president and accepting an Emmy Award for the company in 1999 - a few years after winning one himself in 1992 for his contributions in the cable television industry. He held 16 patents, Gallagher said.

Cablevision chairman Charles Dolan called Schlaflly "the cable industry's most innovative engineer" and "one of its ablest executives."

"Whether you were his friend or competitor, he was always congenial and supportive and probably had more friends than anyone," Dolan said in a statement Tuesday.

Schlaflly was born Aug. 14, 1919, in St. Louis. He graduated from the University of Notre Dame, where he studied electrical engineering. He worked for General Electric and the MIT Radiation Laboratory before joining 20th Century Fox in New York City in 1947.

Actor Fred Barton Jr. wanted a way to remember his lines and approached Irving Berlin Kahn, nephew of composer Irving Berlin and vice president of radio and television at 20th Century Fox. Kahn went to Schlaflly, then the director of television research.

"He wanted to have multiple units so you could look anywhere on the stage," Schlaflly recalled in a 2008 interview with the Stamford Advocate. "I said it was a piece of cake."

The result - a device with a motorized scroll printed in half-inch font - was named the TelePrompter, which made its debut in 1950 on the soap opera "The First Hundred Years," said Laurie Brown, author of the book

"The Teleprompter Manual."

Schlafly told interviewers the second T in the name of the device, now known as the teleprompter, was capitalized originally to make the name distinctive.

The device evolved eventually into a monitor facing the person appearing on screen and rolling a script at reading speed.

"It revolutionized television and improved the quality of on-air performers," said Jim Dufek, a professor of mass media at Southeast Missouri State University. "It also made the politicians look smarter because they were looking right into the camera."

Former President Herbert Hoover became the first politician to use a teleprompter in 1952, when he gave the keynote speech at the Republican National Convention in Chicago.

Every president since then has used the device - now also such a staple of television news that occasional technical glitches can turn a news report into unintentional comedy.

In the 1970s, TelePrompter Corp. owned cable franchises in 140 markets and served about 1.4 million customers.

A graveside service for Schlafly is planned Thursday in Louisville, N.Y.

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