

MSU's Owston honored for dissertation

By Jessica Farrish
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Dr. James M. Owston has worn several hats — and won several awards — in Beckley.

From his days in the 1980s and 1990s at WOAY-FM (now Groovy94), 103CIR and WWNR to his current position as senior academic officer in distance education at Mountain State University, professional recognition has followed Owston.

In radio, he won five national awards for “picking hits” and garnered a slew of gold and platinum albums for his wall.

Now, he's achieved what many in academe believe is impossible: He's been awarded two outstanding research awards for his doctoral dissertation.

“It's strange to get two for the same dissertation,” acknowledged Owston, a Beckley resident.

Less than 1 percent of the population receives a research doctorate. Even fewer are honored with one award.

To put it in perspective, MSU spokeswoman Megan Constantino compared Owston's two awards with being struck by lightning twice.

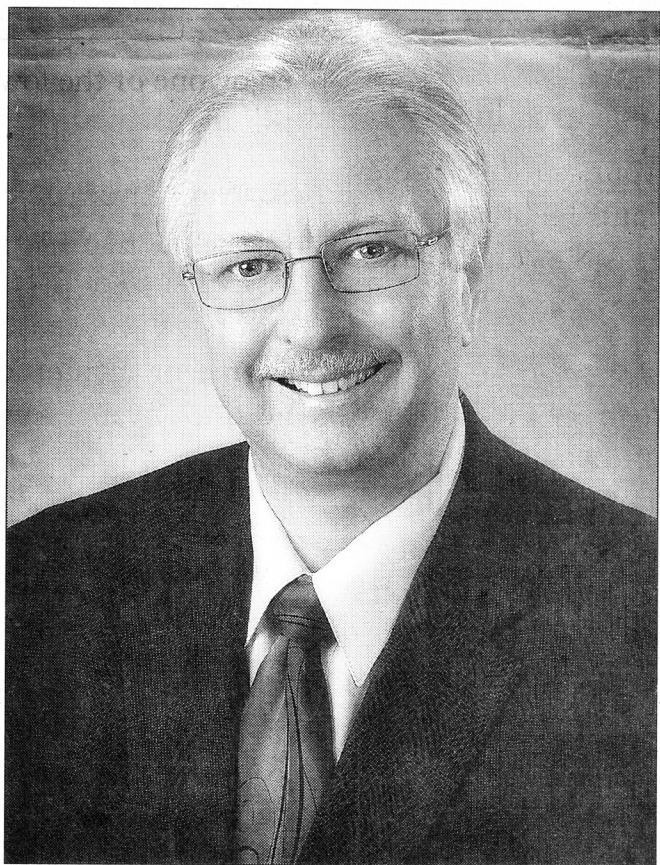
“Very few individuals are honored with one dissertation award, let alone two,” she added.

Owston's dissertation, “Survival of the Fittest? The Rebranding of West Virginia Higher Education,” was awarded the international Alice L. Beeman Dissertation Award for Outstanding Research in Communications and Marketing for Educational Advancement.

Owston received his first award last year from the American Association of University Administrators.

The dissertation was completed at Marshall University in November 2007.

Owston adopted an



Dr. James M. Owston

atypical format and used multiple methods for the dissertation, thanks partly to the advice of Dr. Barbara Nicholson, his dissertation chair at Marshall.

“Dr. Nicholson was the catalyst behind any success that I may have achieved,” Owston said. “She pushed me toward excellence, and I hope I lived up to her expectations.”

The dissertation has been selected for print in various publications, including the International Journal of Educational Advancement.

The dissertation examines name changes of colleges to universities in America between 1996 and 2005 and the impact the changes have had on enrollment, tuition and other factors.

Owston said he came to Beckley to work at a local radio station. He'd been working at a station in the Huntington area when a job offer in Beckley lured him to Raleigh County in 1981.

He had two bachelor's degrees and two master's degrees, from the

West Virginia Graduate College (now Marshall) in humanities and from West Virginia University in communications.

“Had I not come to Beckley, I wouldn't have had the opportunities had I stayed in a larger town such as the Huntington area,” he said.

After finishing his first master's degree in 1991, Owston began teaching (mostly speech classes) at MSU, then The College of West Virginia, on a part-time basis.

In 1994, he began working directly for MSU President Charles Polk on a full-time basis.

Polk encouraged Owston to obtain his doctorate, Owston said.

“I love it at MSU. It's been quite the growing experience.”

Owston is a board member for The Friends of West Virginia Public Broadcasting.

He and his wife, Pam, have two daughters, 15-year-old Lora and 13-year-old Kristen.

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