

State and Local

A&M assistant professor tries variety of careers

By Todd Riemenschneider
Reporter

The professional life of Dr. Don Tomlinson can be described in one word—diversified.

Tomlinson's career experiences range from being a deputy prosecuting attorney to owning a television production company.

During many of these years, Tomlinson was working as a part-time college teacher. He taught everything from television journalism to political science.

He is now an assistant professor of journalism at Texas A&M.

"I had a sincere interest in higher education," Tomlinson said.

A suggestion by his wife, Beverly, gave Tomlinson the drive to become a college professor.

"I wanted to do something with long-term stability," Tomlinson said. "I wanted to be at an institution where I could enjoy myself."

Tomlinson said he had a choice of two colleges at which to teach, Southern Methodist University and Texas A&M. He came to A&M in 1985.

"I am absolutely confident I made the right choice in coming to A&M," he said.

Tomlinson said he enjoys the Bryan-College Station community and also likes being at a large public institution. He keeps busy most of the time, he said.

"What little spare time I have I like singing and playing country music on the guitar," he said. Tomlinson played in rock bands during high school and college, but he says his musical activities are less public now.

"Now I just pick and grin for myself or anybody who might come along and want to listen," Tomlinson said.

Tomlinson's career can be traced to Jonesboro, Ark. where he attended Arkansas State University. During his senior year at Arkansas State, Tomlinson was the managing editor of the campus newspaper.

Tomlinson said he "became enthralled" with the electronic side of journalism during his senior year. Tomlinson said he had a part-time job at a local television station, KAIT. He said KAIT was compar-

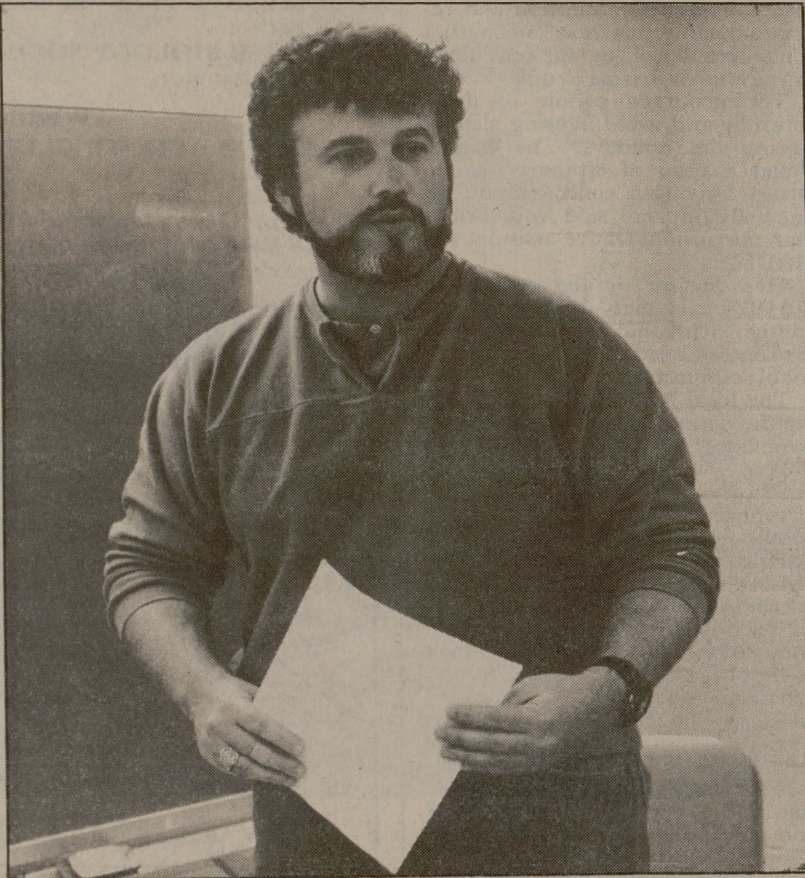


Photo by Shelley Schluter

Dr. Don Tomlinson has recently completed a documentary.

ble to Channel 3, KBTX-TV, here in Bryan-College Station.

He was offered a job at a junior college in Beebe, Ark. after he graduated from Arkansas State. He said he took the job with the understanding he would work only one year because he had a desire to attend graduate school. While he was working at the junior college Tomlinson was the sponsor for the school newspaper and also the annual. He also did public relations work for the college.

After receiving his master's degree in journalism from North Texas State University, Tomlinson went to work for a television station in his hometown of Little Rock, Ark.

At KTHV, a CBS affiliate, he worked as a reporter and a weekend anchor.

Tomlinson then switched to the ABC affiliate in Little Rock, Ark., KATV. At KATV he was also a reporter and a weekend anchor, but there he was producing monthly, hour-long documentaries. He said he had always had an interest in making documentaries, and being at this station would allow him to do something he really wanted to do. Tomlinson said he believes documentaries are "as pure a form of journalism as there is."

As a reporter, Tomlinson covered a lot of state government issues, and

he found himself becoming interested in law. He decided to go to law school to be a participant, rather than an observer, in the legal process.

"When I was covering government as a reporter, I found myself wanting to raise my hand, wanting to have the floor and have input," Tomlinson said.

He started law school at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, which he attended for one year. He then transferred to the University of Arkansas at Little Rock so he could work during the day and go to school at night. While attending law school, Tomlinson did public information work for various state agencies.

After law school, Tomlinson went to work as a deputy prosecuting attorney in Little Rock.

"Normally this job entails working for a prosecutor who prosecutes all kinds of crimes," Tomlinson said. "I did a little of that, but my main job as a deputy prosecutor was the prosecution of two different kinds of crimes."

In his position as deputy prosecuting attorney, Tomlinson enforced the payment of child support.

"This type of child support deals with the person who has a clear ability to pay child support, but has a genuine desire to avoid paying," he said. Tomlinson added his office did not deal with visitation rights, only support payments.

"What our office was trying to do was save the public from having to pay child support — through such vehicles as welfare — for individuals who could clearly do it themselves," he said.

The other type of crime Tomlinson prosecuted — as both a deputy prosecuting attorney and later as a deputy attorney general — was white-collar medical fraud, for example when dentists, doctors, pharmacists and others in the medical profession defraud the Medicaid program.

"In Arkansas there is a generic drug law," Tomlinson explained. "This law allows a generic equivalent for a drug to replace a name brand, so the cost is less."

Tomlinson said some medical

professionals take advantage of this law.

"A pharmacist was distributing generic drugs and was listing them as name brands and was getting more money than he was entitled to," he said.

Tomlinson said the attorney general's office ran a sting operation where they would send a person into a pharmacy who would pretend to be on Medicaid, and this person would receive the medication and the bill.

The attorney general's office would then check the records of the pharmacist to see if the drugs he was ordering were the same as he was dispensing. If the pharmacist was dispensing generic drugs for name brand drugs, it would show up in his records. If a pharmacist's records showed he was dispensing generic drugs for name brands, charges would be brought against the pharmacist for fraudulent activities.

"As long as I was there (in the attorney general's office), we never lost a case," Tomlinson said.

Trial law is a high-stress job, Tomlinson said, and after several years he realized that he didn't want to do it on a long-term basis. He chose to pursue his interest in broadcasting, and he moved on in his journalism career by forming a television production company, The Video Production House. His company, based in Little Rock, did work for private industry by making videos for companies. "Private documentaries" is what Tomlinson called the videos his company made. At this time he also had a private law practice.

Tomlinson moved his company to Gulf Shores, Ala. and changed its name to CableTime. CableTime produced television commercials for local insertion into network cable television programming. In late 1983, Tomlinson sold the company.

"I got an offer I couldn't refuse," he said.

The Country Music Television Network was the next place Tomlinson tried his hand at something new. In Nashville, Tomlinson was making videos for the network and also was serving as legal counsel. At CMTV, Tomlinson was able to combine both his journalism and his legal careers.

The most recent project Tomlinson was involved in was to work on a documentary for the A&M Sea Grant College Program. This documentary, which Tomlinson produced and directed, is titled, "Trashed-out Texas Beaches: The Junk Stops Here." It is about the growing problem of trash washing up on Texas beaches.

"People for 4,000 years have been throwing trash in the water," Tomlinson said. "Until the last 40 years it didn't matter, because there was less traffic and no plastic."

Plastic is not biodegradable, so it is starting to wash up on the beaches, Tomlinson said. The documentary is in the editing stages, he said.

He said he hopes to get the documentary on the Public Broadcasting Service as soon as possible.

"This university, with the amount of research it does, has a wonderful opportunity to do documentaries," Tomlinson said. He said he is trying to create a mechanism for more documentaries to be made about the research that goes on at A&M.

Unit considers tax exemption for elderly

AUSTIN (AP) — The governing body of a taxing unit may offer a residence homestead exemption to people 65 or older without offering the same exemption to disabled people — or vice versa, according to Attorney General Jim Mattox.

Bobby Joe Mann, Palo Pinto county attorney, requested Mattox's opinion, which was released Monday.

Mattox noted that the Texas Constitution and Tax Code either require or authorize various types of political subdivisions to grant or offer residence homestead exemptions from property taxation.

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