



## Obituaries

Richard W. Richter, founding president of Radio Free Asia, dies at 88

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by [Bart Barnes](#) July 7 at 1:51 PM [✉Email the author](#)

Richard W. Richter, the founding president of Radio Free Asia who organized and led for 10 years its broadcasts to nations in East Asia that are subjected to government news censorship, died June 29 at a hospice in Issaquah, Wash. He was 88.

The cause was pneumonia, said his wife, Joan Richter.

Mr. Richter, a former news producer for ABC television and WETA, the Washington-area PBS affiliate, organized a staff of technicians and news professionals who in 1996 commenced what became round-the-clock radio programming in Asian languages, including Burmese, Cantonese, Khmer, Korean, Lao, Mandarin, Wu (Shanghainese), Tibetan, Uighur and Vietnamese.

Additionally, Radio Free Asia (RFA) established a news website in East Asian languages and set up toll-free hotlines for callers. It specialized in local news programming and recruited, as its news staff, a corps of stringers, broadcasting in local dialects. They reported on such events as internal ethnic flare-ups and opposition to government policies — which were often a target of government censorship.

The reports sometimes subjected the RFA stringers to government retaliation, including surveillance, harassment of families and friends, and jail, said Dan Southerland, a former Christian Science Monitor and Washington Post journalist who is a retired RFA program executive.

In a public statement on his retirement in 2005, Mr. Richter said “repressive governments reviled RFA, because we were letting people know what was going on in their own countries — providing information that their own leaders would suppress.”

Chinese officials, he said, had jammed RFA broadcasts and tried to block access to its websites.

Richard William Richter was born Nov. 17, 1929, in New York City. He graduated from New York’s Queens College in 1950.

As a young man, he was a copy aide at the New York Times and a reporter for Newsday and the New York World-Telegram and Sun.

In the 1960s, Mr. Richter was an overseas program evaluator for the Peace Corps and then deputy director of Peace Corps programs in Kenya. He was a producer in New York and Washington for ABC News from 1969 to 1989, working on news documentaries. He was the founding senior producer of ABC’s “Good Morning America.”

At WETA, he was a producer of “News of the Week in Review.”

Radio Free Asia was authorized by Congress as a “surrogate” broadcaster to East Asian countries lacking a free media. It is a federally supported private nonprofit organization and is managed by a bipartisan Broadcasting Board of Governors, who appointed Mr. Richter president in 1996.

He moved from the District to the state of Washington nine years ago.

Survivors include his wife of 67 years, Joan Skrivanek Richter of Issaquah; two sons, Dave Richter of Issaquah and Rob Richter of Mystic, Conn.; and two grandchildren.

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