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From her sixth-floor corner office at 30 Rockefeller Plaza in New York City, Valari Dobson Staab reflects on the broadcast television career that landed her a big job in the Big Apple.

As the first woman to hold the position of president of NBC Owned Television Stations, Staab oversees the company's 10 local stations in New York City, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Connecticut, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Miami and Dallas.

The University of Texas at Tyler graduate spends part of each week visiting those stations, and the other part dealing with programming, marketing and other matters from her office in New York.

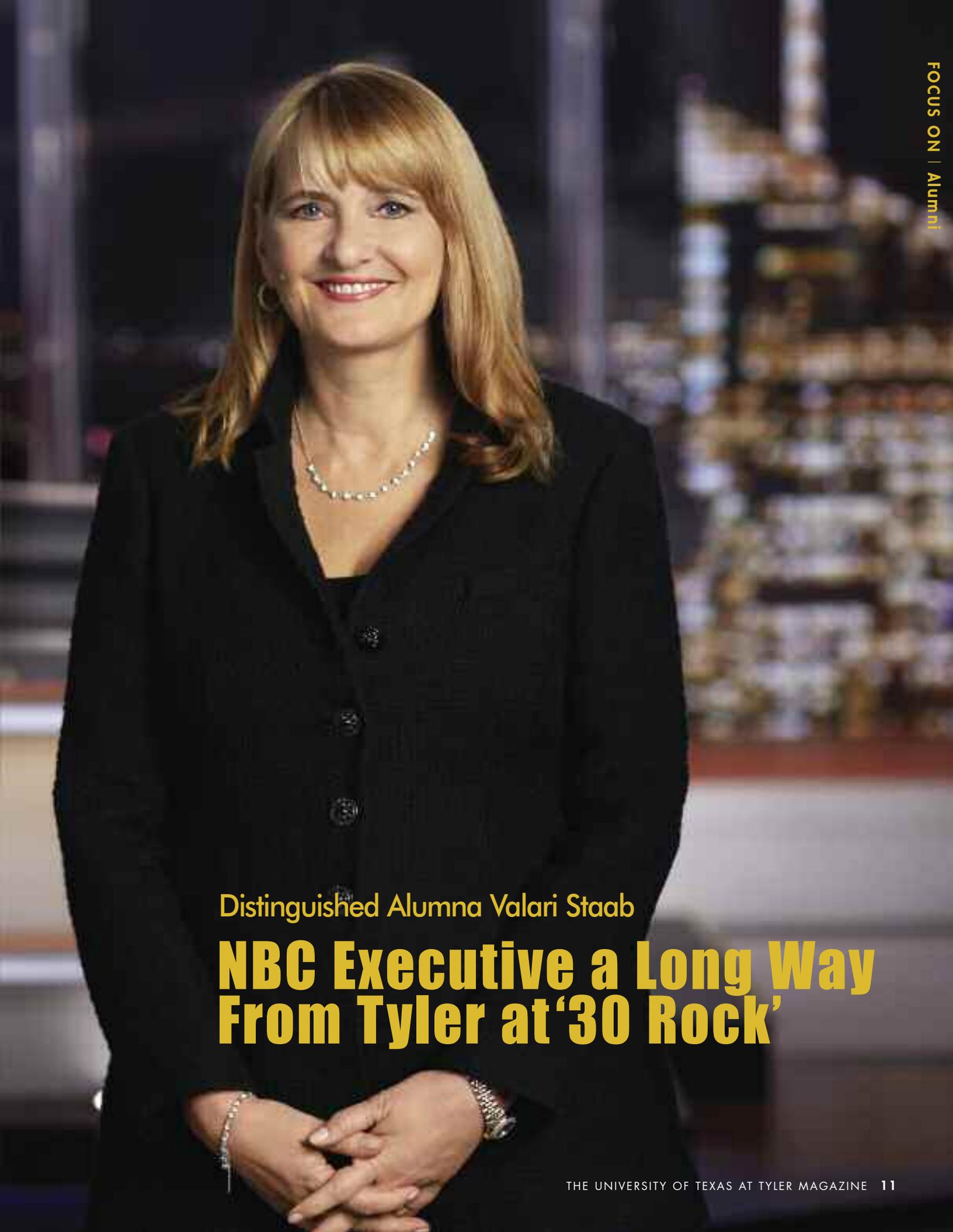
"The thing I like most about my job is there is no such thing as a typical morning," said Staab, who was hired last year.

She especially enjoys the energy and excitement surrounding her at "30 Rock."

"It is a fun place to work," she says, noting several television shows produced there.

The "Today Show" is filmed outside her window at Rockefeller Plaza, where MSNBC has studios and other nationally televised shows are produced, including "The Dr. Oz Show," "Saturday Night Live," "Late Night with Jimmy Fallon" and "NBC Nightly News."

"Sometimes, walking through the studios here is just a tremendous amount of fun, because you run into people laughing and talking and practicing a skit, or being goofy," Staab said.



Distinguished Alumna Valari Staab

# NBC Executive a Long Way From Tyler at '30 Rock'

Staab was among four alumni recognized by UT Tyler this spring for distinguishing themselves in their professional achievements, contributions to society and support of the university. She received her bachelor of business administration degree with a major in marketing from UT Tyler in 1982. She also holds a master in business administration degree from Baylor University.

Prior to working at NBC headquarters, Staab spent most of her 30-year career working for ABC Owned Television Stations in management, research and marketing roles. For many years, Staab directed creative services, marketing and research at WPVI-TV in Philadelphia, and then went on to serve as president and general manager of the ABC TV station in Fresno and then in Raleigh-Durham.

She spent eight years as president and general manager of KGO-TV in San Francisco where, under her leadership, the station received numerous awards and recognitions, including:

- The Northern California Emmy for Station Excellence three out of four years.
- The Radio and Television News Directors Association's Regional Edward R. Murrow Award for Overall Excellence.
- The Mark Twain "Station of the Year" award from the Associated Press Television and Radio Association.

Staab's star-studded record attracted NBC in its search for an executive to oversee its 10 local television stations, and they hired her away in June 2011.

"She knows everything about what makes a local television station work, and she brings a great deal of calm, wisdom and common sense. Finding all those things in one person is very, very difficult to do," said her boss, NBC Broadcasting Chairman Ted Harbert. "... Our stations were in some trouble, and I knew she would be the person to fix them the best and fastest."

NBC offered Staab the job within 24 hours

of the first interview.

"That was probably a fairly dramatic moment," Staab said, busting into laughter. "I was expecting a longer process."

In addition to overseeing NBC's 10 owned stations, Staab also manages the company's associated online properties and digital out-of-home division, its local lifestyle-programming production company and its in-house marketing and promotion company.

## Creating Solutions

Since taking the reigns in New York, Staab has turned stations around faster than thought possible, by boosting their budgets, expanding their resources, improving promotions and giving control back to the local stations.

Staab was hired in the aftermath of Comcast buying NBC, whose TV stations' news operations had suffered under budget cutbacks. Comcast wanted the picture to change, and that was the challenge it laid before Staab.

With her guidance and a significant investment by Comcast, stations have expanded or added investigative units, staff members, helicopters, equipment and other resources for reporting the news. Already, the stations are producing more content, breaking more stories, conducting more investigations, creating more original content and doing more enterprise reporting than they were a year ago, she said.

Though she never worked as a journalist, she has worked closely with news directors through the years and places a great value on quality reporting. "It's the product that a station puts out, so a station's total identity is heavily tied to their news product," she said.

Having served so many years in a general management role at local stations, it is perhaps no surprise that her leadership philosophy also emphasizes local-station autonomy.

"A lot of the decisions for those 10 TV stations were being made here in New York,"

she said. "Now we've given control back to the general managers, so the general managers can make the right decision for their communities, which might be a different decision in Dallas than in New York City or in Philadelphia."

The local stations have responded enthusiastically.

"Valari recognizes that all of our stations and markets are different," said Tom Ehlmann, president and general manager of KXAS/NBC5 in Dallas. "So having the ability to make plans and decisions quickly and with our local communities in mind has made us stronger and more competitive."

What she has done is paying off.

"We're seeing ratings go up in eight of our 10 markets, with real increases in our news ratings in several time periods," he said. "It's really performance that Steve Burke, the CEO of NBC Universal, has said is right now the best work being done at all NBC Universal, and that includes cable, movies, theme parks and all the television assets.

"So, she really is making quite a name for herself quite quickly. It's pretty amazing results in just a year. We thought that it would take us three years to get results, and we're getting results almost instantaneously."

While Staab is glad to change things for the better in her company, her focus is not just on winning awards and profits. She is deeply committed to the community.

She is a member of the board of NBC Universal Foundation, whose mission is to encourage people to use innovative technology to solve community problems. The foundation gives money to nonprofits in its 10 markets for that purpose.

Throughout her career, Staab also has served on various United Way boards.

"A television station needs to have a strong relationship with a safety-net organization," she said. "By safety net, I mean (helping



your least advantaged people in your community that have minimal things that they need to survive, and the United Way is often the safety net for communities.”

## School Days

Born in Oklahoma, Staab moved at age 8 with her family to Texas, where she lived until she was 27. Throughout her teen years, her family owned a marina on Lake Sam Rayburn near Broadus in East Texas, where they had a restaurant, store, motel units, cabins, lake sites and a boat dock. They sometimes rose before dawn to host bass tournaments at the marina.

Staab began working at KLTV in Tyler when she was a sophomore at Tyler Junior College, and continued working there as a junior and senior at UT Tyler. She worked full time and attended school full time.

“To work 40 hours a week and to carry a full load at school was completely manageable,” she said, “because by the time I was in high school, I got up early to help get fishermen out on the lake in the morning, then went to school all day, and then I came home and worked in the store and the marina, and cleaned hotel units in the evening. So I was used to that kind of busy work life.”

Staab even managed to graduate valedictorian.

She believes that the combination of her upbringing, academic training and work at KLTV prepared her for the road ahead. For instance, at the Tyler TV station, she learned how to write, edit and produce commercials, to run a camera and to understand the news business and its product.

“What I couldn’t really learn at the station was basic business acumen, basic accounting, finance, economics and marketing, so that’s what I learned in my education,” she said.

She hasn’t forgotten her Texas roots. She occasionally returns to visit NBC’s Dallas station and to visit family members in Tyler and Austin.

At the same time, she has come to love life in New York City, where she lives with her husband, R.C. Staab, and remains committed to her work and company’s mission.

“In a free society, the press is wildly important, and we can’t forget that. We have to hold people in these communities accountable and we have to be the voice for those people who don’t have a voice,” Staab said. ■



A 1982 graduate with a BBA in marketing, Staab accepts the Distinguished Alumna award during UT Tyler’s 2012 Alumni Gala.

