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Forty Years of Flacking For ‘The Mouse’

On Main Street, U.S.A., in the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World, the windows above street level are filled with old-fashioned lettering announcing the businesses within. One of them reads, simply:

RIDGWAY PUBLIC RELATIONS

Charles Ridgway Press Agent

No Event Too Small

Ridgway Public Relations may be an imaginary business, but Charles Ridgway is very real. In fact, he is a “Disney Legend,” recognized by the Disney Company for his four decades of service to “the Mouse.”

Ridgway, or Charlie as he is known to generations of Disney Cast Members, spent his time at Disney dreaming up new and better ways to get publicity for Disney theme parks in Anaheim, Orlando, Paris, Tokyo, and Hong Kong. In the early days, Disney did next to no advertising, relying on Ridgway’s ingenuity to spread the word about the wonders that awaited within the parks. It was a strategy that worked very well.

In *Spinning Disney’s World*, his light-hearted new memoir, Ridgway recounts his many triumphs of flackery, such as having fifty white Peking ducks parade down Main Street behind Donald Duck in celebration of his fiftieth birthday. It was no easy task.

To pull it off, Donald himself had to be on hand when the ducklings hatched, so that he would be the first thing they saw. That way, they would “imprint” on him and follow him anywhere.

Donald’s birthday bash was a huge success. But Ridgway’s ingenuity didn’t end there. When the celebration was over, he arranged to have Disney donate pairs of these ducks to zoos around the country, guaranteeing another avalanche of publicity.

Charlie saw the world of the media change from an era of manual typewriters to the age of instant global communications. In fact, Disney events pioneered some of the news gathering and spreading techniques we now take for granted. When Epcot opened in 1981, Walt Disney World became the site of the first large scale use of satellite uplinks to cover a news event. Ridgway’s office was flooded with requests from television stations around the world who wanted to participate. So new was the technology that many of them didn’t realize they needed a satellite dish in order to receive the live feed from Epcot’s Spaceship Earth. Stations scrounged downlinks from nearby universities so they could get in on this marvel of instant communication.

— more —

Advance Praise for *Spinning Disney’s World*

“Charlie Ridgway is part of a breed of people I’m not sure exist anymore in our business.”

— Roy E. Disney, former vice chairman, The Walt Disney Co. and a Disney Legend

“Ridgway’s credibility with news people is a legend, a legend earned ... his book, as always, tells it straight.”

— Walter Anderson, CEO, *Parade Magazine*

“Ridgway was present at the creation of Disneyland and Walt Disney World, and he spins wondrous tales.”

— Bob Thomas, author of *Walt Disney: An American Original*

Ridgway's book is filled with reminiscences of both the big names and the little people who made Disney parks so special. He rubbed shoulders with Walt and became close to both Roy O. Disney and Michael Eisner. As a result, he has a unique perspective on the controversy that surrounded Eisner's last years at the company.

He also got to know virtually every famous journalist of the last fifty years, from Lowell Thomas and Walter Cronkite to Charlie Gibson and Diane Sawyer.

But he hasn't forgotten the unsung Cast Members. Here is Tom Nabbe, who sold newspapers outside Disneyland until he caught Walt's eye and became the personification of Tom Sawyer. Forty-five years later, he was still working for Disney and was named a Disney Legend, just like Charlie, in 2005.

Here, too, is the unnamed Cast Member who was so protective of the Disney magic and her role as Snow White that, when she was out of costume, she would never admit, even to her closest friends, that she portrayed the character in the parks.

Charlie Ridgway lives in Longwood, Florida. The Intrepid Traveler publishes a number of books about Walt Disney World, including "Hidden Mickeys," two volumes of "The Walt Disney World Trivia Book," and "Disney on a Dime."

To request a review copy of **Spinning Disney's World**, to arrange an interview with Charles Ridgway, or for any additional information, please contact Alexis Elder at
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Spinning Disney's World:

**Memories of A Magic
Kingdom Press Agent**

by Charles Ridgway

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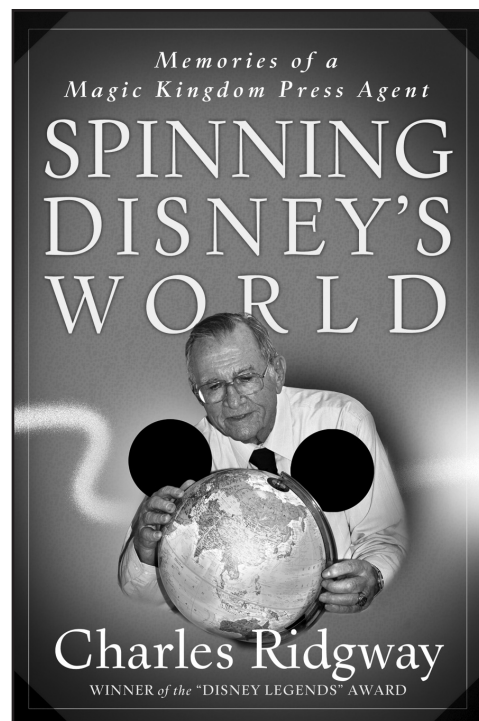
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