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**ON TUESDAY:** CELEBRATING YOUNG WRITERS

BY JOHN NEMO  
*Special to the Pioneer Press*

**S**teve Iverson still remembers the first time he met Casey Jones.

"I turned on the television and saw this guy sitting down at a table talking to me — to children — in a very friendly manner," said Iverson, 40, who grew up in Willmar during the 1960s.

"I had lunch with Casey every day from then on. My mom would come downstairs and bring me a sandwich, and I'd be sitting on the floor, watching 'Lunch With Casey.'"

Iverson is one of many Minnesota children from the 1950s, '60s and early '70s who remember the staple of Twin Cities television that ran from 1954 to 1972 on Channel 11.

Now, KARE 11 reporter Boyd Huppert, who grew up watching the show, has written and

produced "Lunch With Casey: A 50th Anniversary Special," which airs Tuesday night and is hosted by KARE 11 news anchor Paul Magers.

"For me, it was like I was 7 years old all over again, seeing the clips," said Huppert, 40, who grew up in River Falls, Wis. "I felt like grabbing people and saying, 'Come here! Look at this!'"

Iverson, who now lives in Atlanta and works for Turner Entertainment Networks, runs the fan Web site [www.lunchwithcasey.com](http://www.lunchwithcasey.com). He and Huppert are not alone in their fond memories of the show that starred St. Paul native Roger Awsumb as Casey Jones, the famous railroad engineer, along with his comedic sidekick Roundhouse Rodney, played by Lynn Dwyer.

ALL ABOARD, 3C

# All

*Fans of  
Casey Jones get  
one more chance to  
appreciate their  
childhood TV  
friend.*

# aboard!



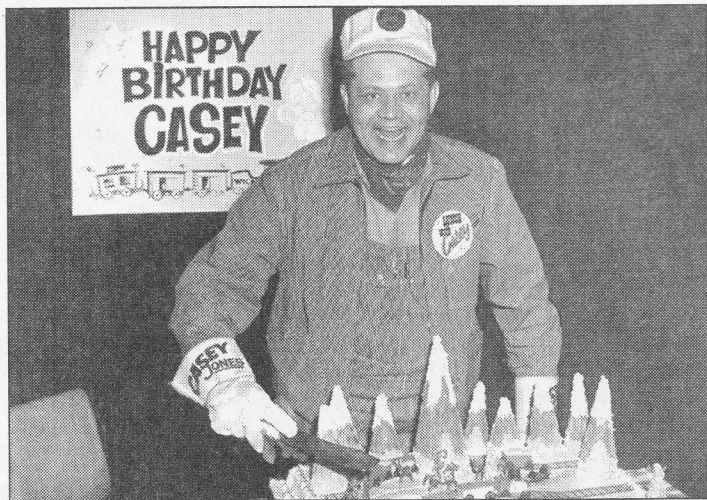
# All aboard

(continued)

When Awsumb died at age 74 in July 2002, Iverson's site was flooded with postings by thousands of fans mourning his passing. Huppert, who put together an obituary piece on Awsumb for KARE 11, also noticed his station's Web site was flooded with postings.

"Hundreds and hundreds of people took the time to write their thoughts down," Huppert said. "I started reading through their notes and couldn't believe how vivid their memories were 30 or 40 years later and how important this show was to people during their childhood years."

Spurred on by the outpouring of support from the show's fans, Huppert began putting together the special. He started



**It's Casey's turn** to celebrate his birthday on air.

with Awsumb's kid-friendly character, Casey Jones, named after the famous Tennessee railroad engineer who died in 1900 trying to get his locomotive to the station on time.

Using the antics of Awsumb

and Dwyer, who died from a coronary aneurysm in 1976, "Lunch With Casey" was a combination of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" and "Saturday Night Live," giving kids a gentle, family-themed hour of



## AGE 1C

improv comedy skits, musical performances and cartoons. Casey always sat down at his table for lunch, usually a peanut butter sandwich or sometimes a special meal delivered by a local restaurant like Shakey's Pizza or Burger King.

"What struck me was how well the skits held up," Huppert said. "I took home a rough cut of the special and showed it to my kids, and they watched the whole thing and really liked it. It was amazing to look back and see how creative they were."

"Lunch With Casey" came to an end in the early 1970s, when the advocate group Action for Children's Television successfully lobbied to prevent characters like Casey and Roundhouse from pitching products to kids, cutting out the heart of the show's advertising income.

With the loss of many of the show's biggest sponsors and more and more kids staying at school for hot lunch instead of

coming home to eat, local noon-time programs like "Lunch With Casey" lost their niche as national entertainment like "Sesame Street" came onto the scene.

The last broadcast of "Lunch With Casey" was on Dec. 29, 1972, with everyone from Twins legend Harmon Killebrew to Minneapolis Mayor Charles Stenvig dropping in to say goodbye.

must call the companies' road-

"I hope people are rolling videotapes on this," Huppert said of tonight's special. "To me, it's a part of family history. I think people will want to have a record of this, because it's a portrait of who we were growing up."

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