

HONORING “A LIVING LEGEND”

*Dr. Norman
Francis: A Legacy
of Leadership*

**Thanh
Truong,
Producer**

By Dean M. Shapiro

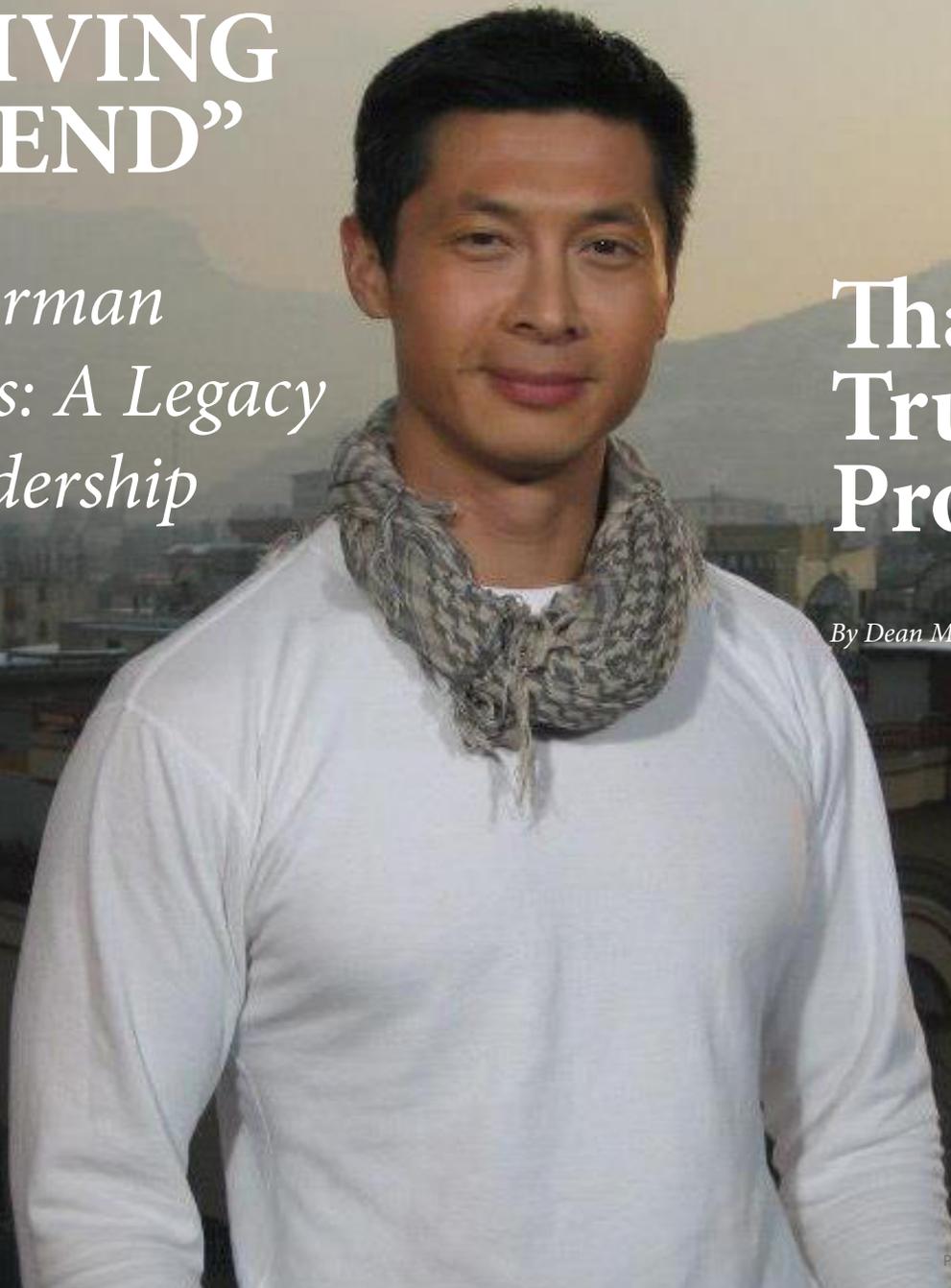


PHOTO COURTESY OF THANH TRUONG

Taking on one of the leading roles in the production of a documentary on a living New Orleans icon would be a daunting role for even the most experienced journalist but TV news veteran Thanh Truong is enthusiastically up to the job.

Thanh is the producer of an hour-long piece on Dr. Norman Francis, the retired longtime president of Xavier University that will premiere on September 27 over New Orleans' Public Television station, WYES Channel 12. Although acknowledging

that he's never done anything this extensive previously, he brings to the table more than 20 years of experience in TV news as an anchor/reporter for WWL-TV Channel 4, an NBC network affiliate in Denver and on the NBC network level itself.

"In my local TV days (in Denver) I went back to Vietnam for the first time and compiled a short documentary on the years that had passed since my family left there (in 1978)," Thanh said. "But it was not to the length of the one we're doing here."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR



In the WYES documentary, titled “Dr. Norman C. Francis: A Legacy of Leadership,” Dr. Francis reflects on his event-filled life in a series of one-on-one interviews. Archival photos, video and interviews with his family, friends and colleagues will visually document his long career of service and leadership within the New Orleans community.

The piece is narrated by former WWL-TV anchor Sally-Ann Roberts.

Thanh credits WYES Executive Vice President/CEO and project Executive Producer Dominic Massa with originating the concept of the Dr. Francis documentary and conducting the initial interviews. “There’s this belief that he is a living legend and we should honor him while he’s still here with us. Dr. Francis isn’t getting any younger but he’s been so influential over the years that WYES believed that we should absolutely do this,” Thanh said.

Terming the project “a team effort,” Thanh added, “Dominic did a portion of the interview with Dr. Francis and associate producer Dionne Butler and I split the rest, talking to the other players and the people who are part of the documentary. I researched and looked through some past interviews from print, radio and online to get a feel for who Dr. Francis is and some of the work that he’s done. As with most documentaries, the challenge is trying to

formulate and develop the character of the central figure of the story through the eyes and experiences of other people.”

A number of notable New Orleans public figures were interviewed for the piece and they all had glowing words of praise for Dr. Francis.

Among his responsibilities in the role of producer, Thanh conducted and coordinated the interview process and “took on the bulk of the writing. That’s the really challenging part as you can well imagine,” he noted. “I’ve written many scripts before and obviously there will be an editing process with Dionne and Dominic to make everything fit into the time frame.”

Born in a village in what was once South Vietnam, Thanh’s family emigrated to a small town in upstate New York when he was two years old. Later the family moved closer to the city of Binghamton where Thanh attended and graduated from the State University of New York’s branch campus in that city. From there he went on to Syracuse University where he received his Master’s degree in Journalism.

Following that milestone achievement, Thanh began pursuing his career

in journalism, which took him “all over,” including his first visit to Vietnam since his family left there many years earlier.

“It was 2008 and I’d been going back regularly until the pandemic, but I hope to start going back again,” he said. “I’m actually hopeful of producing a documentary; something related to the war. More importantly, something related to the people who have left the country.”

Although his core family is now in the United States, Thanh noted that he has a few cousins who are still in Vietnam.

Arriving in New Orleans in the early 2000’s, Thanh was a reporter for WWL-TV News when Hurricane Katrina hit the city. “I was part of the 30-person team that stayed in town with Channel 4 and covered the storm. It was quite an experience and that’s certainly underselling it for sure.”

In the aftermath of the storm, with power and services down at the station’s North Rampart Street offices, Thanh and the rest of the available crew worked out of the station’s transmitting facility on the West Bank. A year after the hurricane he moved on to the TV station in Denver where he stayed for the next three years.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THANH TRUONG

From 2009 to 2013 Thanh was a news correspondent on the network level with NBC Universal's Southeast Bureau in Atlanta before returning to New Orleans where he was rehired as an anchor/reporter at WWL-TV. For the next seven years he wrote, produced and presented daily news content for broadcast and digital platforms and anchored daily broadcasts, traveling frequently to provide coverage for breaking news.



When he left the TV station in early 2020, Thanh and his wife, Anna Christie, co-founded "New Orleans Unsolved," with the objective of "delivering weekly digital content on multiple podcast platforms." Through interviews, writing,



voice narration and editing, they aimed to produce episodic narratives available for worldwide distribution.

However, just as the two of them were starting out, the COVID-19 pandemic hit and future podcast plans went on hiatus after 18 episodes were produced. Thanh temporarily returned to a short-staffed Channel 4 for a third go-round. Since June of this year he has resumed his podcast plans for a second season and he and Anna are seeking sponsorships for it.

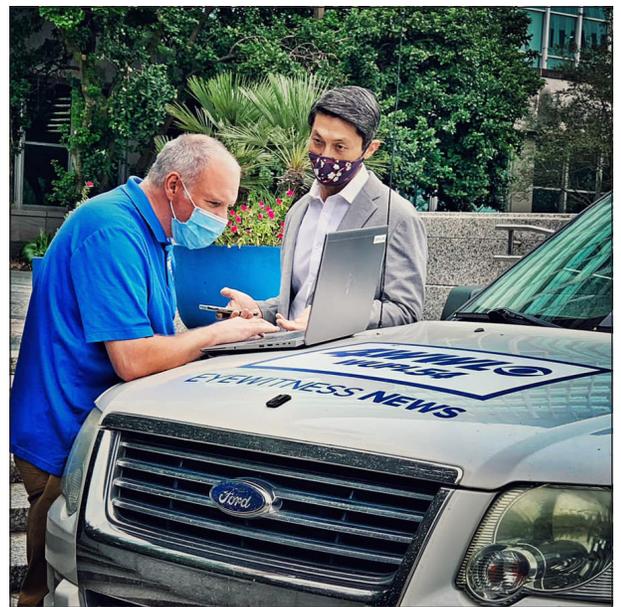
The podcast that is currently viewable focuses on unsolved crimes that took place in New Orleans. The episodes vary in length but they average out to about 35 minutes each. The podcast is viewable on

Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, Google Podcasts and other platforms.

Thanh is now a digital content producer for WWL-Radio/Audacy, broadcasting on 870 AM. As he explained, "WWL-Radio hasn't done much original reporting online and so we are very much trying to carve out a niche for ourselves right now,"

He described the stories he is producing for the station as long-form features that cover news, politics, crime and human interest subjects. They are published on WWL-Radio's website and posted on social media.

Summing up a long, eventful career and a promising future, Thanh noted, "I've had 20-plus years in television on the local and



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THANH TRUONG

network level. I enjoyed it and I will never say never about going back to it, but I thoroughly enjoy the digital audio space now. It's something that I think is great for writing.

"As great as TV and documentaries can be on a visual level, there's a certain amount of latitude you can take when you use just audio and natural sound and you can also be more flexible in the writing," he continued. "You can be more creative and more focused on words and audio instead of being reliant on pictures and other visuals like you would be on television. I am really enjoying doing this." 🍷