

VALLEY BROADCAST LEGENDS

Issue #116

“Honoring the Past, Sharing the Present, Embracing the Future in Media”

August 2020

President’s Message: Working for One of the Greats

by VBL President **Jim Drennan**



Not all of us have the privilege (and challenge) of working for great men and women, but those of us who worked at KCRA back in the “glory days” certainly did. That man was station owner **Jon S. Kelly**, who passed away on July 24 just a day after turning 84. He died at his farm known as Tres Palomes in the Southern California desert town of Rancho Santa Fe.

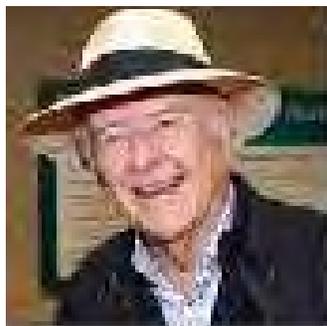
Jon was known in Sacramento as the dynamic boss of Channel 3 and the owner of River City Bank, but after the 1999 sale of KCRA to the Hearst Corporation, he became one of the foremost thoroughbred horse breeders in the U. S.

Only a man with Jon’s energy and intelligence could cram at least three careers into one life.

One person who knew and loved Jon, warts and all, was Legend **Stan Atkinson**, whose relationship with Jon goes back to 1956.

“In 1956, we both arrived at (then) KVIP Channel 7 in Redding. I was doing the usual booth and studio stuff ... as we all did in those days. The old man (Jon’s father and KCRA radio and TV founder **Gene Kelly**) had sent Jon up there to cut his teeth in sales. Problem is ... it was an impossible task.

“KHSL/12 Chico had been on the air for two years and had all the eyes. Redding area rooftop antennas were thus all turned south to get 12’s signal. That meant that anyone in the Redding area could barely see Channel 7 from the back of their antennas. The picture was lousy if even visible.



Jon S. Kelly.

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August 13: Join Us in the Virtual Realm

We’re happy to announce that we will be holding our August meeting as scheduled our first meeting since our last one in February at the Club Pheasant. Except that this meeting, on Thursday, Aug. 13 at 11 a.m., won’t be held at the Pheasant; it will be held on your computer or smartphone.

We had hoped we would be able to meet outdoors in person at a Sacramento city park with social distancing and all the other precautions. Unfortunately, the way things have been going with the pandemic, that option looks impossible. But thanks to the magic of Zoom and the ingenuity of our IT

guy, **Bud Kress**, we’ll be able to get together and talk with each other on the 13th.



Marcos Bretón

We’ll even have a guest speaker, *Sacramento Bee* columnist **Marcos Bretón**. Marcos will talk about what’s going on these days in Sacramento and answer any questions you might have.

This is kind of an experiment, but we decided that it’s the only way we can meet these days and that getting

together again is important to our organization and to our mostly homebound members. Just consider it a bridge to the future days when we can get together in person again and share those steak sandwiches and all those wonderful stories.

If you are brand-new to Zoom, all you need is a computer with microphone and camera and an internet connection. Or you can use a smartphone. Go to zoom.us/signup to create an account. Yes, it’s free and no, you don’t have to give them a credit card. A wealth of free training materials are available. Try doing a Google search on “Zoom for beginners” or “Zoom tutorial.”

Then, watch your email the day before (in other words, August 12) as we’ll be sending a link to the meeting. On the 13th a few minutes before 11 a.m., click on the link and follow the prompts appearing on your screen. Within a few moments, you’ll be in the virtual VBL broadcast booth!

“All in the Family”: Beth Ruyak, Robbie Waters

by VBL President **Jim Drennan**



Beth Ruyak

As we mentioned briefly in our July newsletter, Legend **Beth Ruyak** has ended her eight-year gig with Capital Public Radio as host of its daily *Insight* news/talk show. Beth had already spent years as anchor and reporter in Sacramento television and covered sports for network TV. But moving from TV to radio proved a huge challenge.

“When I came to CapRadio in 2012, my youngest child had just gone off to college,” Beth recalls. “Joining the station some months later was an unexpected adventure. The work of weaving and hosting the show—which was four segments a day, five days a week—engulfed my life. The experience was intense and stressful, demanding and exhilarating.

“Over the years, mixed with the fast-moving river of news and entertainment, came personal and private journeys: the birth and early years of my granddaughter; a tragic plane accident that killed my brother-in-law; a trip to the Sochi Olympics with only a backpack, a credential and an iPhone; the establishment of our small urban farm; and travel to northern Minnesota for short stints as caregiver

for my dad. I will always be grateful for the finale we had with him and the latitude CapRadio gave me to do so. The pain I feel now for families who cannot touch or hold loved ones at the end of a COVID battle is beyond words.

“In hosting *Insight*, I have had the privilege of listening to the journeys and adventures of hundreds of people. From serious to silly, from smart to thoughtful to important and incredible ... there has been a bit of everything. I questioned and challenged people, I wondered and I learned from them; I was often surprised and amazed. I constantly stayed curious. And I have stayed convinced that most people are good, hoping and trying for something better from life, both for themselves and others.”

Another “departure” to report this month, of someone who was not a member of the broadcast fraternity/sorority but a guy who many of us knew and loved. **Robbie Waters** died early in the morning of July 27, another victim of COVID-19. Robbie fell and broke his hip at his Greenhaven home on June 30. While recovering from hip surgery, he developed the virus and was admitted to Sutter General Hospital on July 20. He died less than a week later at the age of 84.

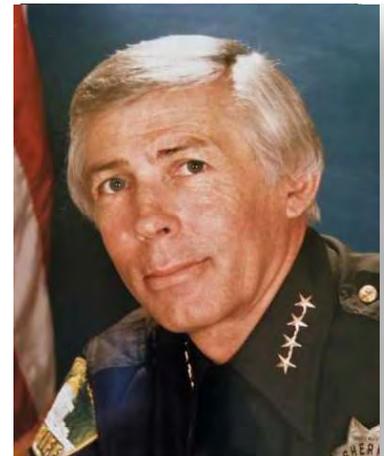
Like fellow Sacramentan **Jon Kelly**, Robbie lived a rich, full life.

At various times he was a heroic cop, the sheriff of Sacramento County, a long-time city councilman, and owner of a Greenhaven hardware store where he did picture framing! (I have several pictures in my home that Robbie framed.)

He was a Republican in a Democratic town, a conservative among liberals, but his voice was heard and his views were respected. Former Mayor **Kevin Johnson** called Robbie “a character in the truest sense of the word; Robbie was driven by his love for the city.” And current Mayor **Darrell Steinberg** put it this way:

“Robbie and I came from different places in the political world but none of that mattered. I considered him a dear friend. He loved Sacramento and made a lifelong impact on the city.”

If you get the chance, read the wonderful **Marcos Bretón** story from which I stole much of this material. It ran in the July 28 issue of the *Bee*.



Robbie Waters

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Audio-Visual: Bud Kress

VALLEY BROADCAST
LEGENDS

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President's Message: Jon Kelly

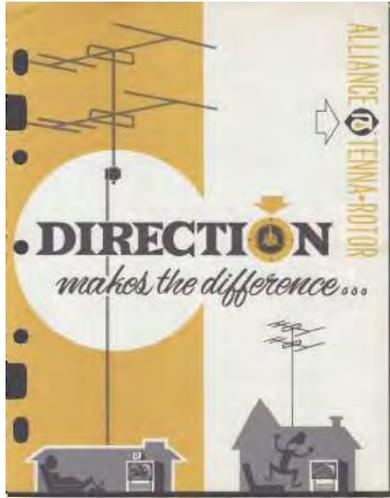
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"And so, few watched. It was an impossible sell on the street. As staff, I got a regular paycheck. Jon was living off commissions, and wasn't earning them." Stan recalls many a night when he, Jon and their wives dined on Kraft dinners.

Salvation came in the form of **Jim Birmingham**, who showed up at KVIP one day to pitch a new gizmo, the Alliance Tenna-Rotor. It sat atop the TV set and allowed the viewer to turn the antenna 360 degrees for a better picture.

"We gave them away ... a huge hit they were," Stan recalls. "People could now easily see both stations without interference and Channel 7's good fortunes began. So Jon and the sales staff, headed by **John Dadiw**, started making some bucks. Jon eventually talked with Gene or (brother) Bob about me, saying 'This kid is good.' **Fred Wade** of KCRA marketing and PD **Tom Breen** liked what they saw. And the rest is history."

Jon Kelly launched many careers during his time running KCRA, and many of them are expressing gratitude for what he did. One is **Val Nicholas**, who started at KCRA when he was fresh out of college and went on to become vice president of NBC News and now senior vice president and creative



Vintage catalog for the Alliance Tenna-Rotor, the gadget that saved **Jon Kelly's** career.

director for Summit Media Corp.

"One of my great friends and lifelong mentors passed away last night. I have lived a life way beyond my expectations because he decided I was worth investing in when I was young, and I will always honor his deed by continuing to be a mentor to other young people."

Another tribute comes from our own Legend and multiple Emmy-winner **Joyce Mitchell**:

"As the second woman hired to produce a TV newscast in the Sacramento market, I was given opportunities by Jon Kelly and KCRA that set the foundation for a 40-plus year career in the television industry. During my 13 years at Channel 3, I learned from the best and was taught how to cover news ... the right way. We were fortunate that Jon was forward-thinking and progressive. Without my experience as a newscast producer at Channel 3, I would not have the skills to write efficiently and effectively and create the long-format documentary TV I produce today. I also learned from Jon Kelly that we all have a responsibility to give back to the community. That is my mantra in life. Thank you, for a start to a fascinating, interesting and sometimes challenging career. Overall, I am blessed."

As for me, I remember Jon as a whirling dervish of ideas who was willing to spend whatever it took and work as hard as he could to keep KCRA in the leadership position it still holds today.

The Legends

Membership as of July 30, 2020

Jerry Agresti • Bob Aldrich
 John Archer • Julie Archer
 Jay "DJ Jay" Arnold • Stan Atkinson
 Linda Bayley • Vic Biondi
 Bill Bishofberger • Thomas Blazowski
 Matias Bombal • Mel Boyd • Jim Brewer
 Tom Buck • Dick Cable
 Allen Chamberlin • Don Chandler
 Mark Chiolis • Chris Cochran • Chris Davis
 Jim Drennan • Mike Duncan • Claire Elliott
 Rick Eytcheson • Anita Fein • Curt Foley
 Vicki Fox • Bill George • Gary Gerould
 Dennis Grayson • Cyndy Green
 Michael Guiliano • Kristine Hanson
 Bud Harmon • Fred Harris • Jerry Henry
 Betsy Hite • Tom Hughes • Rich Ibarra
 Steve Jackson • John Jervis • Rick Kavooras
 Richard Kermickel • Tip Kindel
 Jan "Neely" Klevan • Kim Kline
 Ward Koppel • Bill Kreutzer • Bud Kress
 Joyce Krieg • Eleanor Kuechler-VanAcker
 Bob Lang • Dick Leeson • Dee McCafferty
 Michael McCarron • Jeanne Marie
 Lizette Martinez-Hopkins • Michael Messmer
 Dana Michaels • Ron Middlekauff
 Bob Miller • Alan Milner • Joyce Mitchell
 Mike Montgomery • Keith Moon
 Ray Nelson • George Nyberg
 John D. O'Brien • Deborah Pacyna
 Sue Peppers • Mary Jane Popp
 Tiffany Powell • Craig Prosser
 Rich Raymond • Rick Reed • Bruce Riggs
 Jay Rudin • Beth Ruyak • Bill Schmechel
 Walt Shaw • Becky Shephard • Dann Shively
 Ken Shuper • Barbara Souza
 Charles Starzynski • Roy Stearns
 Barry Stigers • Bill Storm • Bob Suffel
 Steve Swatt • Gregory VanAcker
 Bob Venditti • Gregory Virtue
 Tom Wagner • Frank Wallace • Marla Wells
 Dave Williams • Dennis Yoder • Jan Young

Final notice! Have you paid your dues for 2020? If not, please do so now or this will be your last VBL newsletter.



Life on Lock-down: Staying Connected

by **Bob Lang**

“New normal?” Man, do I hate that expression!

For me, the tough part about dealing with the coronavirus is the isolation. Some people have family and children. I’m alone, have been for more than two years. That’s been hard to get used to all by itself, but recently there have been days when I haven’t even seen another person!

To help combat that feeling of isolation, I’ve been reaching out, usually by text, to people who for some reason I haven’t communicated with in a while just to tag up and say that I’ve been thinking about them. It’s nice to reconnect, but falls short of the real deal. I mean, there’s nothing more calming and pleasant than sitting on the patio with a cocktail at dusk, but it’d be a lot nicer to share that experience.

So, I’ve discovered an alternative. I am a member of the Renaissance Society and for years I’ve been leading a music appreciation class at CSUS called Real Rock ‘n’ Roll, complete with recordings, videos, and backstories. Then the pandemic hit and classes for the spring semester were abruptly curtailed,



leaving us all with a terrible social void. Along came Zoom, an online platform allowing some of us to resume leading our sessions. Twice a week, I conduct virtual meetings with class members and play music for them. It’s almost like being a disc jockey again, but with video—not quite television, almost radio! For me, sort of full-circle!

Then I got the idea to organize virtual family gatherings, again using Zoom. My dad’s side of the family reside all over the West Coast; my mom’s side are scattered around the East. And my step-kids and their families are also all over the country. We’ve put the word out and invited the various generations for face-to-face interactions via computer and cell phone. Some of these shirt-tail cousins I’ve never even met until now. It’s been wonderful!

If anyone were to ask, that would be my suggestion: stay connected! Avoid the isolation. Figure out how to remain social and be safe at the same time. More than that, try not to be defined by a “new normal!”

VBL Boutique



VBL’s new online swag store is now live, thanks to Legend **Bud Kress**. Shop for t-shirts, mugs, mousepads—even face masks! Bud tells us, “There is no mark-up and the quality is *very* good.” If that’s not enough incentive to check it out, there’s a 15 percent discount for the first 15 days of the grand opening.

<https://shop.spreadshirt.com/vbl-boutique/>



Country Maid, Revisited

Oops! The photograph we published in the July inewsletter of the demolition of the old Country Maid Creamery building, the one-time home of KCRA radio, should have credited **James Christian Scott** of Sacramento Public Library’s Sacramento Room. While our own **Jay Rudin** posted the image on Facebook, from which our newsletter editor snagged it, the actual photographer was Mr. Scott.



Meanwhile, Legend **Gregory Virtue** points out that KCRA was not the only radio station to occupy the second floor of the restaurant building at 10th and J Streets. After KCRA moved out, Top 40 powerhouse KROY moved in, staying until 1966, when the station moved to 977 Arden Way.

Many Sacramento Baby Boomers have fond memories of the Arden Way studio and its famous “jock window.” Imagine the excitement of peering through the glass and watching a real, live disc jockey spinning 45s and talking into a microphone. Times were simpler and thrills were cheaper back then, weren’t they!