

TV's 'Woman on the Beat' Broke Newsroom Barriers



Wanda Ramey interviews Ronald Reagan 1966; Bill Hillman, husband Richard Queirolo & Wanda at a *Broadcast Legends Luncheon*

By Stephen Miller, The Wall Street Journal

She was an experienced broadcaster when she took a job as one of the nation's first female local news anchors in 1959, yet **Wanda Ramey** was billed as KPIX-TV in San Francisco's "Girl on the Beat."

Ms. Ramey, who died Aug. 15 at the age of 85, had been on the air for more than a decade by the time *Noon News* had its debut. She specialized in reporting from the scene at a time when newscasts were conducted mostly from the studio. She rode along on a night police patrol in a high-crime zone, peered into the exotic haunts of a Beatnik from Greenwich Village, and reported on the construction of San Francisco's latest high-rise from inside the emerging building's skeleton.

Within a year Ms. Ramey's hard-news leanings led to a different slogan: "The Woman on the Beat."

"People sometimes mistook her soft manner and didn't notice that she had a steel back," says **Belva Davis**, a veteran Bay Area broadcaster who counts Ms. Ramey as a mentor.

On "Noon News," she was paired with a male anchor, **John Weston**.

"John led the newscasts with the biggest stories," Ms. Ramey told the San Francisco Chronicle in 1990. "In those days we didn't think of equality."

Earlier in her career, she worked at several Bay Area radio and television stations. Her reporting then was aimed primarily at homemakers, with features like "The Woman Behind the Man," in which she interviewed the wives of famous men.

Ms. Ramey was determined to be on the air from her student days at Indiana State Teacher's College, where she majored in radio while hosting a children's show called *Story Princess of the Music Box*. She moved to Oakland, California, after graduating in 1945, and was hired as an interviewer at radio station KROW.

There, Ms. Ramey was part of an illustrious broadcasting team that included **Rod McKuen**, **Art Linkletter** and **Ralph Edwards**, creator of *This Is Your Life*. Also employed at the station was a writer named **Phyllis Diller**. The two young women shared an office and became friends.

Ms. Diller says that when she started out as a stand-up comic, Ms. Ramey bought Ms. Diller a dress for her opening night at the Purple Onion, a local nightclub. "She went on her Sunday TV interview show and told viewers there was a new comic in town who would break all the records," Ms. Diller says. "She took a stack of records in her hand and broke them right there on the set."

On New Year's Eve of 1960, Ms. Ramey filmed a report about inmates at California's San Quentin State Prison. The story kicked off a lengthy relationship with the prison community. Ms. Ramey helped to create SQTV, a close-circuit network that still exists at the prison. Ms. Ramey and her husband, **Richard Queirolo**, a part-time cameraman, helped train inmates in production skills. Eventually dubbed an "honorary inmate" by some of the prisoners, she once brought Ms. Diller with her to San Quentin to perform stand-up comedy. The inmates presented Ms. Diller with a giant wooden "key to the prison."

"Ms. Ramey was especially interested in helping the inmates make movies about their experiences while incarcerated," recalls **Rick Cluchey**, a former San Quentin inmate. His play *The Cage*, a stark depiction of prison life, was filmed on cameras provided by Ms. Ramey and her husband and broadcast on public television shortly after Mr. Cluchey was released, in 1966. He subsequently toured the U.S. with a theatrical production of *The Cage* starring ex-convicts, and later became known for his productions of **Samuel Beckett** works.

Says Mr. Cluchey, "I don't know if people understand how important it is for people of substance to come to the disenfranchised and broken down."

Ms. Ramey left her anchor's post in 1967 to take a position with National Educational Television, the precursor to PBS. She worked in the 1970s as California correspondent for Voice of America.

"[It] was an innovation to have a woman as a straight-out newscaster," Ms. Ramey recalled of her early years at KPIX, in an interview recorded at the

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Wanda Ramey



Wanda receiving *Broadcast Legend of the year 2002*
Wanda with Jack & Elaine LaLanne

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University of San Francisco in 2000. It was natural for her to do hard news, she added, and not be "relegated to home hints and recipes."

Wanda Ramey was a member of the NATAS *Silver Circle*, class of 1989 and a active member of the Broadcast Legends. Wanda will be presented the AFTRA WIN award (Women's Image Now) in November. Her daughter **Kristi Steadman** will accept for her mother.

On the Move



Priya David, who left KTVU last year for CBS News, is returning to the West Coast to co-anchor a new 4 p.m. newscast on Portland CBS affiliate KOIN. David began reporting for CBS' *The Early Show* and weekend editions of the *CBS Evening*

News in April of last year after a three-year stint at KTVU.



Stacy Owen, news director at KXTV in Sacramento, has been hired by WLWT-TV, Cincinnati (Ch 5) to replace **Brennan Donnellan**, who left the station a month ago. Owen has been news director for three years in Sacramento. Before that, she spent 13 years at KRON-TV in

San Francisco as an assistant news director, executive producer and producer, and three years as news director.

Says **Richard Dyer**, Channel 5 president and general manager: "Stacy's career has been marked by high impact journalism, multi-media innovation and leadership through times of change."

At the Sacramento station, Owen "led the transformation from a traditional TV operation to a Multimedia Information Center, and launched a digital 24/7 weather and traffic station and calmoms.com," Dyer said.

Owen starts at WLWT Sept. 8. She is married and has a 4-year-old son.



KGPE CBS 47 hired **Evy Ramos**, who worked at KMPH 26, 2005-07, to co-host the local CBS affiliate's morning show. She replaces **Roopam Sidhu** who, after an extended leave, no longer works at the station. The first day on air for Ramos is Sept. 14.

"We are thrilled because she is a familiar face, a talented reporter and has been a morning anchor here and in San Diego," says **Linda Danna**, KGPE general manager.

When Ramos left KMPH in 2007, it resulted in then-owners Pappas Telecasting Inc. filing a lawsuit in Fresno County Superior Court that alleged breach of contract because Ramos left the station with one year remaining on her three-year contract. She notified KMPH management she was leaving because her husband was going back to school and had taken a job in San Diego. Ramos became a reporter with KGTV, the ABC affiliate in San Diego.

Danna says that lawsuit was settled and will have no affect on Ramos' return to the market. Ramos, a University of Southern California graduate, worked at the E! Entertainment cable channel as an associate producer before she made her first move to Fresno.

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