



National Trustee John Odell



Class of 2003

Silver Circle Profile
By: Kevin Wing



John Odell is a Bay Area television pioneer. His claim to fame is that he's nearly seen it all in the last four decades.

His other claim to fame – and an even rarer one at that – is that he appeared on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* back in the fall of 1963, a month before **President John F. Kennedy** was assassinated in Dallas, and television news as America knew it prior to then, would be changed forever with coverage of the tragedy.

Odell was a student at Columbia University back then, and was a member of the Columbia Pep Band. As a 38th-birthday surprise for **Johnny Carson**, the show's producers invited the band to the late-night program's then-New York City studios. And what a surprise it was for the "King of Late Night": the band marched right onto the stage during the middle of the show, much to the surprise of Carson. (In the photograph, that's the tall and lanky Odell on the left with the trombone, directly behind Carson.)



"I can tell people I once played trombone on the Johnny Carson show," says Odell, 48 years later.

For years, Odell has been deeply entrenched in the San Francisco Bay Area television industry, from his pioneering work at KPIX and KGO-TV to his leadership roles locally and nationally with the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

To recognize the significance of his contributions and achievements to Bay Area television, Odell was inducted into the *Silver Circle* of the San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, in 2003.

Odell grew up on Long Island in New York. After graduating from Garden City High School, he went to Columbia University. Graduating from there, the Navy came calling shortly after, and Odell would spend much of his time on aircraft carriers.

Originally, Odell thought he would enter the radio industry. Moving west, he attended San Diego State University. He also went to work for San Diego's KPBS-TV, which was owned by the university. In 1973, he received his first class FCC license. His first job? Operating the station's transmitter.

Odell would eventually earn a Masters degree in communications from San Diego State. That was 1974, a big year for him. Not only did he receive his degree, he moved to the Bay Area that year. And,



he also married his wife, **Gloria**. Nothing fancy, the couple exchanged wedding vows in traffic court at San Francisco City Hall.

"From there, it took me more than a year to get a job in television," Odell says.

"I took miscellaneous jobs to get us by, until those TV jobs started coming along," he recalls. At one time, he entered San Francisco politics, working as a volunteer campaigning for then-state **Sen. George Moscone**, who was running for mayor. Odell manned and supervised get-out-the-vote phone banks.

Finally, KPIX came calling, giving Odell his first TV job in San Francisco.

It was his job at KPBS in San Diego that helped him get the KPIX job.

"At KPBS, I operated Ampex 1000 and 1200 2" videotape recorders," he says. "I got the Channel 5 job because I knew how to operate those machines."

At KPIX, Odell worked the overnight shift as a videotape operator, airing reruns of the 1960s Western, *The Rifleman*, and black and white movies.

Odell would eventually advance to working with new technology, from 2-inch videotape machines to the first portable tape machines.

In 1976, KPIX started using 3/4" videotape with its debut of *Evening Magazine*, which aired weeknights from 7:30 to 8 p.m.

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The show was the result of the so-called “prime-time access rule,” to which the FCC forced ABC, CBS and NBC to relinquish the 7-8 p.m. time slot to local stations, a rule designed to encourage locally-produced programming.

Evening Magazine originally began as a studio show with hosts **Jan Yanehiro** and **Steve Fox**. But, as the show produced more segments with the hosts in the field, the studio segments were discontinued and the show was shot solely outside.

“I did a lot of different things for Channel 5 around that time,” Odell says. “I ended up doing two days in videotape, two days in master control and one day in maintenance.”

In 1978, at the station Christmas party, Odell struck up a conversation with *Evening* host Fox about the show and its segments. Before he knew it, Odell would begin working as a story editor on the show.

“Those were really long days,” Odell says. “But, I learned a helluva lot. After six months, I got burned out, and I wanted a life.”

In the fall of 1979, Odell went to work in Channel 5’s newsroom as a video editor.

He received his first Emmy® nomination in 1980, on a special report he edited for **Wendy Tokuda**, who was KPIX’s science reporter at the time.

Odell remained in the news department until 1982, ending up as supervising ENG crew chief.

“It wasn’t much fun,” Odell says. “I felt I wasn’t going anywhere. Beyond that, though, as crew chief, it was exciting to go on a couple of road trips when the Raiders and the 49ers went to their Super Bowls, back to back.”

The Oakland Raiders played in Super Bowl XV in New Orleans. The following year, the San Francisco 49ers went to Super Bowl XVI in Pontiac, Michigan.

After six years, Odell began to grow tired of KPIX, and a friend, **Lorne Morrison** – who was a cameraman at KPIX before leaving to work at cross-town rival KGO-TV – helped him get a job at Channel 7. In June of 1982, Odell joined KGO-TV, when it was located in the city’s seedy Tenderloin neighborhood.

“That station (on Golden Gate Avenue) was a pit,” Odell says, jokingly. “But, I was happy to be there.

During his years at KGO-TV, Odell wore several hats. Known mostly behind the scenes as an editor and writer, he was also a reporter in 1988 and 1989.

Through the years as a videotape editor, Odell would receive several Emmy® awards for his work, including an Emmy® statuette that he received in 1987 with anchor **Pete Wilson** for a feature story on the Blue Angels.

Odell also received Emmy® awards for best feature editing and best feature story.

In all, Odell earned six Emmy® statuettes at KGO-TV, and one with KPIX.

He, along with KGO-TV reporter **David Louie**, received a Los Angeles-area Emmy® for a series on Far East economics. The series also aired on KABC-TV in Los Angeles and KGTV in San Diego.

Odell left KGO-TV in 1994.

His involvement with the San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences began in 1983, when he was elected to the Board of Governors. In 1985, he wanted to run for re-election to the board, but then-chapter administrator **Jack Armstrong** forgot to put Odell’s name on the ballot. So, the board elected Odell the chapter secretary.

In 1988, Odell added national trustee to his duties with NATAS. Odell became chapter president in 1989 and served until 1992. He is very proud of the fact that he was the first craftsman to serve as president.

In addition to his work with the TV Academy, Odell also served 12 years as its representative on the San Francisco Ballot Simplification Committee – nine years as its chair.

After KGO-TV, Odell began a long association with City College of San Francisco. Having his masters degree from San Diego State University years before paid off, and Odell was able to teach broadcasting at the college. For the first five years, he was a part-time professor. Then, in 1999, and for the next seven years, Odell was full-time on campus.

Odell has also taught a studio production class at the College of San Mateo.

Although Odell retired from City College of San Francisco in 2006, he remains very involved with the local and national branches of NATAS.

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Besides attending the monthly board meetings for the local NATAS chapter, Odell travels all around the country in his role as a national trustee. Currently, as chair of the National Academy's rules committee, he is coordinating the updating of its by-laws. It's no easy task, but someone has to do it.

He and wife, Gloria, now married 37 years, live in San Francisco. They enjoy traveling.

"We try to take at least one major trip every year," Odell says. They have been to the Baltic Sea, Stockholm and Helsinki. Last year, they vacationed in China.

Odell is also an avid hawk watcher. He regularly surveys nesting raptors in the Bay Area. He is also a water bird docent on Alcatraz, keeping an eye on snowy egrets, California gulls and "several thousand nests."



Kevin Wing pens the Silver Circle and Gold Circle profiles for Off Camera. He is a two-time Emmy® Award-winning Bay Area journalist, currently with KNTV/NBC Bay Area in San Jose as a freelance news writer/producer. Reach him at kevinscottwing@gmail.com.

KTVN Sports Director Killed in Hit-and-Run

By Andrew Gauthier, TVSpy



Reno CBS-affiliate KTVN sports director **JK Metzker** died on Sunday, November 13th from injuries suffered in a hit-and-run accident.

Metzker, 41, was crossing the street following a University of Nevada football game Saturday night when he was struck by a vehicle that then fled the scene, according to

KTVN. Going on witness descriptions of the vehicle, police later arrested a 23-year-old man. Alcohol does appear to be a factor in the accident and police are awaiting results of blood tests.

"We are grief struck," KTVN general manager **Lawson Fox** said. "JK's commitment to his family was an example to every father and husband. His family is a delight. And JK's humor and storytelling ability were extraordinary. He is deeply missed."

KTVN resumed its regular newscasts on Monday after cancelling the local news on Sunday. KTVN ran a message at the top of the 5 o'clock hour from meteorologist **Mike Alger** who, calling it the "most difficult broadcast" of his career, announced that Metzker had died earlier that afternoon.

"Honestly, it's just too hard for any of us here at Channel 2 News to focus on the work that it takes to produce a newscast," Alger told viewers, saying that KTVN staffers were spending the day and night grieving.

The KTVN news team was back on the air Monday, with plenty of kleenex on-hand to wipe away tears. KTVN's anchors and reporters were visibly shaken by the loss of Metzker, who had been with the station for 14 years, as they tried to work their way through the day's newscasts.

The station ran a number of tributes to Metzker, a Reno native, including a group interview with his three young sons.

"Reno lost one of their own Sunday," KOLO sports director **Josh Little** wrote in a post on the station's website. "I cannot even illustrate how sad I am today. I always looked forward to seeing JK...he made trips to practice and games that much more enjoyable. He truly was one of the good guys...in a business and a world that quite frankly, there just isn't enough of. It's a HUGE loss for the community, for KTVN, for his viewers, his family and his friends."

Metzker is survived by his wife, **Jaimie**, and three young sons. A Facebook page has been set up for people to offer their condolences:

<http://www.facebook.com/metzkerfamily>

**The Board of Governors
of the
San Francisco/Northern California
Chapter
National Academy of Television Arts
and Sciences
wishes you and your family
a very
Happy Holidays**