

Dick Robertson is practically synonymous with the San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of The National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences as he is with the Bay Area television market.

He is a true television pioneer.

Robertson was one of the first employees to be hired at KTVU Channel 2 in Oakland, just before the station hit the airwaves as the Bay Area's first independent television station.

It was March of 1958, when Robertson was just 32 years old.



Robertson is also one of the first to work in promotions and public relations for a Bay Area television station. I guess we could say he wrote the book on how to promote a television station, and how to do it well.

He also worked later, for many years, at San Francisco's KRON Channel 4 and KQED Channel 9, before forming his own public relations agency, Mother Lode Communications.

Robertson has a long and storied history with this Chapter. He has served as its president, as well as vice president representing San Francisco. And, for many years, he was the Chapter's administrator.

Through the years, as you can see, he has kept himself busy with anything he has ever been involved with.

Today, Robertson is 89 (he will be 90 in March) and living in Medford, Oregon. While he is long retired from the business, that hasn't stopped him from being the board chairman of Southern Oregon Public Television for the last seven years.

Robertson, inducted into the Chapter's distinguished *Silver Circle* in 1988, was also honored with admission into the *Gold Circle*, in 2005, representing more than 50 years of professional contributions to the Bay Area and northern California television industry.

While he spent most of his life in the Bay Area, Robertson is actually not a native son. He grew up in Salt Lake City, attended the University of Utah before going into the service.

"I signed up for the Naval Air Corps," Robertson says. "I worked in the engineering department. I was stationed for three years in Hawaii, on Ford Island. That's where (World War II) started for the United States, on Dec. 7, 1941."

Robertson's main duties was to be in charge of inventory and bomb site maintenance.

After his three years in the service, Robertson used the G.I. Bill to return to the University of Utah. He attended the university's journalism school, earning the first Master's degree to any journalism student at the university. He later worked in the university's public relations office.

In 1950, television, which was burgeoning but still in its infancy, came calling. Robertson joined

KSL in 1950, working for both the television station and radio station.

Robertson stayed six years. Then, in 1956, he left for New York to become the advertising manager for a publication called Television Age.

While in New York, Robertson missed working in the business.

"Anytime I went to a TV station, I felt I should be on the other side of the desk," he recalls.

Then, he knew some people in the Bay Area who were trying to get a new television station launched. That was 1958, and the station was KTVU.

One thing led to another, and Robertson found himself relocating to the Bay Area to become one of the original employees of KTVU.

"Back then, the station was located in the old Paris Theater on Telegraph Avenue," Robertson says. "I was the station's first promotions manager."

But, while Robertson was one of the new station's first employees, his tenure there would ultimately be short-lived.

In 1959, he went to work in San Francisco at KRON. First, he was the station's merchandising manager.

"They made me a deal I couldn't pass up," Robertson says of KRON management.

"We used to put in-store displays in store, and the station got write-ups in all sorts of places."

Eventually, KRON's upper managers - **Harold See**, president of Chronicle Broadcasting, which owned KRON at the time, and **Al Constant**, the station's general manager - took notice. They asked Robertson to take over the station's promotions department.

It was a job that Robertson loved. He remained at KRON until 1977, when he decided to retire from the station.

At that time, Robertson and his then-wife, **Lanora**, decided to move from San Francisco to Walnut Creek. She was going to dental school at the time.



Launching a new TV station

Dick Robertson, left, and Al Helms, admire a copy of TV Guide featuring an advertisement about KTVU Channel 2, which had just launched. Spring 1958.

"We bought a house on a hill," Robertson says. "After we bought the house, Lanora got out of dental school. She really wanted to work for a university. She eventually landed a job as the head of dental services at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff."

Robertson wasn't sure what he would do in Arizona. He had some ideas - one was to purchase a radio station. Ultimately, he taught public relations and journalism at the university.

"I loved it," he says. "I loved getting the kids out there into jobs."

Though he was working in Arizona, Robertson found a way to split time between there and the Bay Area. He became a special adviser to KQED Channel 9; he would come back during summer break from the university to work in San Francisco.

Eventually, the Robertsons divorced.

From 1979 to 1982, Robertson was KQED's director of corporate communications. And then, he met **Rose**, who would eventually become his second wife, in 1981.

Leaving KQED in 1982, Robertson launched Mother Lode Communications.

As far as the Chapter was concerned, he became more involved with it as well. Serving as the Chapter's president from 1969 to 1971, Robertson already had quite a successful tenure with the Chapter. In 1989, he took over as chapter administrator, a position he would hold until 1996.

Dick and Rose were both very involved with the Chapter. While he served as administrator, Rose became editor of Off Camera.

In 1996, the Robertsons decided that they wanted a quieter life, so they moved from the Bay Area to Sonora.

After 22 years of marriage, Rose Robertson passed away in 2003.

By then, Lanora, Robertson's first wife, was single again. They decided to give marriage another try, and in 2004, became husband and wife again.

These days, the Robertsons love to travel.

"We've traveled all around the world, taking cruises," he says. "Our last cruise was to Australia and New Zealand. We've also been to the Mediterranean and to Alaska.

Besides traveling, the couple is also actively involved at their church in Medford.

Robertson has fond memories of his years in Bay Area television and with the Chapter.

"Those were glorious years," he says.

Next month in Gold & Silver Circle Profiles: Read all about **Lee Mendelson**, who has produced the *Peanuts* specials for network television for the last 50 years. Inducted into the *Silver Circle* in 1988, Mendelson will be inducted into the *Gold Circle* next month.

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