



ff Camera

November 2008

The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences

San Francisco/Northern California Chapter

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Advanced Media, Sacramento, Nov. 20

What is Advanced Media? You can be awarded an Emmy® statuette in four advanced media categories so this is a very important question. You'll get all the answers at Sacramento's first Advanced Media Seminar.

Topics to include: Internet Protocol Television (IPTV); Fiber Home & SureWest Technologies; Digital Workflows; The New Digital Stereoscopic (3D); Marketing Benefits of Blogs; Does Your Website Rock; and How Advanced Media Works with Television, Radio & Current News.

Speakers: **Bill Demuth**, Senior Vice President & Chief Technology Officer of SureWest Communications. The company's broadband unit offers Internet and digital video services to both business and residential customers in the Sacramento area.

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HD Expert Comes Clean Kim Aubry



By Keith Sanders

I love watching HD. Films are my favorite. But with so many delivery options, what is the best way to view HD? I didn't know the answer so I talked to an expert. His name is **Kim Aubry** and he owns and operates Zoetrope Aubry Productions (ZAP) in San Francisco. He's the

former Head of Post Production at American Zoetrope and a long-time **Francis Ford Coppola** collaborator.

Keith – "After February 17th everyone will be viewing a digital signal on TV. What's the best way to view films at your home in high definition?"

Kim - "I would say that it remains to be seen how the cable and satellite operators deal with

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NATAS Night at Wed.



Nov. 19

NATAS is going to take over **Presidio Bowl!** **Wednesday, November 19** from **7 to 9 pm!** Get ready to have some fun, unwind and meet your peers in the local industry over some food, drinks and bowling. If this catches on, we would like to form a bowling league. \$20 admission covers bowling shoes and three games per person. There is free parking. NATAS will provide snacks and soft drinks. Full meals and wine/beer are available for purchase. Located in the San Francisco Presidio at 93 Morgan, 94129. RSVP's are mandatory, please e-mail events@emmysf.tv or call (650) 341-7786.

Silver Circle Profile Stan Atkinson



By Kevin Wing

During the more than 45 years when Silver Circle member and three-time Emmy® award winner **Stan Atkinson** was a popular, well-known television anchor and reporter, one could say he was also a foreign correspondent of sorts — not for a network news division, but for some of the

local stations his work impacted during that time. Atkinson traveled regularly to the world's most turbulent, politically charged nations to bring a deeper insight to his local nightly newscasts. From Bosnia and Afghanistan to Somalia and El Salvador, he nearly did it all, risking life and limb to help viewers better understand what was going on in the world and how it was going to affect them.

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Stan Atkinson Still Active After 45 years



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The 76-year-old Atkinson is likely best known for his many years as the principal news anchor for KCRA in Sacramento. His newscasts on KCRA dominated the ratings so much that the combined ratings of the station's competitors couldn't even equal the numbers for Atkinson's newscasts.

It has been nine years since Atkinson retired from the television news business, leaving the anchor desk at KQVR in 1999. Five years before, he had jumped ship after spending 18 years

at crosstown rival KCRA. He'd also worked at KCRA early in his career. His many years in Sacramento, the Bay Area and Los Angeles made Atkinson a household name across the Golden State.

"I've had the most wonderful life and career," Atkinson said recently.

Atkinson's TV news career is legendary and nearly unprecedented. In the 1950s, after studying journalism at Pasadena City College and a U.S. Army tour of duty during the Korean War, he got into radio as an announcer and newsmen. But, Atkinson was destined for television. He started in Spokane in 1954. By 1957, he began working as an anchor at KCRA (his first of two tenures at that station). Staying until 1963, he took what turned out to be a temporary respite from TV news, leaving KCRA to move to Los Angeles to work on documentaries with the acclaimed producer, **David Wolper** (of *Roots* fame).

Atkinson produced and wrote three projects for Wolper, including TV specials about actress **Bette Davis** and crooner **Bing Crosby**. After a year and a half at Wolper, Atkinson partnered with a friend to form an independent production company. The irony of Atkinson's move to Hollywood in 1963 meant that, as fate would soon have it, he would have no involvement in covering one of the worst tragedies in American history: the assassination of President **John F. Kennedy** in November of that year.

"It felt strange to be watching the events unfold on TV, and not to have a part in covering it," he remembered.

Atkinson's production company didn't last. Unsatisfied by what they were doing, he and his partner closed up shop. "I missed daily news," he recalled. In 1964, Atkinson moved to the Bay Area to anchor at KTVU in Oakland, where he'd remain until 1967.



His experience at KTVU in the 1960s (he would return in the early 1970s) was "great." But, Atkinson added, the Bay Area didn't care much for news from KTVU at the time. "We were on at (what was considered then) this cockamamey hour of 10 p.m. We produced an excellent newscast, and we had interesting people reporting the news. But, it was the heyday for the affiliates and we got no respect." Eventually, Atkinson said, advertisers warmed up to KTVU's 10 p.m. news.

He remembered how interesting it was to anchor on Friday evenings. The KTVU newscast followed wrestling throughout the 1960s. "The wrestling was live in the studio every Friday night. We'd go into the men's room before the show to put makeup on. By then, all the sweaty bodies, using the same restroom to take showers in, had steamed it up like a sauna. Made it impossible to get the makeup on without a layer of your own sweat underneath."

Leaving KTVU, he was offered a Ford Fellowship (known today as the John S. Knight Fellowship) at Stanford University. Atkinson wanted to develop a skill as an environmental reporter. At that time, there was only one TV environmental reporter in the country. In 1969, Atkinson headed south to Burbank, where he was hired as KNBC's environmental reporter and weekend anchor. But, destiny had something else in mind. His beat would dramatically change with the murders of actress **Sharon Tate** and the **La Bianca** family, a crime that terrorized Los Angeles. Soon after, authorities arrested **Charles Manson** and, for the next 16 months, Atkinson covered Manson's and his "Family's" murder trial.

"There was craziness in the courtroom," Atkinson recalled. "It was just absolute weirdness, punctuated by much drudgery."

"It was a fascinating time for me. Working at KNBC became my greening years as a television reporter and as an anchor, too. Professionalism at KNBC was very high. I was working with a lot of immensely talented people. (**Tom**) **Brokaw** was there, as well as **Tom Snyder** and **Bob Abernathy**."

After KNBC, Atkinson returned to northern California, becoming one of the founding partners of KFTY Channel 50 in Santa Rosa. Atkinson had always loved

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northern California's Wine Country. A colleague at KNBC pitched the idea to launch a station. They raised money with limited partnerships and a "stellar list" of local investors, got the FCC to grant a license, and in 1973, KFTY took to the airwaves.

"The first few moments when Channel 50 signed on the air were very eventful," Atkinson said. "The booth op read the sign-on, the first show came up with no color. He hollered out to the control room, 'There ain't no f—king color!' All those wonderful families watching experienced the pain of that moment, as did we! It was a most auspicious beginning."

Starting up KFTY and keeping it on the air came at a time when the nation was in the midst of a "huge recession," Atkinson said. A year after signing on, KFTY went dark.

"It was one of the saddest experiences of my life," Atkinson said. "We had taught 35 staffers TV. It was really hard to tell them that we were going dark. That was a real downer. I never thought I'd go back into TV again."

After KFTY came to an end (it returned in 1981 with new owners), Atkinson taught a summer graduate journalism program at Stanford. By then in his early 40s, the Stanford experience turned Atkinson around. The failure of KFTY went through his mind constantly. "If you run a business and then have to say goodbye to 35 wonderful people, you take it seriously. But, during those eight weeks of teaching at Stanford, I started to think where I'd been in life and where I was, re-examining my life. I credit the loss of and aftermath of KFTY and then teaching at Stanford in that summer program with getting my head straight and getting on with my life."

Atkinson became a casual reporter at KGO-TV in San Francisco, hoping to get on full-time. That's when KTVU came calling again for a second anchoring stint. During his time at KTVU, he landed the first one-on-one interview with Manson, who, by then, was imprisoned at San Quentin. "Charlie remembered



me from L.A.," Atkinson recalled. "His mind was a jumble. The interview reflected that madness."

Fred Zehnder, KTVU's news director from 1978 to 1999, was working his first stint at the station as assistant news director and assignment editor when Atkinson rejoined it in 1973.

"Stan was a real gentleman, just terrific to work with," Zehnder said. "He had strong standards about news, and he did some really groundbreaking things while at Channel 2. He loved to do documentaries. He was a great anchor and reporter, and a dream to work with."

In 1976, Atkinson returned to KCRA. His legacy in Sacramento was about to take off. For 18 years, Atkinson, his co-anchors and the news team ruled the Sacramento airwaves, and he established his newscast tease trademark line, "We have news for you... next," as he folded a single copy of script. He also established his closing line at the end of his 11 p.m. broadcasts — "Sleep well, and have a good tomorrow."

KCRA's principal anchor shared the news desk with many. But, Atkinson also wanted to get out from behind the anchor desk to cover foreign stories. He eventually would travel to 18 countries-in-crisis, in 31 assignments.

"(The KCRA years were) really terrific because of all of the foreign assignments I got to do," Atkinson said. "For me, that was the best part of my career, the most memorable."

Atkinson's war stories include being chased down by a Soviet helicopter gunship in Afghanistan (he was there in 1982 and 1985), and being held up and robbed by leftist guerrillas in El Salvador. While covering a story in Cambodia, he was shot at. Atkinson also reported from Baghdad just before Operation Desert Storm began, and later, from Kuwait, a month after it was liberated. In the early 1990s, he covered the collapse of a nation into anarchy in his reports from Somalia, right after the downing of two U.S. Blackhawk helicopters and the

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resultant withdrawal of American forces. He has slipped across Marxist-controlled borders with resistance fighters to produce documentaries in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia and Central America. Atkinson also covered the remarkable transition of South Africa. He also has a long history with Vietnam. He was there twice in the early 1960s.

KTVU News Director **Ed Chapuis** worked with Atkinson from the late 1980s to the mid 1990s as KCRA's special projects producer. Chapuis was field producer on three of Atkinson's trips abroad, working closely with him in Baghdad, Kuwait and Mogadishu.

"Stan was, for all the places we went to, incredibly calm," Chapuis said. "He was always thinking three steps ahead. Every time Stan did a trip (to a foreign country), he always found great ways to tie it back to northern California. We sought out to find the local soldiers. You really have to have strong connections to make that work," recalling the numerous times when Sacramento-area soldiers would recognize Atkinson from seeing him on television back home.

By the mid-1990s, KCRA "started pinching pennies", and Atkinson was told there would be no more foreign assignments. Feeling as if he'd done all that he could at KCRA, Atkinson, in 1994, dropped a Sacramento bombshell: he was resigning from KCRA, and leaving for rival KQVR.

It was a year of change and tragedy for Atkinson, devastated with the sudden, unexpected death of his son, Lance, at age 34. Atkinson also has three sons and a daughter, two grown stepchildren and 14 grandchildren.

He remained at KQVR for five years, retiring in 1999 after an illustrious television career.

"I've had great anchor partners throughout my career," Atkinson said. "Every one of them was a gem. I was really blessed in that regard. They all helped to make my career the way it turned out, in a substantial way."

Atkinson has been busy since his retirement from TV. He does media and conducts seminars for California Reverse Mortgage, traveling to cities throughout northern California to help senior citizens understand the benefits of reverse mortgages. He also serves as a TV spokesperson for American Home

Makeovers, which distributes "walk-in" bathtubs for seniors who desire to be more independent in their later years.

He has never forgotten his roots. Atkinson, who still lives in Sacramento with wife **Kristen**, is active as ever in community service. In fact, his Stan Atkinson Foundation helped to fund 'River Cats Independence Field', a multi-use sports and recreation facility in Sacramento that's designed for disabled youth and adults. Atkinson has raised more than \$8 million for Sacramento-area agencies and charities. He's been honored many times for his philanthropy; most recently on Nov. 5 — National Philanthropy Day. All of Sacramento's numerous non-profit and charitable organizations got together to award him the 'Lifetime Achievement Award.'

"The community has always been so good to my family and me," he said. "I can't do enough to repay that."

"I've really been lucky in so many ways," he said. "To stay active, even now, is so terrific. Right now, as a senior myself, I love the freelancing and the chance to make other seniors aware of options that can improve their lives. But for the death of Lance, my life has been blessed!"



*Bay Area television journalist **Kevin Wing** pens Off Camera profiles on Silver Circle and Gold Circle members. He's a casual network field producer for ABC News, covering the Bay Area and northern California for Good Morning America and ABC World News.*

Silver Circle
25 years



Gold Circle
50 years

To submit a name for consideration for induction into The Gold or Silver Circle download forms from the NATAS website at www.emmysf.tv and click on Gold or Silver Circle. Forms are due by April 15, 2009.