

Silver Circle Profile Fred LaCosse



Class of 1988

Silver Circle Profile
By: Kevin Wing



There are few people in Bay Area television who have done it all in the broadcasting business. **Fred LaCosse** is one of them.

As well-known as he is to viewers in the Bay Area, his multiple talents are known just as well to colleagues he has worked with during his career.

LaCosse's contributions to the San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences were recognized in 1988, when he was inducted into the Chapter's *Silver Circle*.

The Emmy® Award-winning LaCosse says his interest in broadcasting began back in the summer of 1941, in his hometown of South Bend, Indiana. He was seven years old, World War II had begun abroad and the United States was just months away from entering the conflict.

"I used to listen to the radio with my family," LaCosse says. "World War II was going on, and we followed the War carefully. We would have dinner at 6. Then, precisely at 6:30, we would move into the living room just in time to hear **Edward R. Murrow's** opening line "This...is London."

Murrow became LaCosse's idol. "He grounded my interest in broadcast communications," he explains. Little did he realize then that he would one day move to the Bay Area to launch a television career that would last more than four decades.

LaCosse was 11 years old when World War II ended in 1945. He vividly recalls the celebration in downtown South Bend. "People were dancing in the streets," LaCosse recalls.

By the time he was a senior in high school, his interest in broadcasting remained strong. However, he decided to pursue a liberal arts education to broaden his understanding of history and the world in the early 1950s.

He graduated with a baccalaureate degree in liberal arts from Wabash College, an all-men's school in Crawfordsville, Indiana, and received his masters in broadcasting at Northwestern University. He launched his career in 1956 at Chicago's WTTW (Window to the World) as a dollar-an-hour floor director.

"I learned how to put up sets, handle studio lighting and, as a floor director, learned directing skills via my headset, listening to cues from a variety of veteran directors. That was a great experience."

After a year and a half at WTTW, LaCosse was ready to explore new opportunities. He embarked on a vigorous letter-writing campaign.

"I wrote letters to TV stations and set up meetings with whomever would give me five minutes. I visited managers or program directors at 28 stations in five Midwest states over a period of two weeks. A fascinating experience, but no job offer."

Finally, a week after returning home to his Chicago apartment, LaCosse got a phone call from **Jack Launer**, program director at WLWC, the Crosley Broadcasting TV station in Columbus, Ohio, offering him the job of studio supervisor. He took it.

Unfortunately, the job lasted only three months. LaCosse had used up his draft deferment during six years of college. Now he was out of school, working and very eligible for the draft.

His first wife, **Mariette**, was pregnant with their first son, **Kevin**. They spent two years at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, living in a mobile home.

After his stint in the Army, LaCosse and his little family returned to South Bend, and stayed with his parents for three weeks.

In December 1959, LaCosse received a call once again from Launer, who had moved from Columbus to San Jose. He was now KNTV's program director.

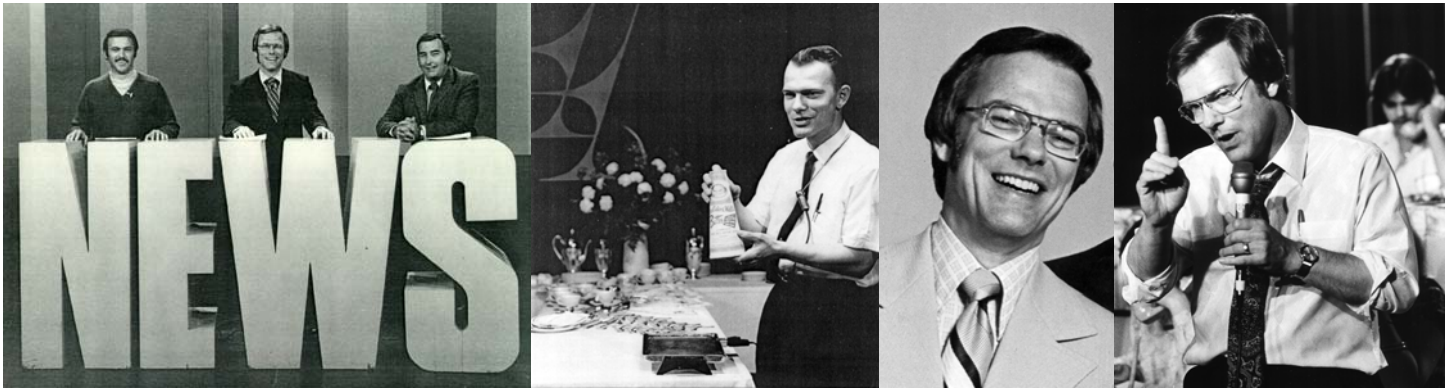
"Jack said, 'We have a job as a floor director here. One of the guys just left. It pays two bucks an hour.'"

The first week of January, 1960, LaCosse packed up and took his family to California.

Shortly thereafter, son number two, **Ken**, was born in San Jose.

"I floor directed for two years, but I wanted to become a director. To become a director in those days, you had to also become an announcer, so I studied announcing from the head of the vocal music department at San Jose State," he explains. "I eventually became an announcer/director. That was

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December of 1961. A couple of years later, I became the station's production manager." On the side, LaCosse also directed independent films.

In 1965, Fred left KNTV to join Darien, Russell and Hill Advertising, a firm which wrote and produced radio and TV commercials for its wide variety of clients in San Jose, where business was booming. **Frank Darien, Earle Russell** and **Danny Hill** owned the firm.

"We used the successful "AIDA" formula for creating our broadcast spots. I had learned it at Northwestern: Attention, Interest, Demonstration and Action. Using this simple, but effective formula, I could grind out a radio or TV spot in a half hour."

In 1969, the firm made LaCosse a partner. It was that same year that he had a conversation with **Bob Hosfeldt** (SC 1986), KNTV's general manager at that time. Hosfeldt hired LaCosse back, and at age 35, Fred's television career was on its way for a second round.

In addition to anchoring KNTV's newscasts, LaCosse was also the station's news director, overseeing 22 people in the news department.

"We were still using film for most of our news stories, and we had to send the film to a film processor in Sunnyvale. Very time consuming."

The use of film, and all the complexities which came with it, such as processing, developing, editing and putting it on the air, was frustrating at times, LaCosse says.

He remembers the November 1970 election, in particular, and the visit to San Jose by President **Richard Nixon**, who was in the South Bay to campaign for **George Murphy** who was running for reelection to his U.S. Senate seat.

"Nixon was at the Civic Auditorium. It was the Friday night before the election the following week," LaCosse says. "By the time we processed and edited the film of Nixon, we got 20 seconds of a clip of him on during the last segment of the newscast."

LaCosse had no choice but to be multi-talented when it came to wearing three hats at KNTV – news director, anchor and producer. It was always a balancing act.

"I came in around 11 in the morning to play news director, dealing with the general manager and

working on the news department budget. At two or so I was off to the newsroom to produce the 6 p.m. newscast which I co-anchored with **Don Hayward**. We'd go out and get dinner after the early newscast and return to the newsroom no later than 8. Then I would start producing and co-writing the 11 p.m. newscast. Fortunately, Don was a great writer. He knew how to keep it concise and simple."

In late 1972, LaCosse received a "wonderful offer" from KGO-TV news director **Pat Palillo**.

"He brought me up (to KGO-TV) to audition for their weekend news," LaCosse says. "I auditioned by myself. Then, they brought in **Fred Van Amburg** (SC 1988), and then **Jerry Jensen**. It was the most thorough audition I'd ever participated in. I was offered the job."

But, LaCosse had to turn down the offer. He was living in San Jose and had just purchased a home in the Almaden Valley. KNTV was also paying him quite well for his multitasking as news director/anchor/producer.

San Francisco came knocking again the following year. This time, it was KRON news director **Jim Reiman**.

"He invited me to audition. I went up to San Francisco. The audition was long, included lots of copy to read, plenty of prompter and some ad-libbing. **Al Constant** (SC 1988) (the station's Vice President and General Manager) offered me a job."

LaCosse accepted KRON's offer to anchor the station's 6 PM and 11 PM *NewsWatch* newscasts Monday through Friday, joining weather reporter **Jack McKenna** and sports anchor **Eddie Alexander**.

LaCosse had this one request of his new GM.

"I knew that it always took time for new anchor teams to gel with the public, so I asked the station for two-year contracts for each of us to maintain presence. They guaranteed it. However, 18 months later, **Alexander** got an offer from ABC-TV Los Angeles and was able to negotiate his way out of his two-year deal with KRON-TV. Famed NFL quarterback, **John Brodie**, took his place.

Eventually, LaCosse was joined at the anchor desk by **George Reading**, and later by **Kirstie Wilde**.

The station was doing all it could in the 1970s to establish dominance over perennially top-rated KGO-

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TV. They made some changes, including hiring **John Hambrick** to anchor the San Francisco desk and moving LaCosse to its South Bay Bureau. Soon after, LaCosse was assigned to co-anchor the midday newscasts with **Liz Walker**.

LaCosse remained at KRON until 1980. But, it was during his tenure there that he met his future second wife, **Terry Lowry** (*SC 1996*). She had been at KRON since 1970, doing everything from being a “weather girl” on the station’s weekend newscasts to reporting and anchoring news.

“I remember sitting in the KNTV newsroom with some of my colleagues watching her do the weather in a mini-skirt,” LaCosse says, laughing.

For five years, they were just colleagues and friends, occasionally going out to lunch together.

Then, in 1978, LaCosse and Lowry went on their first date.

She says they were very discreet at the station when it came to their dating one another.

“When we decided to get married, we knew we had to tell KRON management,” Lowry adds. “So, Fred met with our general manager, **Paul Wischmeyer**, and broke the news that we were engaged and planned to get married. Essentially, Fred asked our boss for my hand in marriage.” Happily, Wischmeyer gave us his blessing.”

On Sept. 29, 1979, Fred and Terry were married at the First Unitarian Church, located behind KRON.

In 1980, several unions, including AFTRA that represented on-air talent and reporters at KRON, went on strike. Management personnel, most of whom had never been on the air before, replaced them. The strike lasted nine weeks.

Lowry and LaCosse left KRON in December of 1980. LaCosse established LaCosse Productions, which produced corporate videos, conducted communication training seminars and provided the LaCosses’ talent services. LaCosse would eventually conduct more than 2,000 seminars and workshops to assist corporate managers on how to handle interviews with the news media.

Meanwhile, Lowry was hired across town at KGO-TV as an anchor-reporter. In 1982, KGO-TV decided it was time for a change with its mid-morning talk-show, *AM San Francisco*. Lowry was slated to move from the newsroom to co-host the

program. But, who would co-host with her? LaCosse’s name came up, and an on-screen husband-and-wife team at KGO-TV was born.

LaCosse accepted the offer on the condition that he could leave the station at noon each day to tend to his business for the remainder of the day.

The couple worked out an effective way to plan for each day’s show. The producers delivered notes and materials to their home by bedtime the evening before. The next morning, LaCosse would rise at 4 a.m., delicately wake up Lowry, and the two of them would study the notes for that day’s show for the next two hours – LaCosse at the second floor dining table; Lowry in her third floor office.

The LaCosse-Lowry team had a successful five-year run on *AM San Francisco* until 1987, following the sale of ABC-TV to Capital Cities.

LaCosse expanded his production company, and Lowry moved on to host a show at KGO Radio and co-anchor *2 At Noon* with **Eric Greene** at KTVU.

In the 1990s, LaCosse hosted *Silicon Valley Business This Week* on KICU-TV. The show remained on the air until 2002.

Throughout their 32-year marriage, LaCosse and Lowry have enjoyed traveling to various parts of Europe, China and Turkey. They are hoping to eventually visit Egypt, Australia, New Zealand and experience an African safari.

In the meantime, LaCosse remains busy in ‘retirement.’ He has created a one-man show called “Your American Freedoms: Protect Them or Lose Them.” He carries on conversations with many of America’s Founding Fathers to tell audiences about the creation of America in the late 18th century and the responsibilities that all Americans have to participate in our democratic republic. His audiences vary from students to service clubs to senior citizens’ groups.

Like Lowry, LaCosse has devoted much of his time over the years to charitable and community organizations, including The Salvation Army, Laguna Honda Hospital, The Pomeroy Center (formerly the Recreation Center for the Disabled) The American Heart Association, the Muscular Dystrophy Association, the Easter Seal Society, San Jose Jaycees, West San Jose Rotary and San Francisco Rotary, to

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On the Move

Congratulations to **Jan Blair Hardee** who's been named Morning EP for KNTV, the NBC O & O in San Jose. Jan's been working as a freelance producer for KPIX-TV in San Francisco, and has also been an EP at KDVR-TV in Denver. She's also worked in Boston, Miami, Jacksonville, FL, and Gainesville, FL.



Jan Blair Hardee

KXTV 10 Sacramento Vice President of News **Tim Geraghty** is leaving this Gannett owned ABC affiliate after almost three years. He's moving to Florida (where his daughter will start college this fall) to be Senior Director of News for Central Florida News 13. It's a return to Florida for Tim, who earlier in his career was News Director for WTVJ-TV in Miami. He's also been a ND in Grand Rapids, MI, and has worked in Kansas City, Kalamazoo, MI, Decatur, IL, and Columbia, MO. Tim replaces **Steve Chaverie** who retired last November after ten years as ND.



Tim Geraghty

News director **Genie Garner** has left KITV, the ABC-affiliate in Honolulu. Garner will be "seeking future opportunities on the mainland," KITV president and general manager **Andrew Jackson** told the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*. Her last day was Friday, February 17.



Genie Garner

Garner joined the station in 2009 from WHAS, the ABC-affiliate in Louisville. Jackson said **Chuck Parker**, the managing editor of KITV, will be "taking a leadership role" until Garner's replacement is named.

KRON 4 Master Control - As of 11:05 a.m. on Tuesday, February 21, 2012 the Master Control room of KRON Channel 4 San Francisco is now located in Atlanta, Georgia. Live KRON 4 News is still run out of the 1001 Van Ness Studios in San Francisco. The Van Ness address has a "For Sale" in front, KRON is looking for a new location in the city.



name a few.

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LaCosse is also very involved with the NATAS San Francisco/Northern California Chapter. Among other things, he and Lowry have served as the backstage announcers for the annual regional Emmy® Awards for many years.

"In 1956, television was a baby," he adds. "So, all of us in the business were really devoted to this new medium called television. We were there to inform, educate and entertain the American public, and we did it responsibly.

I was lucky to participate in some of the major news events of the second half of the 20th century."

LaCosse co-hosted a special newscast the day that President **John F. Kennedy** was assassinated; produced coverage of **Cesar Chavez** and his United Farm Workers in the Salinas Valley; anchored the **Patty Hearst** kidnapping story; conducted a special one-hour interview with Vice President **Gerald Ford** three months before he became president; anchored a special live one-hour report the day of the assassinations of San Francisco Mayor **George Moscone** and Supervisor **Harvey Milk**; edited and aired the first video of the Jonestown massacre; and anchored a weekly report documenting the dramatic expansion of high-tech in Silicon Valley.

As LaCosse puts it: "I consider myself to have been extremely lucky in this business. Those were the good years for me - 1956 to 2002."

Silver Circle Class of 1988



(front row) **Don Curran***, **David Sacks***, **Vern Louden***, **Nick Hamel**, **Dick Robertson**, **Dick Weise**, **George Lum**, **Jack Armstrong**, **Ian Zellick***, **Les Avery***, (back row) **Fred LaCosse**, **Shelly Fay***, **Dave McElhatton***, **Fred Van Amberg**, **Mel Querio***, **Aldo Constant***, **Nancy Besst***, **Bob Foster***, **Harry Martin***, **Stew Park**, **Bill Osterhaus**, (not pictured) **Ray Jacobs***, **Jon Kelly**, **Claud Mann***, **Lee Mendelson**, **Gordon Waldear*** (*deceased)