

New State Of The Art Studio For KUVS



All Smiles In New Studio

The staff of KUVS Univision 19 Celebrate The Debut Of Their New News Studio.

Sacramento's KUVS Univision 19 has unveiled a new state-of-the-art, high-definition studio and newsroom, including new outdoor building signage with the redesigned Univision UniMas logos.

The newly-remodeled facilities is the new home of *Noticias 19*, the station's 6 and 11 p.m. newscasts and *A Primera Hora*, its morning program.

The new studio features a LED lighting system and top-of-the-line visual background monitors, new equipment, graphics, and an advanced weather forecast system.

Gold & Silver Circle Profiles



GOLD & SILVER CIRCLE PROFILES

by Kevin Wing





For 36 years, **Don McCuaig** was among the very best, most talented photographers to work in the Bay Area television market.

McCuaig not only has had the longevity of working in the business to prove it, he has numerous Emmy awards and other honors to show for it, along with a wealth of colorful memories, especially from his many years at KTVU Channel 2 in Oakland.

McCuaig, inducted into the *Silver Circle* of the San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in 2002, worked at KTVU from 1970 until his retirement in 2006. Ask him what he's done throughout his career, and he'll tell you a few things at best. He's being modest. He has done it all. And then some.

You might say McCuaig was destined for a life in television in one form or another. Born June 19, 1944, in Los Angeles (just three blocks from the MGM Studios lot), McCuaig grew up when television was in its infancy. In fact, the McCuaig family was the first on the block to own a television set. Back in those days, the television broadcast day didn't begin until 3 p.m. each day.

"All the kids would come over and I'd set up the dining room, turning it into a theater," McCuaig says. "For a kid, it was an exciting time."

McCuaig's father, Don, sold cars, but cars weren't selling very well in Los Angeles in the early 1950s. So, in 1953, the McCuaigs packed up and moved to the Bay Area, settling in Mill Valley. Eventually, the family would relocate to Larkspur, and later, Novato.

The younger McCuaig aspired to be an architect at the time, attending the College of Marin.

"I'd been going there for two years, and I was ready to go to Cal Poly (in San Luis Obispo) to continue my studies," McCuaig says. "But then, I started having second thoughts about being an architect. I knew it wasn't going to be something I wanted to do for the rest of my life."

Instead of attending college in San Luis Obispo, McCuaig got a job as a telephone installer for Pacific Telephone (today's Pac Bell) in 1965. Then, he got a letter from the federal government.

McCuaig was about to be drafted. It was the Vietnam era.

He ended up going to Fort Ord. "Every morning, I'd get up and look at the headlines, and more GIs were going to Vietnam," McCuaig says. But he never had to go. Instead, he was "shipped" - to Sausalito.

Being back in the Bay Area, McCuaig would eventually go to work for a brokerage house on Taylor Street in San Francisco. Across the street from there was KBHK-TV Channel 44.

By now, you already know where this is going.

"I started hanging around there, and finally, the front desk guy introduced me to **George Dakin**, the head film editor there," McCuaig recalls. "So George invites me in and gives me a little tour."

Dakin told McCuaig that the station had just fired one of its editors, and asked him if he'd like a tryout. McCuaig was given two weeks to make it work, and he did.

McCuaig, 25 years old at that time, got wind of a film editor opening at KTVU. He applied, and in January of 1970, he started working there.

"I spliced and edited cartoon reels and commercials, eventually got promoted to edit syndicated shows," he says.

His fate was about to change at KTVU. A news editor there had died in a car accident, and McCuaig went to work in the news department, eventually becoming head news editor.

By the mid-1970s, McCuaig moved from the editing room to the field. He became a cameraman.

"I got a news car, a camera, all of this stuff. How could I complain? At that time, Channel 2 was No. 4 out of four Bay Area stations doing news, so we could do anything and take chances, because no one was watching," he says.

McCuaig, of course, saw first-hand all of the technological advances in television during his career at KTVU.

"I hated 3/4-inch tape when it came out," he says. "It was a giant step backwards. The pictures looked like crap compared to film. By that time, though, almost everyone was shooting on tape. We were still shooting on film, especially our news specials."

But, change was inevitable

The rest of the 1970s was a volatile period in the Bay Area, and McCuaig had a front row seat for most of it, from the **Patty Hearst** kidnapping and the Jonestown massacre to the assassinations of San Francisco Mayor **George Moscone** and Supervisor **Harvey Milk**.

"I was with **Rita (Williams)** when all of that happened," McCuaig recalls. "And when the verdict for (suspect, Supervisor) **Dan White** came down, the city went crazy. We drove up to City Hall, and police cars were on fire. We drove down to Castro Street, and people were throwing rocks at us. It was just an incredible mess."

By the early- to mid-1980s, KTVU was growing tired of being in last place in the ratings. News Director **Fred Zehnder** had been at the helm for several years at that point, and under his guidance, the station's news product was gaining respect for its excellence in comprehensive, complete news reporting. But, McCuaig and his co-workers sensed a change was in the air when a new general manager by the name of **Kevin O'Brien** was hired, in 1986.

"Kevin came in, and said, 'If you're with me, we're gonna be No. 1'," McCuaig recalls.

The Oakland station, situated at Jack London Square, began to change to become a serious challenger to the "big three" San Francisco stations. Zehnder was allowed to thrive, too, and under his direction, the station's news department gained more respect than it had ever had.

"Finally, the other guys (the San Francisco stations) weren't laughing at us anymore," McCuaig says.

"Fred was great. I love Fred Zehnder," McCuaig says of the station's legendary news director, who led the news team for an unprecedented 21 years, from 1978 until his retirement in 1999.

"Fred was a different type of news director, but he got the job done and he was always respected by the people in his newsroom," he says. "You could walk into Fred's office and sit

down and tell him about a story idea, and chat with him about it for 45 minutes. It was wonderful."

From the late 1980s on, KTVU's fortunes began to change. Its 10 p.m. news ratings soared to double digits, trouncing prime-time network programming on the three San Francisco stations. And station management, from O'Brien to Zehnder, spent a lot of money to make it happen. The station covered everything, even sending McCuaig and his colleagues to news stories that were happening outside of the Bay Area.

"If there was a story going on in France that had a Bay Area connection, we'd drop everything and go to France," McCuaig says. "It was amazing."

In 1992, McCuaig and reporter **Faith Fancher** were sent to Los Angeles to cover the riots there following the court verdict of the Los Angeles Police Department in the **Rodney King** beating case.

"I still remember seeing Army trucks filled with GIs, going up and down the street. It was like something you'd see in, say, South America," McCuaig says. "It was crazy."

McCuaig also went to cover the riots in Miami with reporter **Gary Kauf**. It was another hotbed of turbulence and turmoil.

McCuaig was the station's photographer when it came to news specials, traveling across the nation and around the world. He did it all. When a devastating earthquake spawned a catastrophic tsunami in Thailand in 2005, McCuaig was dispatched there, along with reporter **Sara Sidner**.

Finally, in 2006, McCuaig decided he'd had enough, retiring from the station he loved. During the 36 years he was there, he was an integral part of the news department's success. And, during that time, he had collected countless honors for his work. Besides Emmys, McCuaig was also recognized as photographer of the year. His work was also honored at the New York Film Festival.

"By then, we weren't doing so much traveling for stories anymore, and that's what I really enjoyed," he says. "I saw the writing on the wall."

McCuaig loved the station he called home, but it was because of the people he worked with. In his words, they were "family". He was especially fond of longtime reporter, **Bob MacKenzie**, who died in 2011.

"I miss (reporter) Bob," he says. "Every time something good happens to me, I want to call him. He's still with me in a lot of ways. We had such a good time. What was wonderful about that man was that he was the best writer I've ever worked with."

When McCuaig retired, he and **Vicky**, his wife of 23 years and a Bay Area television veteran herself, decided they would make a change of their own, and move to Hawaii. For the last two years, they have lived on Maui. They are living the life.

"Every now and then, I write an article for a magazine called Old Gauge Railroad," McCuaig says. "I'm really into trains."

He also maintains his business, Journey Films, which he started in the Bay Area. It keeps him busy, when he wants to be busy.

The day McCuaig was interviewed for this story, he and his wife were planting pineapple trees in their yard. Rubbing it in a little?

"I love it here," McCuaig says. "Big-city people would go crazy here. Today, we also planted a papaya tree, and we went swimming. I go diving a lot, so this is just the perfect life. It's Heaven's spot."

Soundbites