

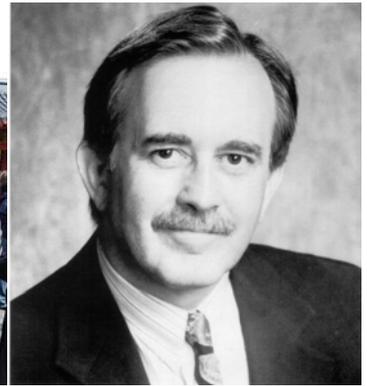


# HANK PLANTE



**Class of 2006**

*Silver Circle Profile*  
By: **Kevin Wing**



**Hank Plante** was a reporter's reporter. He was never afraid to ask the kind of tough questions that usually got under the skin of most politicians and government officials here in the Bay Area. Just ask San Francisco Mayor **Gavin Newsom**. Or even **Willie Brown**, the former state Assembly speaker who preceded Newsom at City Hall. They — along with countless other mayors, senators and governors (oh, and throw in a few U.S. presidents, too) — know all too well what it was like to be grilled by Plante.

It is difficult to speak about Plante's Bay Area broadcast journalism career in the past tense, but *it* has happened: retirement. Plante retired March 24 after 24 years as an anchor, reporter and political editor at KPIX. Plante has wasted no time in launching the next chapter of his life. In fact, by the time this story goes to press, Plante will be 500 miles from San Francisco and the CBS5 newsroom, getting used to his new, just-purchased digs in sun-kissed Palm Springs.

In 2006 Plante was inducted into the NATAS *Silver Circle*. He came to KPIX as a reporter in 1986, at a time when anchors **Dave McElhatton** and **Wendy Tokuda** and the entire *Eyewitness News* team began dominating the Bay Area ratings, taking over the top spot from KGO-TV. By the time Plante arrived in the Bay Area, he had become a well-respected reporter and anchor in markets around the nation, including Houston, Los Angeles and Minneapolis. He began his TV career in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1978.

During the next 32 years, Plante would earn four regional Emmy® awards (one while working at what is now KCAL in Los Angeles, and three for his work at KPIX), two national Emmy® awards and the George Foster Peabody Award. Last year, he was named "Chris Harris Reporter of the Year" by the Associated Press Television-Radio Association.

Years before his career took off in broadcast news, the Detroit native had his sights set on a career in politics. After graduating with a degree in sociology from Michigan State University, Plante moved to Washington, D.C. He applied for jobs on

Capitol Hill, but eventually wound up at the *Washington Post*.

"I thought I would get into politics," Plante says. "But then, I decided I wanted to be a reporter." To combine his desire to be a reporter and his love of politics, the nation's capital was the perfect place to be.

The year was 1970. With no professional print journalism experience, Plante was hired as a copyboy at the *Post*. For the next two and a half years, he was happy working there, but he wanted to be a newspaper reporter. He knew that a budding journalist doesn't begin his newspaper reporting career at the *Post*. So Plante took advice from his boss, who tipped him off to a reporting job at the Sentinel Newspapers, a chain covering Montgomery County and Bethesda, Maryland.

"He said to me, 'We just hired a reporter here named **Bob Woodward**, and he came from the Sentinel. You should go check it out and see what happens,' so I did, and I got the job," Plante says.

The timing seemed right on the mark for Plante. So he left the *Post* and went to work as the reporter who replaced Woodward at the Sentinel Newspapers. Woodward, along with fellow *Post* reporter **Carl Bernstein**, went on to fame with their Pulitzer Prize-winning coverage of the Watergate break-in, and the beginning of the end of **Richard Nixon's** presidency.

Plante eventually became the Sentinel Newspapers' managing editor. But, he decided that television news would be his next career step. He left the newspaper chain to become assignment editor at WTTG-TV in Washington, D.C. "It was the only job I was fired from," Plante admits.

With WTTG-TV behind him, Plante acknowledged that TV news was in his blood, so he went to work for WVEC in Norfolk as a reporter. A year later, he made a big jump, going to work for KMSP in Minneapolis. The West Coast called for him in 1981, and he moved to a job at Los Angeles' KHJ-TV (now KCAL). After two and a half years there, he moved to Houston's KRIV, then made his way to the Bay Area and KPIX.

During the next 24 years, Plante gained even more respect as a reporter. With previous anchoring

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experience under his belt, Plante would go on to anchor *Eyewitness News* in all time periods — mornings, afternoons, evenings. And while doing so, he would still file stories and work on special reports.

Serving as the KPIX political editor for his last decade in broadcast news, it might seem as if politics was Plante's proudest work. Not so.

"I'm proudest of my work covering AIDS," he says. "And I'm proud of the station. The station got behind it, saying 'let's do it'. It's a compelling, ongoing story. We were doing stories on AIDS every night (and doing it in the early years when President **Ronald Reagan** wasn't saying anything about it). I think our coverage really helped to save lives."

In the early years of AIDS, it wasn't talked about much. Why?

"It just wasn't on the government radar back then," Plante says. "It affected two groups of people who made the Reagan administration uncomfortable: gays and IV drug users." It was the stigma that was so strongly attached to the disease in the 1980s. "In 1988, I heard Reagan call it AIDS for the first time," Plante says. "By then, 28,000 Americans had already died from it."

Plante and KPIX were honored with two national Emmy® awards for AIDS coverage.

If covering AIDS was Plante's proudest work, his passion was politics, and covering it well.

"I always felt like I had to be the eyes and ears for all the viewers ... [and talk about] what was important to them," Plante explains. "I love politics. If I didn't love it, it would've been a chore."

Plante interviewed five U.S. presidents: Richard Nixon, **Jimmy Carter**, **Bill Clinton**, **George W. Bush** and **Barack Obama**.

During Nixon's visit to San Francisco, Plante caught up with him at the Fairmont Hotel, asking the former president if the passage of time helped to erase the sting of Watergate. "He was iconic," Plante says. "It was an uncomfortable question to ask, but it had to be asked."

Interviewing the second President Bush, Plante posed a question that some Americans were asking at the time — if he was intelligent enough to be commander-in-chief. "A tough question to ask," he says. But after the interview, Plante says Bush was

"absolutely charming. He spent 15 minutes schmoozing with the local media. He didn't take my questions personally. I was impressed with the guy."

Speaking of all five U.S. presidents he's interviewed, Plante gave high marks to President Obama.

"He was the most impressive," he says. "He has that extra special something. It's beyond brains. He's got that extra special connection to people. I can't even describe it. He lights up a room. He comes across as a very decent guy, a very sincere guy. It's not just a performance for him. Clinton is much like him, too."

Interviewing local politicians was part of Plante's passion, getting to the heart of an issue by asking direct, brutally blunt questions.

"Willie Brown is a reporter's dream," he says. "Willie is a great story. If you're looking for a story, stick a mic in his face and you've got a story. He's the smartest guy in politics. He's still the second most powerful man in California."

During his years at KPIX, Plante has been honored for his involvement in community service. He has devoted time to the Human Rights Campaign, the LAMBDA Legal Defense Fund, GLAAD, Project Open Hand and the San Francisco AIDS Foundation.

The community has also recognized his work at KPIX. Plante received the James R. Harrison Award from the San Francisco AIDS Foundation. He also received the Pioneer Award at the GLAAD Media Awards. His work has also received nods from the *New York Times* among other media.

The newly-retired Plante purchased a home in Palm Springs and moved there March 29 with his partner, artist **Roger Groth**.

His retirement from broadcast journalism — and KPIX — certainly leaves a void in the Bay Area media corps. And, at KPIX, too.

"KPIX will be fine without me," says the modest Plante. "They have a good management team. **Dan Rosenheim** has been news director for a long time. He was news director at KRON beforehand, and was also in management over at the *San Francisco Chronicle*. And KPIX president and general manager **Ron Longinotti** is from the Bay Area. They both care about the Bay Area. Channel 5 will be just fine after I leave."