



Ron Wren



Class of 1994

Silver Circle Profile
By: Kevin Scott Wing



Ron Wren thinks nothing of driving to and from San Francisco every week to his home in Truckee. The San Francisco-based publicist, advertising executive and voiceover talent maintains an office along The Embarcadero next to the Ferry Building. When Wren is working in the Bay Area, he stays in an apartment in the city's Buena Vista Heights neighborhood.

Wren has the energy, drive and savvy of someone half his age. At 79, the trek back and forth between the Sierra Nevada home he shares with his wife **Jan**, is par for the course.

"She's originally from Aspen," Wren says, "so a few years ago she finally said to me, 'Okay, I think it's my turn. We've lived in the Bay Area. Let's move to Tahoe.'"

Wren, who was inducted into our chapter's *Silver Circle (Class of 1994)*, has been leading a very interesting life. He started his career in television and radio, working for San Francisco's KGO-TV and Radio, and KPIX, in the '50s and '60s.

In 1966 Wren decided that going into business for himself would be the more lucrative thing to do. That year a San Francisco advertising agency was born. Ronald R. Wren Advertising has been a mainstay in the Bay Area advertising industry for nearly 45 years.

Born in the Los Angeles suburb of Glendale, Wren's family moved to San Jose when he was seven years old. He grew up in the city's Willow Glen neighborhood, and attended Lincoln High School. Wren attended San Jose State University, where he graduated in 1953 after studying speech and communications with an emphasis in radio and television.

The Korean War was happening during this time, and Wren was nearly drafted right out of college. He ended up joining the National Guard, but they told him it wouldn't prevent him from one day being called up to serve. "They just gave me a rank when I was called up," Wren says.

As a corporal Wren became stationed at Fort Ord in Monterey County, and earned his FCC first-class radio license. "I did a sports show on KMBY

radio in Monterey," Wren says. "I was the announcer for an Army sports show."

Then, in 1954 Wren was hired at KSBW in Salinas to work as a board operator. He would also announce the live television commercials. "I was earning \$110 a week at KSBW, compared with about \$110 a month with the Army," Wren recalls with a laugh.

That same year, Wren was sent to Japan to the Army's Far East headquarters. He was assigned to work in television and radio there. "Every two weeks, we did a music show on Japanese television," he says. He also announced a radio show on Japan's NHK network.

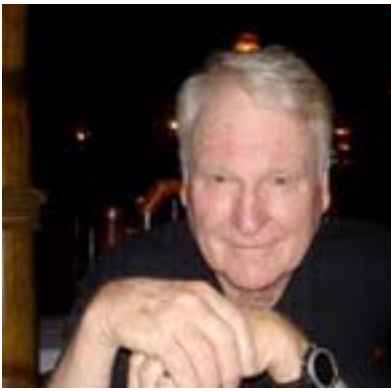
In 1955 he headed back to San Jose, landing a job at KEEN Radio in San Jose. "I tried getting a job in San Francisco, but I just couldn't get one at the time," Wren says. Once, he landed an interview at KRON, but instead of being offered a position there, the person he met with gave him a job lead – in Bakersfield. "He told me, 'Kid, I don't have a job for you. I may never have a job for you, because no one's ever going to leave,'" Wren says.

He got an interview at Bakersfield's KBAK-TV and was hired for a job as an announcer and director for \$90 per week. "I ad-libbed washing machine commercials. I was on camera doing commercials live," Wren recalls. "I did a 6 p.m. newscast with someone else, and we would read articles straight out of the *Bakersfield Californian*. We didn't have footage or film, so we'd air still photographs as we read the news."

That was 1956. And, for Wren, his Bakersfield experience lasted less than a year. Soon, he would return to the Bay Area to go to work at KGO-TV and Radio, where he worked in the advertising, promotion and publicity department. "We would do cross promotions for Channel 7 and for the radio station," Wren says. "After two years doing that, I was promoted to radio promotion manager in 1960." Wren says the job was "a lot of fun, and I had a chance to do a lot of writing."

By then, Wren was married to his first wife, and they had four children. They never wanted to move away from the Bay Area, but New York kept calling. "I was eventually offered the job to be the promo-

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tions guy for ABC's six owned-and-operated radio stations," he says. But, accepting the job would have meant a move to New York, so Wren turned it down.

By 1965, Wren would leave KGO-TV and Radio for a position as publicity director at KPIX. "I was very happy there," he says. Westinghouse Broadcasting, which owned KPIX at that time, had an opening for a job as the marketing chief for the company. But, Wren did not want to leave the Bay Area for New York.

In 1966, the H&R Block accounting company played a major role in Wren's life, to the point that Wren would leave Bay Area television, essentially never looking back. Wren took an opportunity to work in marketing and advertising for the company. "They would need me from December 15th until April 15th – income tax day," Wren says. "H&R Block would pay me more in 15 weeks than what I would earn in 52 weeks at KPIX."

Wren remained with H&R Block for 12 years, working as a contractor to them from his own advertising firm, which he launched in 1966 when he joined H&R Block. In the mid-1970s, H&R Block offered Wren an opportunity to be its marketing and advertising chief, but he would have to relocate his family to Kansas City, Missouri, for the job. He turned it down.

After leaving H&R Block shortly thereafter, Wren concentrated more on his advertising firm. "It's always been an interesting life," says Wren, who has had a menagerie of clients through the years.

He re-entered television briefly in the early 2000s to direct a TV program called *Backroad Adventures*. The show was seen on more than 100 stations nationwide. He also produced the program and was its announcer.

"We took the show all over the world," Wren says. "It was a lot of fun. It was great to get paid to travel." Only 13 shows were made, but during that time, Wren and his crew took the show overseas to France, Italy and New Zealand.

Wren's advertising firm is still going strong, though he's now a one-man band. At one time, he had 10 employees. "What I do is I sell solutions to problems," he says.



Silver Circle Class of 1994: Luis Echegoyen, Anchor, KDTV (Gold '08); Roger Grimsby*, Anchor, KGO (Governors' Award 2000); Dennis Richmond, Anchor, KTVU; Jan Moellering, Production Coordinator, KNTV (Gold '09); Pat McCormick, Host/Weathercaster, KTVU; Ron Wren, Wren Advertising; Wiley Schmidt, Art Director, KGO; Howard Harden*, Director, KGO. *Deceased

Being self-employed and working three to four days a week (even at 79) has afforded Wren the opportunity to take up flying, which he learned to do at 60.

Wren is also a longtime ham radio aficionado. He also is a freelance magazine writer, enjoys hiking, and visiting friends in San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood.

As far as his across-the-state drive every week from Truckee to San Francisco, Wren really doesn't mind. "I have the best of both worlds," he says. "San Francisco is so beautiful that I could never really leave it. So, even though Jan and I have a home in Truckee, we continue to maintain our apartment in the city. I couldn't ask for anything more."



Kevin Scott Wing pens the Silver Circle and Gold Circle profiles for Off Camera. He is a two-time Emmy® Award-winning Bay Area journalist, currently with KNTV/NBC Bay Area in San Jose as a freelance news writer/producer. Reach him at kevinscottwing@gmail.com.

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