



# VALLEY BROADCAST LEGENDS

Issue #121 *"Honoring the Past, Sharing the Present, Embracing the Future in Media"*

June 2021

## President's Message: Old Age Is Not For Sissies!

by VBL President **Jim Drennan**



Only a few weeks ago, I had planned to celebrate my 85<sup>th</sup> birthday on May 28 with a maskless visit to Freeport Bar and Grill or some other nice Sacramento area restaurant. Unfortunately, it was not to be. The reason: UTI.

UTI, also known as urinary tract infection, is hardly in the same category as cancer or heart disease or Parkinson's, but it can have a devastating effect on its victims. It

typically affects older people who have trouble passing urine through their systems in a speedy manner. That sluggishness allows bacteria to form and the result can be a general sluggishness in the victim.

In my case, in a matter of weeks I went from being a pretty active guy to one with no energy. As a result, I have a Kaiser home care nurse coming in twice a week to monitor my health, a physical therapist once a week, and five days a week of assistancer from Home Instead, which will help me with cooking, bathing and the other activities of everyday life. And of course I'm zapping the UTI with regular doses of antibiotics.

In the past I've engaged the services of such agencies on behalf of friends and family, and now it's my turn to find out what it's like to be dependent on others. I just hope that all this help will get me back to the life I love so much.



## What's in Store for VBL: June Meeting & Beyond

When it comes to VBL, and much of life itself, there's just one question on our minds: when will things get back to normal?



**José M. Hernández**

We know for certain we'll be meeting via Zoom on June 10 and our guest will be astronaut **José M. Hernández** (more on him below). But beyond that, it's all hope and speculation.

Our governor has promised California will "open up" on June 15. But what, exactly, does that mean? Throw away our masks? Hugs and handshakes? Sitting elbow-to-elbow in an indoor restaurant banquet room? No one seems to know for sure.

Your VBL board is hoping we'll be back at the Club Pheasant for our October meeting, assuming the Pheasant will be ready to welcome us back by then. The board has been kicking around the idea of a picnic-type event for the August 12 meeting. The thinking is that an outdoor affair might be a way for us to ease into meeting in person. And, this year is our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. VBL's very first meeting was June 22, 2001, at the old Coco's restaurant on Arden Way. A good enough reason to gather outdoors, catch up with each other, and yum up a slice of birthday cake.

Watch for future email updates as they become available in the VBL Newsroom.

Now, as to the June meeting: Mark your calendar for June 10, 11 a.m., via Zoom. Our special guest is Stockton native **José M. Hernández**, a child of migrant farmworkers who grew up to be an astronaut. José was part of the crew of STS-128 in 2009, and credits the rigorous training he underwent to guide him in surviving the pandemic shutdown. In an interview with NBC News, he spoke of the importance

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# VBL Walks the Virtual Red Carpet



When Legend **Joyce Mitchell** suggested to the VBL board the idea of placing an ad in the program for the SF/Northern California Emmy awards gala, the board responded with a resounding, “Sure, why not?” The SF/NorCal chapter of the National Association of Television Arts and Sciences (NATAS) is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of presenting regional awards, and VBL is celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a social club for broadcasters. It seemed like a real natural, and a great way to get exposure among our colleagues. Several “angels” on the board (you know who you are!) stepped forward to help fund the project. We were off and running!

This year’s awards gala will of course be a virtual affair. It’s scheduled for Saturday, June 5, with a pre-party starting at 6:30 p.m., though it does look like you need to be a member to login and watch the ceremony.

Numerous television professionals in the Sacramento-Stockton-Modesto market have been nominated for awards, with KCRA Assistant News Director **James Stimson** slated to receive the prestigious Governors’ Citation. Jim started his career as a student intern at KCRA radio and moved over to the television side in 1978. He has won multiple Emmy awards. Chapter President **Randy Foresman** notes, “Stimson’s stamp on not only Sacramento news, but the industry as a whole is readily apparent to anyone who has had the pleasure of working with him.”

Joyce Mitchell, by the way, is a previous recipient of the Governors’ Citation and is a trustee of the SF/NorCal chapter of NATAS.

## Saying Goodbye to Rich Hardaway

We have only recently learned of the death of **Rich Hardaway**. He is best remembered as the host of the California Lottery’s *Big Spin* game show from 1986 to 1998, when it was being produced at the KOVR studios. Rich got his start in television in the 1950s as a kiddie show host known as Captain Humboldt on KVIQ in Eureka. He later worked as a producer at KCRA. Rich had been in declining health in recent years, and died on February 16 at age 87 in McKinleyville. Thank you to **Tom Buck** for passing this sad news along to us.

## Our June Zoom Program

Continued from front page

of clear communication and keeping to a fixed schedule. He recalled one difficult moment during training when he complained about something. His commander reminded him that he was one of only 500 people with the privilege of going into space. “That put it in perspective,” he says.

His life post-NASA has been anything but dull. He’s a motivational speaker, an author, a former Congressional candidate, and the owner of a vineyard. If that weren’t enough, José’s life story is being developed into a feature film for Netflix. Look for *A Million Miles Away* to debut in 2022.

Thank you to Legend **Rich Ibarra** for lining up this impressive speaker for us!

Watch for the usual email notification with the Zoom link a day or two before the June 10 meeting. In the meantime, a tip of the hat to **Bud Kress** for donating the use of his Zoom Pro account. His generosity has saved the club a good deal of money this past year and helped us get through the shutdown without missing a beat.

## Officers

**President:** Jim Drennan

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**Secretary:** Allen Chamberlin

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**VALLEY BROADCAST  
LEGENDS**

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## Commander Bill: ‘Off He Goes Into the Wild Blue Yonder . . .’

Sacramento lost a true local legend with the death of KFBK traffic pilot **Bill Eveland**—better known to legions of commuters as simply Commander Bill.

In 1979, Bill was 50 years old and recently retired from the Air Force when he walked into the KFBK studio in the Bee building in his blue flight jumpsuit to audition for the gig as airborne traffic reporter. The Commander Bill moniker came by way of a consultant, who felt Bill’s last name was too difficult for radio listeners to hear and remember. He also thought Bill’s image needed to be softened up a bit, more fun.

**Joyce Krieg**, then working in the KFBK newsroom, recalled, “At first, Bill was definitely not thrilled. They don’t even have the rank of Commander in the Air Force. I got the idea he thought the new name made him look a bit lightweight and silly. But he got over that pretty quickly.”

In the 1980s and 90s, Commander Bill was one of the most recognizable and trusted personalities in local news. More than just a traffic pilot, Bill also provided on-the-spot coverage of breaking news: police chases, fires and floods. He was quite possibly the first to broadcast on-the-scene reports from the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, as the journalists on the ground in San Francisco were unable to get their dispatches out.

Bill’s airborne exploits became the stuff of legend, like the time he realized he was having a heart attack and still managed to land the plane and put it in the hangar before seeking medical help. Or when his Cessna developed engine trouble and he had to make an emergency landing on West El Camino.

He is also remembered for his clever colloquialisms in describing roads and traffic situations: the WX freeway, the top of town, the taillight tango.

As news of Bill’s passing spread among current and former KFBK staffers, tributes poured in. **Kerry Shearer** wrote, “His energy just exploded out of the radio, especially when something big was going on.” Kerry noted that Bill worked without a script, everything ad-libbed. “All while flying the plane, talking with air traffic control, watching for other air traffic, and figuring out what’s going on 3,500 feet below on the freeway. Bill was a master at all of it.”

In a beautiful tribute during the KFBK afternoon news block, **Kitty O’Neal** said, “He was a remarkable traffic reporter, but also full of great wit and good humor, and an untiring veracity. Bill was so full of energy.”

From **Dave Williams**: “He was one of those rare people who was always smiling. I never saw anger or irritation cross his face, not one time. What a dear, sweet man.”

**Alan Oda**, who flew with Bill as a student intern from UC Davis, recalls, “It was a wonder to watch Commander Bill do his job. Enjoy flying the heavens, Commander Bill Eveland!”

Commander Bill retired in 2005 and moved to the Reno area. He died on May 12 from a heart attack and stroke. He was 91.



## The Legends

Membership as of May 29, 2021

John Archer • Julie Archer  
 Jay “DJ Jay” Arnold • Stan Atkinson  
 Linda Bayley • Vic Biondi  
 Bill Bishofberger • Thomas Blazowski  
 Matias Bombal • Mel Boyd • Tom Buck  
 Allen Chamberlin • Don Chandler  
 Mark Chiolis • Chris Cochran  
 Jim Drennan • Claire Elliott • Curt Foley  
 Vicki Fox • Gary Gerould  
 Dennis Grayson • Cyndy Green  
 Michael Guiliano • Kristine Hanson  
 Bud Harmon • Fred Harris • Jerry Henry  
 Betsy Hite • Rich Ibarra • John Jervis  
 Rick Kavooras • Richard Kermickel  
 Tip Kindel • Jan “Neely” Klevan  
 Kim Kline • Ward Koppel • Bill Kreutzer  
 Bud Kress • Joyce Krieg  
 Eleanor Kuechler-VanAcker • Bob Lang  
 Dick Leeson • Dee McCafferty  
 Michael McCarron • Jeanne Marie  
 Lizette Martinez-Hopkins  
 Michael Messmer • Dana Michaels  
 Ron Middlekauff • Bob Miller  
 Alan Milner • Joyce Mitchell  
 Keith Moon • Ray Nelson  
 George Nyberg • John D. O’Brien  
 Alan Oda • Deborah Pacyna  
 Mary Jane Popp • Tiffany Powell  
 Craig Prosser • Rich Raymond  
 Bruce Riggs • Jay Rudin Beth Ruyak  
 Bill Schmechel • Walt Shaw • Dann Shively  
 Barbara Souza • Roy Stearns • Barry Stigers  
 Bob Suffel • Steve Swatt  
 Gregory VanAcker • Gregory Virtue  
 Tom Wagner • Frank Wallace • Marla Wells  
 Adrian Woodfork • Dennis Yoder  
 Jan Young

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# Romper Room: On the Front Lines

by Don Chandler

Children's programming has been a path to the top for some high-profile personalities. On the local scene, we had **Harry Martin** (Captain Sacto), **Charlie Duncan** (Captain Delta) **Stu Nahan** (Skipper Stu), to name just a few. Their careers have found a springboard in hosting one of the most popular and effective 'baby-sitters' busy parents could hope for.

Hosting a children's show is not without hazards. Corraling and retaining the interest of a coterie of hyperactive youngsters can be like herding cats. The host requirements are friendliness, creativity, talent, determination and a whole lot of patience. In televising *Romper Room*, KCRA was fortunate to find personalities on staff who met the standards. **Ione Lowery** was one. Following her run with *Romper Room*, Ione moved on and was replaced by **Mauvra Baker**. Mauvra possessed the requisite traits but on one occasion was challenged to call upon a trait that had escaped the list and for which she was unprepared.

Guest entertainers were prized additions to *Romper Room*, providing variety as an antidote to a trait common in many youngsters in the audience age group: boredom. Coloring and games were valuable on the list of activities, but how many pictures can be colored and games played before the fidgeting starts and kids begin demanding snack time?

KCRA producers went on the search and located a local musician who played a different kind of instrument: the bagpipe. Quite well. With groups. Never as soloist. Never on television. Never looked into the intimidating eye of a TK-42 camera. Bright lights jockeying around overhead like confused meteors. Guys with headsets trailing long cables.

When the guest of the day was summoned for his performance, Floor Director **Ken Nagle** ushered him in to do his thing. **Finn O'Connor** (not his real name) was directed to a stool next to Mauvra, who also sat on a stool. He perched tentatively on the stool and snuggled his bagpipe close to make sure of a proper fitting for his act. Ignoring the children, he made eye contact with the TK-42.

Mauvra: "Children, this is Finn O'Conner. He is here to do a bagpipe concert for you and our television audience. Finn, would you like to say a few words about this grand instrument to these lovely children?"

Finn: "Uhhh, ohhh ... I..."

Mauvra: "Finn?"

The color drains from Finn's face. Hesitating a nano-second, Finn and his discordant one-note bagpipe began a slow port list onto Mauvra's lap.



Mauvra: "Uhhh, ohh... I..."

Turning her knees to port in cadence with Finn's trajectory, Mauvra made way for him to slip to the floor without taking her with him. Doing so caused his head and instrument to recede out of range of the camera shot, not unlike the moon slipping over the horizon at dusk, only faster.

Mauvra: "Uhhh, ohhh ... I ... Children, I think it's time for Twinkies and juice."

And that's how that went. Finn was unhurt and went on to bigger and better things, concluding, we are sure, that anything ... ANYTHING other than recovering from a fainting spell tangled in a bagpipe to see half a dozen wide-eyed children staring down at him would be bigger and better.

## Who's New

VBL welcomes two new members, **Adrian Woodfork** and **Alan Oda**.

Adrian worked at KCRA from 1970 to 1988, holding positions such as floor director, editor, cameraman, reporter, host and producer. He is the recipient of an award from Associated Press for a public service magazine show, and resolutions from the state Assembly and Senate for his documentaries in Haiti and Uganda. He considers the travel and production of those documentaries as the highlight of his career. After KCRA, he worked as freelance documentary producer and also appeared in national commercials and print ads. His last gig was with the California Dept. of Food and Ag. These days, Adrian keeps busy breeding Doberman Pinschers and judging dog shows around the world, calling it, "My 55-year-old hobby."

Alan got his start in the news department at UC Davis campus radio station KDVS and was the Yolo County correspondent for KFBK circa 1979-80. The latter experience caused him to realize the competitive, high-stress world of broadcast news would not be a good fit, and he continued with his education, earning a PhD in psychology. But he never lost his love of radio, contributing articles and serving as editor of LAradio.com from 1998 to 2020. These days, he's on the faculty at Azusa Pacific University, blogs about the Los Angeles radio scene at ayodaradio.blogspot.com, and "hoping my 401K someday comes through."