

# Traffic anchor's career spans history

■ KCBS' Ron Lyons, 65, joined the scene in the days of Elvis; last work day of 49 years was Friday

By Dogen Hannah  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

SAN FRANCISCO — The atmosphere inside KCBS traffic anchor Ron Lyons' broadcasting studio was calm and collected, even as wind whipped the Friday morning commute.

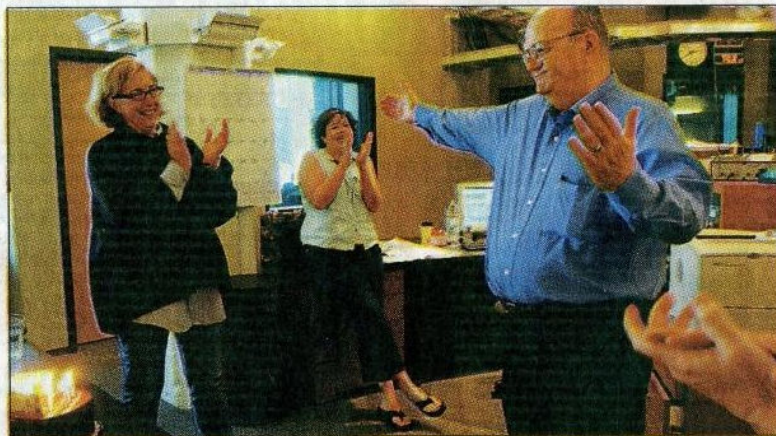
Traffic was backed up on the Golden Gate Bridge. A freeway accident had bogged down San Jose motorists. A fallen tree had blocked a road near Clayton.

"I always tell people: If they saw what I saw, they'd never get in their cars," Lyons said, off the air.

For 16 years the Walnut Creek resident watched over Bay Area roadways. Aided by airborne reporters, online California Highway Patrol dispatches and alerts from motorists, he helped commuters weather the worst.

On Friday, retirement bound, he worked his last 5 a.m. to 10 a.m. shift. No longer will he rise each workday at 3 a.m., ride the first San Francisco-bound BART train from Lafayette and hit the air before many people hit the snooze button.

The 65-year-old Asheville, N.C., native began his 49-year career at the twilight



of radio's Golden Age and the dawn of rock 'n' roll. His career had its ups and downs, but his love for the airways remained constant. "It was an exciting time to be in radio," said Lyons, who first broadcast while in high school. "I broke in '55 just as Elvis hit. Every disc jockey says this, but I was one of the first in the country to play a Beatles record."

He moved West a few years later and spent most of his career as a "rock jock" in the Bay Area and Sacramento, along the way interviewing Frank Sinatra, Mel

Torme and other idols. In a career marked by three firings — including one on the eve of his wedding — versatility was the hallmark of his success.

From music to hard news to talk radio, Lyons handled everything his profession had to offer or asked of him. That included the estimated 142,200 traffic and weather reports — one every 10 minutes — he delivered for KCBS.

"Every time I see what he does, I say, 'How does he do that?'" marveled retired Bay Area radioman and Walnut Creek res-

ident Al Hart, who once hired Lyons and worked with him at two stations.

Lyons did it in a dim, carpeted studio nestled inside KCBS's Battery Street offices outfitted with two computer monitors showing traffic hot spots, a third displaying breaking news and a television tuned to a local station.

"It can be quite a challenge," he said. "There are days when it all flows."

Leaning close to a microphone Friday, Lyons chimed into the broadcast, effortlessly cueing reports from up to four reporters in airplanes and a helicopter, relaying tips from the station's "phone force" of motorists and occasionally offering a lighter look at the latest hassle.

"If I had to end up anywhere, probably that was the best place for me, because there's a little more latitude doing traffic than doing straight news," he said.

Some time ago when a truck overturned and spilled its load of condoms in Marin County, for instance, Lyons wrapped his report with: "And where the rubbers meet the road, I'm Ron Lyons."

The wordplay continued Friday as Lyons trotted out a few admittedly well-worn one-liners for a final run around the track. (How long is traffic backed up? "As long as your first marriage.")

See LYONS, Page 4