

Los Angeles Times

<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/news/tv/la-et-anchor11apr11,0,5163862.story>

From the Los Angeles Times

Departures of Ann Martin and Harold Green may signal a shift

Local newscasts seem to be turning away from high-priced anchors

By Greg Braxton

Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

April 11, 2008

Like the Hollywood sign and the Cinerama Dome, KCBS-TV Channel 2 news anchors Ann Martin and Harold Greene were fixtures of Hollywood, hard to miss on huge billboards plastered on the station's former headquarters as they smiled down on travelers zooming along Sunset Boulevard.

Mainstays on the local news for more than three decades at two stations -- the pair had also been partners at KABC-TV Channel 7's "Eyewitness News" -- Martin and Greene were reflective of the celebrity status bestowed upon anchors, the most visible and highest-paid members of Los Angeles news operations. Even their moves to rival KCBS -- Martin in 1994, Greene in 2001 -- created their own buzz, particularly for Martin, whose salary was reported to be between \$1.2 million and \$2 million a year.

But last week the longtime newscasters themselves became an L.A. story once again. The couple was let go by KCBS, part of a swarm of budget cuts at CBS affiliates nationwide. Their unexpected ouster crystallized a growing suspicion within the local news market -- that in a world of 24/7 cable news and intensifying competition from the Internet, local big-name anchors may no longer be necessary or even relevant.

"We're sadly seeing the end of an era in local news," said Karen Kearns, associate dean of the Mike Curb College of Arts, Media, and Communication at Cal State Northridge. "Anchors were always the imprint for a station, their link to the community. But in the last 10 years, the way that people watch the news has changed, and they are not as significant as they used to be."

The most obvious sign that the pull of a marquee anchor has diminished is audience size, particularly for evening news shows. Familiar, friendly faces have been unable to stem, in many cases, double-digit declines in local news viewership in recent years -- much of it attributed to Internet competition and an ever-shrinking lead-in from network programming.

"When it comes to the nighttime, news anchors are no longer the silver bullet that can save you," said Rich Goldner, KTLA-TV Channel 5 news director (the station, like the Los Angeles Times, is owned by Tribune Co.). "They are still important, but not as much. There were all these longtime, big-money people, and the stations started saying, 'We're spending all this money, but where are we seeing this in the ratings?'"

Shifts in social habits haven't helped either.

"Kids are getting their news from the Internet and their friends. They're not getting it from local news," added Goldner. "Families today are not sitting down to dinner and watching television."

Instead of anchors, stations are focusing more on pushing distinctive aspects of their coverage, according to Bill Carroll of Katz Media, which buys advertising time for local stations.

"Anchors are becoming less and less the identification of a station. It's more and more about things that are promotable: live coverage, the weather radar, the graphics, the special findings of an investigation," he said. "Instead of anchors in the late afternoon and early evening being important, it's become more about the personalities that are on in the morning, and people on cable like Anderson Cooper."

In addition, younger or less-experienced TV journalists who can easily rotate between field reporting and anchoring duties may prove to be more cost-efficient for budget-conscious stations than the traditional anchor who only reads the news, local television executives said.

Martin and Green have remained quiet since the announcement that they would leave the station in May when their contracts expire. Other employees pushed out by KCBS and sister station KCAL-TV Channel 9 include technical crew

members and on-air reporters, including Jennifer Davis, Jaime Garza and Jennifer Sabih. The local team was let go along with more than 145 other employees at CBS Corp.-owned stations in 13 other cities.

The CBS cutbacks coincide with significant upheaval on the local anchor scene recently. KTLA's Hal Fishman, a fixture for more than 50 years, died in August 2007. Carlos Amezcua, the station's morning news anchor who had been regarded as a possible replacement for Fishman, then jumped to rival Fox's KTTV-TV Channel 11 10 p.m. newscast the following month, replacing veteran anchor John Beard. KTLA eventually replaced Fishman with early morning news anchor Emmett Miller.

The departure of Martin and Green leaves KNBC-TV Channel 4's Paul Moyer and Colleen Williams as the local news scene's most veteran team. They have been paired on the station's 11 p.m. newscast for 11 years, and the 5 p.m. newscast for 15 years.

Bob Long, KNBC's news director, said, "Things have changed. Anchors are still the face of the station. Do they still bring ratings in? With a few exceptions, the answer is no."

But Long defended the value of anchors.

"Anchors are important," he said. "They are not important in cyberspace or for people who get their news in an aggregate fashion. But they are terribly important to people who want a finished product that contains important information. They are the last protection against gibberish, the last stop before the word comes out."

And, not surprisingly, he gave glowing notices to his two star anchors: "Paul and Colleen are consummate professionals. They anticipate each other, they support each other on a purely professional level. They are like a couple of surgeons who are better than the sum of their parts. They're great fun to watch, and that's the key to their longevity in the market."

greg.braxton@latimes.com

If you want other stories on this topic, search the Archives at latimes.com/archives.

TMSReprints

Article licensing and reprint options

Copyright 2008 Los Angeles Times | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#)
[Home Delivery](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Archives](#) | [Contact](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Help](#)

partners:

