

# SUTRO TOWER®

*connection*

THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE SUTRO TOWER NEIGHBORHOOD | FEBRUARY 2020



Courtesy KGO-TV

## A Mast Disappears, Then 9 New Antennas

**T**here are nine new television antennas on Sutro Tower, capping months of complex construction that saw the entire south mast of the tower dismantled and rebuilt.

“Replacing our TV antennas was a complicated, delicate, intricate project,” said Raul Velez, Vice President, Operations for Sutro Tower, Inc. “The antennas each weigh thousands of pounds, the work is extremely precise, and the workers are more than 900 feet in the air.”

The project altered Sutro Tower’s appearance for several months, leaving it with two antenna stacks instead of three. It was necessary because of the growth of wireless devices.

▶ A short video of the antenna replacement project is on YouTube and at [www.sutrotower.com](http://www.sutrotower.com)

Congress in 2012 authorized the Federal Communications Commission to convert a portion of the radio frequency spectrum from television broadcasting to wireless uses. So TV broadcasters’ signals had to be “repacked” into the remaining frequencies; transmitting on new frequencies meant getting new antennas. Starting in 2017, almost 1,000 TV stations nationwide have changed their broadcast frequencies, which is possible without affecting TV viewership because modern TV transmission is more precise than in previous decades. The Sutro Tower project is the final phase of the FCC’s nationwide repack.

SEE ANTENNAS ON PAGE 3

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# New Man at the Top for Sutro Tower

**R**aul Velez, who grew up in the Crocker Amazon District seeing Sutro Tower through his bedroom window, is Sutro Tower, Inc.'s new Vice President, Operations. Raul is replacing Eric Dausman, the VP Operations for the past 10 years, who is moving to Oregon but remains at Sutro during Raul's transition.

"Sutro Tower is a great place with great people," Raul said. "There's a lot going on here and my job is to keep it on the rails, keep it going.... Everyone here understands it's collective, that we're building on each other's success."

"We're pleased to have Raul Velez taking the helm," said Kevin Walsh, President and General Manager of KPIX and chair of Sutro Tower, Inc.'s Board of Directors. "Raul knows television, knows radio, knows the city, and knows the tower itself. He is committed to building on the tower's record of safety, smooth operations, and providing essential communications services for the region."

Raul has been coming to the tower as an engineer for radio and television stations for 30 years, except for seven years in the 1990s when he was traveling with the San Francisco Giants as the producer of the game broadcasts on KNBR. Even now, Raul occasionally engineers a live sports broadcast – he just took a quick trip to Miami to work his 22 nd Super Bowl broadcast for Westwood One. "Sutro Tower is



Raul Velez has been a broadcast engineer coming to Sutro Tower for the past 30 years

big, and I know big," he said. "My first full-time job was at KNBR, a 50,000-watt radio station, I've done several Super Bowls and PA for the Pope. You have to do it right the first time."

Raul was born a few blocks from the tower at UCSF's hospital, raised on Vienna Street, and is a lifetime broadcaster. "I was always interested in sound and staging, and first worked part-time at (FM rock radio station) KFOG while I was at Riordan High," he said. "My buddy Tom Kansora and I handled the sound system at Mission Dolores when Pope John Paul II visited San Francisco in 1989, right after I graduated high

SEE **NEW MAN** ON PAGE 4

## Sutro's COO Moving to Oregon

**E**ric Dausman, departing as Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Sutro Tower, Inc., ran Sutro Tower since 2009. "It's been a great ride," said Eric, who is leaving the Bay Area and taking a job with a new technology company. "I'm grateful to all the terrific people I've worked with for making the past decade exciting, rewarding, and a lot of fun."

As Senior Vice President, RF Technology, for the newly formed Public Media Group, Eric will oversee initiatives involving future broadcasting technologies such as ATSC-3.0, single frequency networks, and related systems.

"We'd like to thank Eric for his 10 years of excellent stewardship, especially



**A neighborhood party featured a good-bye cake for Eric**

for managing the long and complex repack project to install nine new TV antennas," said Kevin Walsh, Chair of the Board of Directors of Sutro Tower,

Inc. "We wish him all the best."

Before coming to Sutro Tower, Eric was director of technology for 18 years with television station KGW in Portland, where his children grew up. Now, he and his wife are moving back to Portland to be near children and grandchildren.

"I've loved being at Sutro Tower," said Eric. "It's such a special place, so integral to San Francisco and so solid, with unique challenges and opportunities. I'm proud of the relationships we've built with our neighbors, the safety initiatives we've implemented, and the service we've provided to all our customers, especially the region's broadcasters and their audiences."

## Antennas FROM PAGE 1

Last July, the San Francisco Planning Commission unanimously approved three building permits authorizing the work on Sutro Tower. However, planning and engineering for the project began five years ago, ground preparation was non-stop since 2018, and two tower crews have been on site since August. The new antennas were spec'd out years ago, manufactured in Maine and shipped across country in time to meet the FCC repack schedule. Even the Federal Aviation Administration was involved – aviation officials were notified that the light that is usually at the top of the tower's south stack would be gone from October through January during construction.

"There are always workers and work on Sutro Tower – it's a dynamic industrial site – but replacing the big TV antennas only happens about once every 10 years," said Eric Dausman, who managed the project. "We had



**Tower workers removing the old KGO-TV antenna**

to rebuild the entire steel frame of the antenna stack, make changes in the stations' control rooms at the base of the tower, and install new conduit and electronic equipment as well as the antennas themselves. It is a massive job and took a lot of coordination and

safety planning."

The tower crews utilized a 120-foot-long steel gin pole to access the stack at changing heights, and used a 3,000-pound counterweight as they cut apart and lowered the old antennas and stack, then raised and installed the new elements. A new antenna for KGO-TV was the last piece, lifted to the top of the new south stack on January 28.

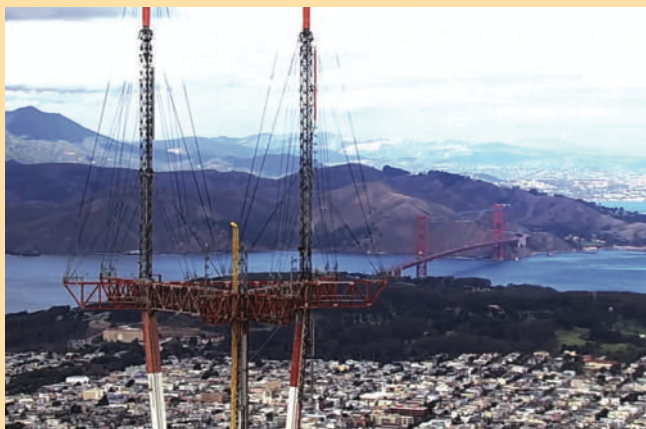
After several weeks of running new transmission lines and testing the equipment, the new antennas will go live in March. At that time, viewers who receive free, over-the-air television via antenna or a converter box will have to rescan to receive the stations on new broadcast frequencies (a guide to rescanning will be on television stations' websites, as well as at [www.sutrotower.com](http://www.sutrotower.com), in March). If you subscribe to a service such as cable or satellite, you do not need to do anything. Your service provider will do it for you.

## City Reacts to the Missing Antenna

Confusion, concern, humor and wonder – public response to Sutro Tower's disappearing antenna stack ran the gamut of emotions.

"My tattoo is accurate again!!" Stephanie Lindsay of San Francisco posted on Sutro Tower's Facebook page.

"Anyone know what happened to Sutro Tower's top?" posted Katherine Maher. "Good to know it was planned," said Dean Paul. "I looked at it last week and said 'Whoa, did the tower antenna break off?'" And Kitt Kotton wrote to Sutro Tower asking, "Is it true that one of your



*"It's one of those SF curious things many of us have been talking about."*

three prongs fell off or somehow was knocked down by wind or something else?"

Tim Snider, commenting on a photo of the tower work, simply posted, "Hell yeah 🤙 man."

Blogs, publications and social media

sites posted photos, articles and comments about the disappearing antenna stack.

Mark Lenz, an occupational therapist, summed it up: "It's one of those SF curious things many of us have been talking about."

## New Man FROM PAGE 2

school. That was a big thing for a Catholic boy!" Then while attending San Francisco State, he got a job that changed his life.

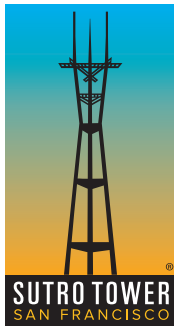
"There was an audition at Great America for a sound engineer to work the ice show. I got the job and more important, met my wife who also worked there." They got married 24 years ago ("in February after the holidays and before I left for the Giants' spring training broadcasts"), and have two daughters, one in high school and one in college.

Away from work, Raul referees high school basketball games. "I like the game, the camaraderie, and the teamwork with the other officials," he said. "I like being the one who needs to get it right. You can't make the right call unless you're in the right position. It's a balance of anticipation, but not assuming."

From engineering thousands of live broadcasts to officiating basketball to overseeing operations for Sutro Tower, Raul says the most important thing is to be two steps ahead, in order to invisibly keep things running smoothly. "The stations broadcasting from Sutro Tower don't want to think about the tower. Game announcers don't want to think about the engineer. Basketball players don't want to think about the referee. I know what can go wrong, and I want to be ready. If you're thinking two steps ahead and things get really wild, and it's hitting the fan, even when you slip you're still one step ahead."

Looking forward, Raul plans to maintain good relations with Sutro Tower's neighbors – "we're all part of the same community, part of the city" – and noted that he, personally, is also part of the city. "Being a home product helps me understand the role of Sutro Tower in San Francisco," he said.

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Questions? Visit [www.sutrotower.com/for-our-neighbors/](http://www.sutrotower.com/for-our-neighbors/), or contact Sutro Tower Vice President Raul Velez at 415-213-7800 or [info@sutrotower.com](mailto:info@sutrotower.com).

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## New Screen for Sutro Roof

**A**t the request of Sutro Tower's neighbors, workers are installing 68 translucent polycarbon panels along the roof edge of Sutro's cement building to screen antennas and other equipment from the view of people walking around the adjacent reservoir. The 4x8 panels, made in France, are 5 thin sheets with honeycomb connectors (right) set in aluminum frames.

