# Rick Schneider, Maine Public's New President and CEO



### What intrigued you about joining Maine Public?

So many things! I'm a journalist at heart, and so I was attracted to the outstanding news organization here. Maine Public is what the public media system calls a "joint licensee" – joint meaning both public radio and television. It is a "community" licensee, which is a self-standing nonprofit governed by a board of trustees, instead of a government agency or educational institution. And, of course, our statewide reach. With the opportunity to cover the state with news, information, classical music, and education across radio, television, and digital platforms, we can positively impact Mainers' lives. A prime example is our coverage of Maine CDC briefings during the pandemic.

# What role do you see public media having in the context of the entire media landscape today?

Our role is based on trust – people knowing that our content is produced as a public service, not based on commercial imperatives. Our news is meant to inform, not sensationalize. Our education programs address the needs of children without treating them as advertising targets. In today's media landscape, there is more content available on more platforms than ever. Much of it is wonderful and much of it is trash. People trust the brands of Maine Public, NPR, and PBS to provide content that informs, inspires, and contributes to a more civil society.

In many communities, public media stations are the last locally owned media outlet. Maine Public offers statewide networks for radio news, classical music, and public television, all complemented by digital media, locally governed and produced with a public service mission. It is a tremendous community asset.

#### What experiences have you had in public media that you feel are relevant for your new role here?

My journalism career, from local reporter to Washington correspondent to television news director, and later responsible for oversight of *PBS NewsHour*, helps me advocate for the powerful news team at Maine Public. I've been a champion for increasing original television production and digital content at my stations. And I have experience running stations; I am comfortable representing my organization in the community and covering diverse geographic areas.

### Is there a project or two that you have undertaken in your career that you are especially proud of?

The single national project I am most proud of is the modernization of *PBS NewsHour*. When I arrived at WETA as COO, the future of the NewsHour was in question. Jim Lehrer had retired from anchoring, and Jim and Robert MacNeil wanted to step back from owning their company, MacNeil/Lehrer Productions. They transferred the company to WETA and I was named president of the new NewsHour Productions. As someone who got his start as a local TV reporter, heading up NewsHour Productions was a great honor for me. The new team under executive producer Sara Just did an extraordinary job of evolving the program. That I worked with Judy Woodruff, Gwen Ifill, Sara, and the NewsHour team is a professional highlight.

More relevant for Maine Public, I'm proud of the original television series my stations have launched. In Reno we produced *Nevada Experience*, *House with a History*, and *Wild Nevada*. I took the outdoor concept with me to Miami to create *Wild Florida*. Our team launched *Changing Seas*, an underwater research series, and *Check Please! South Florida*, a local restaurant review show.

Public television is wonderful for showcasing stories about a state or region. We see that here with *Assignment: Maine* and the Maine Public Community Films series. The television team is eager to tell more of Maine's stories, and I look forward to making that possible.

#### What are some of your favorite radio programs?

Easy answer – *Maine Calling* and the *This Day in Maine* podcast! I have learned so much about Maine from listening to them. I'm devoted to NPR news, *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered* if I'm driving, or the *Up First* podcast first thing in the morning. I'm a big fan of *Marketplace*, and I catch *Wait Wait...Don't Tell Me!* and *This American Life* when I can.

#### And, of course, television?

With my news and WETA background, I'm loyal to *PBS NewsHour* and *Washington Week. Frontline's* investigative coverage of significant issues is such important journalism. And I'm a history buff, so *American Experience* and, especially, the films of Ken Burns.

#### What are some of the first steps you'll take over your initial months on the job?

I'm learning about Maine Public's team and services, of course, and I'm eager to travel across the state and meet listeners, viewers, and supporters. We have a system of 14 radio transmitters and 9 television transmitters statewide, and I look forward to visiting the communities they serve.

One specific project already underway is evaluating our geographically diverse facilities – our staff in Portland needs a better workspace. And I want to make it possible for the team to expand our radio journalism and create more original television content.

#### What excites you about Maine itself?

I love the water and the outdoors. I'm a hiker, boater, lighthouse photographer, and avid road-tripper. Maine is perfect for me!

# I Summer, fall, and spring are magical in Maine, but the winter weather... do you think you are ready for a Maine Winter?!?

Well, I'll need to be! I grew up in Florida, so you might make certain assumptions. But I've experienced winter while living in New York, London, and Reno – I remember driving across Donner Summit in a blizzard. Those might not compare to Maine winters; I'm told the issue is not so much the snow, but that it gets very cold and dark for a long time. But a friend also told me there is no bad weather, only bad clothes! I'll welcome any tips on getting through it and will enjoy the beauty of winter while looking forward to spring.

Thank you, Rick!

