Delaware Public Media

ANNUAL REPORT

2020

Local journalism has never been more important.
Demand for local news intensified in 2020

Ten years ago, a group of visionaries launched Delaware Public Media to fill a gap in local news coverage. We doubt they could have foreseen then how the events of 2020 would amplify the need for timely, trustworthy, and local news.

COVID-19, social unrest, and a contentious election season made 2020 the most tumultuous year of news in our history. Our team went into overdrive, and it was amazing to watch them pivot seamlessly to handling the incredibly fast news cycle the coronavirus created. Amid this environment, we:

- Aired more than 600 stories about COVID-19 in Delaware.
- Reported nearly 200 election-related stories, coproduced Delaware Debates, and offered live primary and election night results.
- Produced 60 episodes of The Green, presented 100 reports on the arts, and reported on education, healthcare, the economy, the environment, and other issues affecting the lives of First Staters.
- Welcomed Hometown Heroes to our schedule after it was dropped by its long-time commercial radio home.
- Were the only local news organization in the region selected to host a Report for America journalist. This national service program supports young journalists and pays half of their first-year salaries.
- Celebrated our tenth anniversary with a virtual event featuring Lulu Garcia-Navarro, the host of NPR’s Weekend Edition Sunday, and former Weekend Edition Sunday host Liane Hansen, a DPM fan since moving to Delaware.
- Introduced a new logo that symbolizes our commitment to Delaware and the unique mix of programming we transmit.

In a time of new and unexpected challenges, we remain profoundly grateful for the strong support we’ve received from all of you. By supporting quality journalism in the First State, you make it possible for us to be the place where Delawareans get tuned in.

Robert J. Varipapa, MD  
Chairperson

Jane C. W. Vincent  
President & Station Manager

On the cover: Sophia Schmidt
In 2020 we celebrated our 10th anniversary

Founded in 2009 as Delaware First Media, we launched our news service in 2010. Here are some of the milestones that have marked our evolution into today’s Delaware Public Media.

- **2010**: We start a livestreamed news service, in partnership with the University of Delaware, with industry veteran Tom Byrne as news director.
- **2011**: With UD and Delaware State University as partners, we begin broadcasting over WDDE on August 17 from studios on DSU’s Dover campus.
- **2012**: We acquire a radio broadcast license, plan to affiliate with NPR, and launch a social media presence.
- **2013**: Our flagship program, The Green, debuts in November.
- **2014**: We launch Generation Voice with the Brandywine School District at Mt. Pleasant High School, and the school’s radio station, WMPH, starts simulcasting WDDE’s signal.
- **2018**: We rebrand DFM as Delaware Public Media.
- **2019**: Generation Voice expands into the Red Clay Consolidated School District at Thomas McKean High School, where radio station WMHS begins carrying WDDE’s programming.
- **2020**: Infrastructure improvements bolster our signal and streaming, and Tom Byrne receives the Communicator of Achievement Award from the Delaware Press Association.

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Our news coverage won 32 awards in 2020—here are our first-place winners

Our work was recognized by the Delaware Press Association and the National Federation of Press Women.

Direction Democracy podcast series
Hosted by Tom Byrne
Produced with UD’s Center for Political Communication, this series earned first-place awards in both the state and national competitions.

Protesters challenge state DOJ’s handling of Wilmington Police shooting of carjacking suspect
by Sophia Schmidt
When protestors demonstrated, Sophia was on the scene, and her report took first place in both the state and national competitions.

First State officials slam sea wall plan as unrealistic way to repel rising seas
by Jon Hurdle
In this 10-minute report, Jon and Tom Byrne dug into the viability of a $9.4 billion proposal to build 941 miles of sea walls in Delaware.

“...So well done. Easily on the level of some national podcasts. Host has great rapport and a personality you want to hear more of.”

2020 Communications Contest judges on the Direction Democracy podcast series
We provide a perspective not consistently available from commercial or out-of-state news sources.
**The Green** is where you'll find our most comprehensive coverage

With a name that evokes gathering places of yore in New Castle, Dover, and Georgetown, **The Green** delivers a mix of First State news, commentary, and features that are in-depth, nuanced, and couched in context that only someone like news director and host Tom Byrne, with insight gained over 30+ years of reporting Delaware news, can offer.

In 2020, politics and the pandemic dominated **The Green**. We aired **Candidate Conversations** with statewide office hopefuls; Gov. Carney visited our studio for an exclusive, extensive conversation about his 2021 priorities; and a variety of medical and healthcare professionals weighed in on the coronavirus.

**Red Clay Consolidated School District** superintendent Dorrell Green (shown with administrator Hugh Broomall, left) discussed the role K-12 schools play in racial justice.

**Pastor John Hornberger** of Middletown’s Bethesda United Methodist Church spoke to **Enlighten Me** about the challenges of leading worship virtually.

**Arts Playlist** asked how the Biggs Museum of American Art and other arts organizations adapted to COVID-forced closures.

**The Green** is supported in part by DANA, the Delaware Alliance for Nonprofit Advancement. **Arts Playlist** is supported, in part, by a grant from the Delaware Division of the Arts, a state agency, in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts.
We introduced a new segment, Building Bridges, a collaboration with the Delaware State News featuring conversations with Delawareans working to promote social justice and racial equity.

The pandemic also featured prominently on The Green’s human-interest segments, Enlighten Me and Arts Playlist. For one Enlighten Me piece, reporter Sophia Schmidt asked faith leaders across the state how their congregations were adapting. Enlighten Me also aired reports by students at the University of Delaware, at Delaware State University, and in the Generation Voice programs at Mt. Pleasant and Thomas McKean High Schools.

With Arts Playlist morning anchor/reporter Kelli Steele delves into Delaware’s vibrant visual and performing arts scene, which COVID-19 completely disrupted. Kelli talked to Paul Weagraff, director of the Delaware Division of the Arts, about the financial implications for arts organizations—and the ripple effects that closures are having on the state’s economy. She also took a virtual “road trip” to report on outside-the-box actions museums were taking to engage audiences.

Village greens have long been open-air meeting places; The Green is an on-air meeting place where Delawareans explore their common ground.
Election-year coverage offered insight into candidates and issues

In 2020, there were debates between the major-party candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives and for governor of Delaware, both of which took place virtually. We aired 24 Candidate Conversations with primary and general election candidates for the U.S. Senate, the U.S. House of Representatives, governor, lieutenant governor, and insurance commissioner.

Races to Watch reports followed hotly contested races for seats in the Delaware Senate and House of Representatives; for president of New Castle County Council; and for seats on Kent County Levy Court, Sussex County Council, and Wilmington City Council.

Our reporters spent election day in the field gathering reactions from voters, candidates, and party leaders up and down the state. On election night, Tom Byrne hosted live coverage featuring analysis and commentary with guests Matt Bittle from the Delaware State News and Dr. Paul R. Brewer from UD’s Center for Political Communication.

2020 election coverage was sponsored in part by Delaware Humanities.

In biennial election years, we coproduce Delaware Debates and Candidate Conversations with UD’s Center for Political Communication.
The coronavirus made having access to local news a matter of life and death

As the coronavirus spread to Delaware, the need for timely, accurate, and local information became urgent. This was especially true in Sussex County, where we are one of the few locally based news outlets.

Our website traffic skyrocketed. It more than doubled from New Castle, Middletown, Smyrna, and Dover. In Sussex County, volume was three to five times higher, with the largest increases coming from Lewes, Long Neck, Milford, Milton, Ocean View, and Seaford.

To cover this rapidly evolving story, our news team worked overtime, we added freelance reporters, and we nearly doubled the number of local stories we aired. With news reporters considered essential critical infrastructure workers, anchors Kelli Steele and Nick Ciolino continued to broadcast from our studios. For reporters working in the field, we provided boom microphone extenders to assist with social distancing, and we invested in additional production equipment so they could write, produce, and file stories remotely and safely.

We followed the pandemic’s progression in Delaware from a variety of angles. We augmented government updates with insight from local medical and healthcare professionals. We reported on the effects on educators and students, employers and workers, communities of color and low-income areas, arts and religious organizations, business and the economy, and families across the state.

As the First State continues to cope with COVID-19, Delawareans can continue to count on us for the best local coverage possible.

We’ve partnered with the University of Delaware since day one, and with Delaware State University since 2012, when we launched WDDE. DSU’s Dover campus is home base to our studios and offices, and we work there with the Department of Mass Communications, Visual, and Performing Arts and sound production students. At UD, we collaborate with the Center for Political Communication and journalism students on a variety of initiatives, including an annual audio essay contest and biennial election debates. Student interns from both schools gain experience in all aspects of newsroom operations and learn how to produce professional-quality stories in broadcast and digital formats.

Our youth media program helps high school students learn about digital media arts production.

We offer Generation Voice, our youth media program, in partnership with two New Castle County high schools that have their own radio stations: Mt. Pleasant High School in the Brandywine School District and Thomas McKean High School in the Red Clay Consolidated School District. We collaborate with the schools on a curriculum that teaches journalism ethics and basics, including how to identify, research, and write stories; how to conduct interviews and host programs; and how to use radio and digital production platforms. Our reporters work directly with students at their schools, and the school radio stations—91.7 FM WMPH and 88.1 FM WMHS—simulcast portions of our programming.

The Generation Voice program is led by our youth media producer, Sophia Schmidt, with assistance from reporter Roman Battaglia. In the 2019–20 school year, the program initially focused on investigative journalism. After the coronavirus closed schools, we helped students produce audio journals chronicling their pandemic experiences.

"The COVID crisis makes NPR and Delaware Public Media critically important. It makes me really proud to say we have DPM on campus." — Tony Allen, PhD President, Delaware State University
We coproduce the *A Matter of Facts* podcast series with Delaware Humanities.

This series, which airs on *The Green*, explores how information overload makes it difficult to discern the difference between news and opinion, and helps audiences identify trustworthy news sources.

Delaware Humanities, a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, thanks the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Pulitzer Prizes for their support.

**Hometown Heroes needed a new home in 2020—and found one with us.**

When a local commercial radio station abruptly canceled *Hometown Heroes* after 21 years, long-standing host Mark Rogers and his iconic program joined the Delaware Public Media family. Mark’s much-loved program is the single authoritative showcase for news about, interviews with, and in-studio performances by artists in and around Delaware across a wide variety of musical genres.

Broadcast live from the WMHS studios at Thomas McKean High School, *Hometown Heroes* airs on Facebook Live in addition to all of our platforms.

*Hometown Heroes* is supported in part by a grant from the Delaware Division of the Arts in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts.
These supporters kept the news going in 2020 and helped Delawareans cope with COVID-19. Thank you!

Financial Highlights

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<th>2019</th>
<th>2018</th>
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<th>2020</th>
<th>2019</th>
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<td><strong>EXPENSES</strong></td>
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<td>$161,175</td>
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Other income includes forgiveness of debt and conditional contribution. Complete audited financial statements are available at delawarepublic.org/legal.
Our news team reports on what matters to Delawareans

No other broadcaster in Delaware has more experience covering the First State than news director Tom Byrne. A Delaware newscaster for 30+ years, Tom brings a level of insight, depth, and context to our programming that is unequaled in the local media, and he holds our team to the highest standards of unbiased reporting and journalistic ethics.

Our local news coverage begins weekdays at 5:00 a.m. with morning anchor Kelli Steele. An award-winning journalist with more than 30 years of radio news experience in Delaware and elsewhere, Kelli is also our arts reporter.

Afternoon anchor Nick Ciolino also reports extensively on healthcare and the opioid crisis. He’s worked at NPR stations in Detroit and Alaska—and as a cupcake delivery driver, auto shop tire technician, commercial fisherman, and beer vendor.

Sophia Schmidt, our New Castle County-based reporter and youth media producer, also leads our Generation Voice programs. Before joining DPM, Sophia worked on NPR’s Weekend Edition in Washington, D.C.

Roman Battaglia, our Report for America fellow, covers local news throughout the state and supports Generation Voice. Previously he reported for NPR’s Next Generation Radio in California.

Part-time contributors and freelancers round out our team

Joe Irizarry, who previously spent six years at commercial stations in New Castle and Sussex Counties, handles part-time reporting and anchoring duties.

Part-time anchor Rachel Sawicki is a senior at the University of Delaware.

Seasoned freelancers Eileen Dallabrida, Mark Fowser, Jon Hurdle, and Larry Nagengast help us cover the state and contribute regularly to The Green.

As we celebrated our 10th anniversary, NPR celebrated its 50th.

We are the only public news service dedicated to covering local and statewide news in Delaware.
Volunteers bring a statewide perspective

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News Director
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Reporter/Afternoon Anchor
Sophia Schmidt
Reporter/Youth Media Producer
Roman Battaglia
Reporter/Report for America Fellow
Joe Irizarry
Reporter/Part-time Anchor
Rachel Sawicki
Part-time Anchor

Contributors
Eileen Smith Dallabrida
Mark Fowser
Jon Hurdle
Larry Nagengast

Program Host
Mark Rogers
Hometown Heroes

Operations and Programming
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Senior Advisor
Daniele June
Administrative Assistant
Thomas Terry
Operations Manager
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Community Advisory Board
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Lisa Hastings
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Mary Elizabeth Phillips
Susan Salkin
James Williams
Paul Wishengrad
About Delaware Public Media

Delaware Public Media is the first and only NPR affiliate licensed, established, and headquartered in Delaware.

Our mission is to serve the public interest by providing unbiased and in-depth noncommercial news and information that informs, educates, and engages the citizens of Delaware. Our unique mix of programming combines NPR content with First State-specific news and features produced by our own award-winning team.

We work closely with Delaware State University, the University of Delaware, the Brandywine School District, and the Red Clay Consolidated School District to provide internships and other opportunities that train future journalists to practice and uphold the highest standards of news gathering and reporting.

Founded in 2009 as Delaware First Media, we launched an online news service in 2010, and began broadcasting over 91.1 FM WDDE in 2012 from studios on Delaware State University’s Dover campus. Our radio signal is also simulcast at select times on 91.7 FM WMPH and 88.1 FM WMHS.

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