Navigating through periods of growth and transformation can be a difficult task, particularly as a leader tasked with inspiring and motivating their team when everything is changing. As I reflect on the past year, the word that comes to mind is “together.” It is evident that our collective hard work at KAXE has yielded some pretty incredible results.

Throughout the past year, our organization has been on a transformative journey. We have seen significant growth and meaningful change. Amid the daily grind and inevitable frustrations, our team has remained dedicated to serving our communities with authenticity and purpose. We take great pride as we have seen the impact of our efforts firsthand.

In an era that is characterized by shifting trends and uncertainties of the future of public media, KAXE stands as a beacon of resilience and relevance. National programs are seeing a decline in listenership, but our local programming continues to thrive, driven by a hunger for content that fosters connection and understanding within our communities. In the complex and divisive world of sound bites and social media bombarding us, KAXE remains committed to authenticity. This is reflected in both statistics and listener feedback, reaffirming the significance of our mission in today's media landscape.

A recent gathering of media organizations across the state served as a good reminder of our unique position as the representatives of Northern Minnesota. In a sea of other media voices, KAXE emerged as an advocate for our region, underscoring the vital role we play in shaping the narrative and amplifying the voices of our community members. This realization has only deepened our sense of purpose and responsibility.

As we look ahead, the future of KAXE shines brightly, guided by the dedication of our team and the support of our members and listeners. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all who have contributed to us on this journey. We appreciate the financial support, words of encouragement and valuable feedback. Your belief in our mission fuels our determination to continue serving our communities in the best possible manner.

In the pages that follow, you will hear from the rest of the KAXE team, each offering insights and reflection on the past year. Together, we remain committed to the ideals that define KAXE – authenticity, integrity and community. We eagerly look forward to what lies ahead, confident in our ability to embrace change and drive growth for years to come.

Thank you for your part in this remarkable journey.

Sincerely,

Sarah Bignall - CEO/GM
Newsroom

By Chelsey Perkins

It’s been just over a year since I walked through the doors of KAXE for the first time — excited and motivated, but also pretty nervous.

As the new news director, I was tasked with building a newsroom focused on local stories across Northern Minnesota in a well-loved and long-lived community radio station.

My background as a newspaper reporter and editor provided a solid foundation, but radio? That was a new frontier. And it turns out, starting something new is a much bigger challenge than I anticipated.

A year — and the two impressive and talented additions of Larissa Donovan and Megan Buffington to the news team — later, we’re finding our stride. As of March, we reached the mark of publishing more than 500 stories in the Local News section of kaxe.org, including 180+ episodes of our daily newscast, the Up North Report. (Subscribe on your favorite podcast app so you’ll never miss it!)

We’ve reported stories across Northern Minnesota on a great variety of topics, generously supported by the one-of-a-kind photography work of Lorie Shaul, a KAXE member and volunteer.

We've covered labor strikes, cannabis legalization, the 2023 election, natural resources, issues with rural mail delivery and severe drought conditions. We’ve traveled across the region to witness court proceedings, attend local government meetings and see the unveiling of new facilities ourselves.

We also produced our first series of in-depth stories in collaboration with Energy News Network, a nonprofit news partner. The series covered the green energy transition in the mining industry on Minnesota’s Iron Range and was republished by multiple outlets.

Looking ahead to the year ahead, we want to ensure the stories we produce are relevant and meaningful to the lives of our Northern Minnesota neighbors. Working with our partners at America Amplified, we’re committed to covering elections your way this year. Take control of the conversation by visiting kaxe.org/america-amplified-2024.

Reach us at news@kaxe.org with story tips, comments, concerns and more. We’re covering the communities we care about. And we’re here to listen.
It was especially gratifying for me to be at the Iron Range Earth Fest and have people approach our table and whisper “are you Charlie Mitchell?” Charlie’s work and general attitude is engaging and inclusive.

The KAXE Newsroom contributes daily headlines with the Up North Report and joins us Thursday mornings for conversations about why and how we report the news. This transparency with our staff of journalists is intentional, to gain the trust of our listeners and readers.

Our co-hosts are what make the Morning Show on KAXE shine and this year that includes John Latimer, Kari Hedlund, John Bauer, Dan Gannon, Jen Kellen, Heather Johnson, Malachy Koons, Sarah Bignall, Chris Walker and Scott Hall. Big thanks also goes out to our regular contributors like Tammy Bobrowsky, Jeff Sundin, Marshall Helmberger, Bob Conzemius, Mark Jacobs, Pam Perry, Kyle Erickson, Fred Friedman, Katie Marshall and so many more!

Never have I felt as connected to what’s going on in our region as this year. We’ve used our text line at 218-326-1234 to have live interaction. Our stories reflected people from Turtle River, Keewatin, Nashwauk, Grand Rapids, Bemidji, Deer River, Coleraine, Walker, Onigum, Bigfork, Laporte, Pequot Lakes, Park Rapids, Ely, Hill City, Palisade, Red Lake, Remer, Aitkin, Virginia, Shevlin, Baxter and more!

Thank you for supporting the Morning Show and all the people who come together to make it a daily dynamic broadcast. As always, let us know what’s going on in your region, email comments@kaxe.org.
Membership & Development

By Chris Walker

It’s been a really eventful year for the Development Team since our last Annual Meeting. We’ve welcomed two new members to the team in Bemidji and one new member in Grand Rapids.

Just before Riverfest last year, Maria Hileman joined our team as our new Marketing/Social Media Specialist. She made an immediate impact by taking over our Facebook and Instagram pages for both the station and Grand Rapids Riverfest. We received a ton of engagement on our Riverfest content including posts that were re-shared by Amanda Shires and Dessa.

Maria has also given us a consistent presence across social media as a station with thoughtfully curated content and an increase in engagement and followers. She has collaborated with almost everyone at the station whether it’s pushing out content on socials, creating new poster designs for events, or updating marketing materials. One of the most notable projects she worked on was our 40 Years of Phenology Member Drive where she designed the theme and set up the process for creating a Phenology t-shirt with North Hennepin Community College’s graphic design class. She has also helped redesign both our Season Watch and Buzz newsletters and worked with Membership on our renewal materials.

With regards to membership, in October, Heather Johnson took over the reigns from longtime Member Services Coordinator, Jennifer Barr. As a longtime superfan of KAXE/KBXE, Heather immediately brought an infectious positivity to the team and an eagerness to learn the role and connect with our members. Heather has been instrumental in expanding ways to communicate with our membership, but has always welcomed a phone call or a walk-in as she truly loves meeting our supporters.

She helped us organize and ease the chaos of our member drives and has been behind updating our renewal materials to give our station a new voice and a fresh look. You may have noticed some emails and postcards with a new design to reach out to members about renewing. She collaborated with Maria on the toad and frog postcards as Heather loves nature and would thoroughly enjoy looking for bugs in any of our members’ backyards. If you ever have a question about membership, Heather welcomes your call.

In December, Jen Kellen joined the sponsorship team to go along with Peggy Stevens over in Bemidji. Since she started, Jen has consistently looked for ways we can grow our presence and awareness in the Bemidji community and beyond. A longtime member, Jen and her husband Dave helped build KBXE. Now, she’s taken that experience with her to meet with potential sponsors and help deliver her authentic pitch to gain support for the station from new businesses and organizations.

Another big undertaking Jen has stepped up to is heading the planning for Bemidji Block Party. She’s working directly and more consistently with Bemidji Brewing to maximize the potential for the event with a focus on more local marketing initiatives in the Bemidji area.

Across the entire Development team over the last year, we’ve increased our sponsorship funding, membership numbers, and social media followers. It’s been a very successful year with a ton of potential for the coming years. Our goal will continue to be coming up with more ways to connect with new people across all of our platforms.
# 2024 Award Recipients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lorie Shaull</th>
<th>Jesse Davis</th>
<th>Megan Reynolds</th>
<th>Roger Rhodes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Silent Star</strong></td>
<td><strong>Community Impact</strong></td>
<td><strong>Community Arts</strong></td>
<td><strong>Volunteer of the Year</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Lorie Shaull** has dedicated countless hours behind the scenes to bringing the stories of our news, Morning Show and music departments to life with her beautiful and compelling images. She’s always up for the challenge, whether covering labor strikes or kids enjoying nature. KAXE.org wouldn’t be the same without Lorie’s talents.

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**Jesse Davis** was a community connector and bridge-builder like no other. His unexpected passing this year brought to light his immense impact on newcomers to the area, growers, artists and people of all kinds.

Jesse’s natural curiosity, warmth and authenticity allowed him to forge deep bonds across diverse groups. His voice uplifted the often-unsung aspects of daily life and local culture.

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Marcia Nottingham worked tirelessly in the nonprofit community and was director of the food bank. Our board of directors gives the Marcia Nottingham Community Impact award annually to someone who makes an outstanding contribution to people in our region.

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**Megan Reynolds** has deeply embedded herself in the arts scene of the Iron Range and beyond. A fervent advocate for youth in arts, she is the Hibbing High School Drama Director and led the group to perform a one-act play at the state sectional competition this year. She is a member of Sugar on the Roof, an old time band that performs regularly at barn and contra dances. Bring any arts idea to Megan and she’ll start scheming on how to make it happen.

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Kathy Dodge was a longtime volunteer at KAXE known for connecting people, ideas and arts organizations around the region. Her accomplishments are legendary and key in building a vibrant arts community. She was an advocate of the arts, through and through.

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**Roger Rhodes** (or ‘Roger Radio’) started volunteering at KAXE in 2023, and quickly became a known personality on the air. He has worked tirelessly on digging into the music library, has volunteered many hours over the past year, and is a constant advocate of the station. Roger volunteered as a stagehand at Grand Rapids Riverfest in 2023 from morning until the very end, with a smile on his face the entire time. He has become a listener and fan favorite, even among Jason Isbell and Amanda Shires.

The Phil Collins Volunteer of the Year Award honors someone who goes “above and beyond” in the same fashion as the late Phil Collins.
2023-24 On-Air Volunteers

Aaron Johnson
Aidan Larson
Alex Zimmerman
Alyssa Roberts aka Alyssa Ellyn
Annette Seppanen “Annie Lou”
Anthony Swann
Ara Gallo
Barry Lyons
Betsy Crabb
Brandon Chase
Brian Milan
Caige Jambor
Carla John aka DJ Ceej
Charlie Parson
Charlie Rockler
Corey Campbell
Culien Horien
Curt Nelson aka Nelson
Dakota Diamond
Dan Lentz
Dan Zorman aka DJ Ironsides
Darren White
Dave Bloomstrand
Dave Murphy
Dave Peterson
David John
Dawn Espe
Debra Rosholt aka DebraAnn
(The Intrepid) Dennis Elj (30 years)
Diane Ott
DJ the DJ
Doug and Sue Lamski aka Dug Dngrr
Eric Mann
Eric Otto
Finn and Scott Jourgenson
Gail Otteson
Iris Jensen
Janet Brademan/Kristi Norland
Janet Florine (since ‘79)
Jeff Edmonds
Jen Buie
Jennie Goodpastor aka DJ Jen Fay
Jerry Brademan
Jim Gallagher
Joan Downham
John Henningsgaard
John Segari
Judy Grewe
Julie Crabb
Justine Jacobson
Karen Ryan (since ‘84)
Kate Tesar
Katie Carter
Kevin Sunell
Kristi Miller
Lulu Flanagan
Marie Debris

Mark Klabunde
Mary Overlie aka MaeMae
Matt Johnson
Melissa Lentz aka Sweet Melissa
Michael Small
Michelle Bedford
Mickey P
Mike Berre
Mike Elliott AKA Old Man River
Mike Spry
Nate Dorr
Nicole Hoops
Pat Miller
Robert Jevne
Roger Radio
Rollie Dethloff
Ryan Brubaker
Sarah Albers aka Sarah Sarah
Shannon Anttila (OTR/GC)
Steve Ross
Susan Lick
Tammy Bobrowsky
Tifanny Halverson
Tod Swenson
Tom Cobb
Tom Daniel
Tom and Julie Legg
Tracy and Kyle Bartholomew
Val Satterstrom
Will Owens

Cont’d Award Recipients

Alyssa Ellyn
Newcomer of the Year

Alyssa Ellyn is a positive force who puts everything she has into each music set she share with KAXE listeners. She embodies the ethos of musical diversity that KAXE asks of on-air DJs with a knowledgeable and deep selection of music that flows from genre to genre with ease.

Alyssa always brings an upbeat and enthusiastic energy to her sets, and she is also willing to volunteer off the air — even in the most undesirable times, like cleaning up the morning after Grand Rapids Riverfest.

“I’m really enjoying the tunes this morning as I’m baking desserts for the family dinner tonight. Thanks for being there!” - Tammy from Bemidji

DJ the DJ

Teacher of the Year

Dennis Jerome, aka DJ the DJ, has been the most accommodating and successful on-air trainer for new volunteer DJs. He said “yes” every single time he was asked if a new volunteer could sit with him, and his success rate is very high. Nearly every prospective DJ that he taught has gone on to produce their own music show.
Over the past year, the Music Team has been stretching out our fingers and toes into new territory, more interviews, more volunteers, more coverage, more music!

Volunteer Coordinator, Dan Gannon, has shepherded many new voices onto the air over the past year, expanding who we are and what we hear on the radio. He's also taken lots of time to hold up those people who have given us so much over the years, seeing several retirements and losses from our volunteer community. Special shout out to longtime hosts who hung up their headphones this year: Joan Downham, Karen Ryan, Charlie Parson, Lulu Flanagan and the late Anthony Swann.

This year, Malachy Koons, our Minnesota (and beyond) music extraordinaire, has interviewed well-known names like Lucinda Williams, Dave Simonett, Charlie Parr, and newcomers to the scene like Laamar, Riley Skinner, Maygen & the Birdwatcher among many others. He's also expanded KAXE's live music coverage with the weekly Setlist, a rundown of must-see concerts near you that has quickly become a weekly staple for our listeners.

Grand Rapids Riverfest has been a large focus of mine the past couple years. In 2023, it was a sold out event with KAXE having a full team of players ensuring all went off without a hitch. It has been so incredible to have people ready to play and dig in the action to make it happen. Ticket sales for 2024 have already been strong and we're ready to host Spoon in Grand Rapids!

Bemidji Block Party was another standout year in 2023 and we have the next one coming soon (6/22)! Keep an eye out for the lineup.

Other than concerts, it's music music music! There is an abundance of great albums and singles out already in 2024 we've been loving playing on KAXE.

“I was introduced to KAXE in the late 1970’s while living in Brainerd. It wasn’t easy with the weak signal, which did seem to get stronger anytime the Road Hog took to the air. Always on my dial in Crosslake. Artists I’ve discovered through KAXE programing continue to grow…..off the top of my head are Courtney Barnett, Them Coulee Boys, Social Animals, Valerie June...” - Scott from Crosslake
Taking time to honor and remember

This year was a tough one, we lost far too many important voices on KAXE.

Don Boese was KAXE's staff historian who dedicated countless hours creating rich programming that explored the area's history - from the Blandin Paper Company to John C. Greenway's impact on the storied Mississippi River. Scott Hall, former Morning Show Director, said, “Don was a rigorous historian.” Boese wore many hats at KAXE and in the community. He taught at Itasca Community College, authored 8 books, and was a formidable gourmet cook in a local food club. His passion for documenting the region’s past helped preserve stories for future generations.

Jesse Davis contributed his vibrant passions to KAXE’s programming in a myriad of ways. From local food, the Itasca Orchestra, the Grand Rapids Farmers Market, festivals or his regular program “On the House,” Jesse created conversations that were brimming with passion and life. Pedro Oviedo, conductor and music director with the Itasca Orchestra Strings Program, aptly described Jesse as “the people’s glue” for the way he brought the community together.

Aaron Wenger was a true Renaissance man who straddled the worlds of poetry, physics, and higher education. Wenger was instrumental in establishing the engineering program at Itasca Community College, now Minnesota North-Itasca, leaving an indelible legacy. Fondly regarded as KAXE's "staff physicist," Wenger could explain complex ideas about space and time in an accessible way. Beyond his scientific mind, Wenger was celebrated as a "big thinker" - an imaginative poet and storyteller who was frequently featured on programs like Stay Human, Wordish, The Morning Show and The Beat. His creative spirit and boundless curiosity allowed him to dive into exploring the human condition from a myriad of angles.

Anthony Swann was a prolific poet and author. Swann was a mainstay at the station, regularly lending his deep knowledge and lived experience to discussions about jazz and poetry. As a jazz aficionado, he hosted the show "Jazz on America Avenue." Swann also contributed his poetic voice frequently to KAXE's program "The Beat." When the station paid tribute to him on the air after his passing, Volunteer Coordinator Dan Gannon reflected that it was “truly touching and a wonderfully thought-out tribute to a man who was, no doubt, scatting right along to the show.” Swann's artistic spirit and enthusiasm for the arts left an indelible impact on all who knew him through KAXE’s airwaves.
Meet the Team

L to R: Megan Buffington, Chris Walker, Heidi Holtan, Jennifer Barr, Sarah Bignall, Chelsey Perkins, Jennifer Kellen, Malachy Koons, Steve Neu, Peggy Stevens, Andrew Dziengle, Penny Holcomb, Dan Gannon, Larissa Donovan, Kari Hedlund, and Maria Hileman.

Not pictured: Heather Johnson and Charlie Mitchell
Northern Community Radio had another clean audit performed by Blake & Lind, CPA of Grand Rapids.

Its financial condition is good. Net assets at the end of FY23 were $2,649,821, $90,357 more than last year.

Cash equivalents on hand at the end of FY23 were $556,180. The full audit is available at kaxe.org.
Top Web Stories
May 1, 2023- April 30, 2024

UPM Blandin paper operations shut down as union employees strike

Grand Rapids school board likely to decide early summer start Monday

Election 2023: Northern Minnesota's results

Virginia councilor apologizes for mocking city workers amidst negotiation

22,808 views
7,591 views
6,944 views
5,876 views

Top Social Media Posts
Feb 15, 2024 - May 15, 2024

The decision was discussed at a special meeting but the issue was tabled for the next meeting to wait for additional details from Superintendent Matt Grose.
Fri, Apr 19

Post reach: 149,004
Engagement: 19,633

Superintendent Matt Grose says it would save the district money to move teachers and classrooms between East and West Rapids elementary schools at the end of the school year...
Mon, Apr 1

Post reach: 74,490
Engagement: 14,504

The $10 million, 63-unit project is proposed for two blocks on Second Street, north of the Grand Rapids Public Library and KAXE studios.
Mon, Apr 29

Post reach: 31,675
Engagement: 6,249

The cuts come from across the district, including teachers and technology. East and West Rapids elementary schools will move to grade level buildings next school year and some classes will...
Wed, Mar 13

Post reach: 13,778
Engagement: 6,118

The Grand Rapids School Board decided Monday night to move the last day of school up for East Rapids, West Rapids and Cohasset elementary schools, to allow teachers time to move...
Tue, Apr 23

Post reach: 34,108
Engagement: 4,891

Rob and Krista Sjostrand plan to open Roots and Wings Early Learning Center by late summer 2023, offering more than 100 slots for child care in the Grand Rapids area as the region...
Fri, Mar 15

Post reach: 15,975
Engagement: 4,872

“Of all the great things about KAXE, nothing is better than the development of the news department. I’ll be stopping by with an extra contribution in support of Chelsey, Larissa and Megan and all involved with bringing us local news. Our region is healthier for it.”
-Simon from Grand Rapids