“From the campus of Bradley University …”

That’s what WCBU-Peoria listeners hear every hour on the hour when they tune in to 89.9 FM for public radio news and information. Hard to believe, but it’s been five years now since WCBU operations came under the management of Illinois State University’s WGLT in Bloomington-Normal. While WCBU remains licensed to Bradley University, the station continues to be under ISU management.

By many standards, this partnership has been a great success. The WCBU Community Advisory Board, which represents the Greater Peoria listening area, has worked with the WCBU/WGLT management to help navigate the organizational transition. It’s been no small task. Change is difficult. Combining the forces of two long-standing organizations has taken a lot of hard work from management and staff to make it a success. But the result is impressive.

In 2023, Bradley and ISU mapped out a new six-year extension of WCBU’s management agreement. That’s great news for the station – as well as the listeners, readers (yes, you can find print versions of many local news stories on the WCBU website) and supporting members. ISU has fulfilled its original promises to provide staff committed solely to WCBU and to increase local content.

It’s not just any local content. It’s in-depth, inciteful programming that has won numerous awards over the last five years including a regional Edward R. Murrow Award from the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTNDA) and back-to-back Best Station honors from the Illinois News Broadcasters Association (INBA). WCBU is also garnering recognition on the national stage. In 2023, the Public Media Journalists Association awarded Best Short Documentary to the WCBU feature story, “For Peoria women whose children were murdered, Mother’s Day is anything but joyful,” an excellent example of the station giving voice to difficult stories that need to be told.

Which leads me to another hard truth that needs to be voiced. WCBU isn’t realizing the financial support the station needs to reach its aspiration to be Peoria’s leader in local news. Being one of the only nonprofit media organizations in Peoria that is freely accessible to all comes at a cost. And costs are rising. WCBU is working hard to grow individual membership and corporate support from the Greater Peoria broadcast area, which is a million people strong. But it takes a community – individuals and institutions – to make this happen.

We all have a stake in this –

Illinois State University: This first-in-the-industry partnership between Bradley and ISU is an inspiration. Please continue support of WCBU management in their goal to continuously innovate to develop staff and service to the station, driving engagement with the Greater Peoria community.

Supporters: If you’re not a member, consider becoming one – individually or through corporate support. Your financial contribution goes a long way. If you are an individual member or program underwriter, could you increase your commitment? Or if you aren’t in the position to make a financial commitment, how about promoting WCBU and station fund drives through your social networks? Corporate support and individual giving funds more than 75% of WCBU’s annual budget, including paying for the news and programming we all rely on. It takes all of us to do what we can for what we value.
Bradley University: WCBU is a great asset to the Greater Peoria community. It’s also a long-time contributor to the fabric of life on the Hilltop. Housed in Morgan Hall, WCBU provides a learning laboratory where new and experienced journalists join students with diverse backgrounds and visions for the future. Currently Bradley provides about 7% of WCBU’s operating funds. An increase in that support could only mean greater things in helping WCBU fully realize its vision for both Bradley and the community at large. So everyone hearing “From the campus of Bradley University …” is eager to become part of the WCBU – and Bradley – experience.

WCBU is in an excellent position to grow for the future. All it takes is all of us – the public in public broadcasting. If you are interested in what the Community Advisory Board is doing in support of WCBU, we invite you to attend one of our public board meetings – or apply to join the board if you are looking to expand your support for WCBU. We look forward to hearing from you.

Becky Doubleday, Chair
WCBU Community Advisory Board