If you’ve taken the time to open this report and read this letter, you’ve already indicated you believe in the public media mission. As always, we sincerely thank you for that. As WCBU wraps up another busy year, I’d like to share some highlights with you:

• WCBU’s news coverage again won a slew of awards, headlined by an Edward R. Murrow Overall Excellence award for the region including Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Wisconsin. WCBU also garnered a national second place honor from the Public Media Journalists Association for Best Short Documentary, and second place honors from the Illinois News Broadcasters Association for Best Station and Best Website.

• This next one isn’t really a highlight, but it is noteworthy. In April, WCBU followed NPR’s lead in leaving Twitter (or “X” or whatever it’s called by the time you read this) after the platform capriciously and incorrectly labeled NPR as “state sponsored media.” Our departure has had little discernable impact on traffic to our website, but as a reminder, you can find us Facebook, Instagram, at WCBU.org, on the NPR app, at 89.9 FM, or sign up for our newsletters.

• Camryn Cutinello joined WCBU as reporter and digital lead in June after interning at WBEZ and completing a master’s degree at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

• The station installed a new broadcast automation system in December—an investment of about $60,000—that has already paid dividends in upgraded on-air performance and greater efficiency for staff.

• We unveiled new mission and vision statements following months of strategic planning.

• Student interns Isabela Nieto and Meagan Ruger-Smith were awarded our second annual WCBU Scholarships. With talent like this coming up our ranks, the future of journalism looks good!

• I wrapped up my first full year as a member of NPR’s Board of Directors, and for the second half of the year I had the honor of serving on the search committee to select the replacement for retiring CEO John Lansing.
• Speaking of NPR, WCBU was prominently featured as a success story in the organization’s position paper, “Public Media and the Future of Local Journalism.”

• In October, Bradley University and Illinois State University extended their Public Service Operating Agreement through June 30, 2029.

As you know, the crisis in local news is very real, and cost-cutting corporate ownership of newspapers and commercial radio and television has accelerated and exacerbated the problem. And while there are still some hard-working folks at those outlets, it’s clear to me that public radio is the last, best hope to save local journalism. Journalism means so much more than coverage of politics, government, and crime. It’s about education, arts, culture, music, and the people in our community who are trying to make a difference. And we take our responsibility seriously.

People tell us consistently they love what WCBU is doing, but they want to hear and read more. “More” can only happen if the community makes financial support of WCBU a priority. So, in short, thanks to every one of you who contributes. And for those who don’t, please consider starting today. It makes a big difference!

R.C. McBride
General Manager
From the WCBU Newsroom

Most-read stories of 2023

• Former Caterpillar CEO Doug Oberhelman touts plan to fix what ails Peoria by attracting more executive talent
• Peoria man makes historic church into inspiring home
• UAW increases strike pay for members as union’s negotiations with Caterpillar continue
• Cullinan Properties seeks $9 million from Pekin to redevelop former Bergner’s property
• Taking a first-hand look at Pekin’s latest response to homelessness

Awards

WCBU was honored with several awards in 2023, including the Regional Edward R. Murrow Award for Overall Excellence in Small Market Radio for a second consecutive year. The station also earned second place in the Illinois News Broadcasters Association Crystal Mic Awards for Best Station in the Small Market category and Best Digital Presence in the Small Market category.

In the Community

WCBU had a strong community presence in 2023, attending more than 30 events. Some highlights include:

WCBU donor breakfast

We kicked off the year with a donor breakfast held at the Peoria Riverfront Museum. Connecting and mingling with friends was a great start to the morning and allowed us an opportunity to provide exciting station updates.

Ignite Peoria

Ignite Peoria, presented by our community partner ArtsPartners of Central Illinois, has quickly become one of our favorite annual events. Our hands-on recording activity for kids let them see what it would be like to build your own newscast and go on-air.

Central Intermediate school visit

Jody Holtz took a field trip to Central Intermediate School in Washington to coach fourth through sixth graders on their radio voices! These students eventually appeared as guest hosts during On Deck by using their recordings from this day.

Bradley Browse

WCBU’s table out on the Olin Quad on the Bradley University campus for the Bradley Browse aimed at exposing college students to community organizations in the area (we scored two interns thanks to this event!)

Fine Art Fair

R.C. McBride was just one of many staff/board members at the annual Peoria Art Guild Fine Art Fair. As longtime sponsor of this event, this is one of our favorites.

Women In Leadership Conference

Some of the WCBU women brushed up on their leadership skills and connected with other Central Illinois women at the Women in Leadership Conference.

Peoria Chamber of Commerce Thanksgiving luncheon

A great way to give thanks for the Greater Peoria community!
Thank you to the nearly 100 contributors who supported WCBU at the Day Sponsor level, giving at least $365 this year. Celebrate the 2023 Day Sponsors and see their messages at WCBU.org.

Please contact us with additions or corrections at WCBUPeoria@IllinoisState.edu or (309) 438-3581.
Community Advisory Board Update

"From the campus of Bradley University…"

That’s what WCBU Peoria Public Radio listeners hear every hour when they tune in to 89.9 FM for public radio news and information. Hard to believe, but it’s been five years 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 managed by Illinois State and WGLT.

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

In 2023, Bradley and Illinois State 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 digital versions of local news stories on the WCBU website), and supporting members. Illinois State 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, insightful news and programming that has won numerous awards over the last five years. 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 needed 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 contributions and corporate support from the Greater Peoria broadcast area, which is a million-plus 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 Illinois State is an inspiration. Please continue supporting WCBU management in its 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 contributor, consider becoming one—individually or through corporate support. Your financial contribution goes a long way. If you are an individual donor 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 with and to 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 wonderful asset to the Greater Peoria community. It’s also a longtime 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. 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 that station. We look forward to hearing from you.

Becky Doubleday, Chair
Community Advisory Board

Community Advisory Board Members
Becky Doubleday, Chair
Jim Runyon, Vice Chair
Sara Netzley, Recording Secretary
Jennifer Essig
Ray Baker
Betsy Beltran
Diane Hahn
Isabela Nieto, Bradley University student
Megan Pedigo
Meagan Ruger-Smith, Bradley University student
Bill Shock
Brittany Strickland
Jessica Thomas
Ravi Uddavolu
Yolanda Wallace

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