

The Community Advisory Board of WVIA

Report to the Board of Directors, WVIA

June 2023

Executive summary:

Over the past month, the Community Advisory Board (CAB) of WVIA has, in accord with U.S. law, reviewed station programming goals and services, plus relevant policy decisions, to provide an advisory assessment of station performance in “meeting the specialized educational and cultural needs of the communities” it serves.¹ The twenty-member CAB, representative of the public served by the station, has come to a unanimous conclusion: WVIA has done outstanding work in meeting community needs while setting an ambitious course for sustained excellence.

Meeting educational needs in northeast and central Pennsylvania:

In 2022-2023, WVIA has performed far beyond expectations in meeting the educational needs of its community. Station leaders, producers, on-air hosts, and support personnel have consistently found ways to enhance and expand programming that performs an “educational” function. To begin with, education—broadly conceived—is at the heart of virtually everything the station undertakes in its mission to be the region’s leader in “arts, news, and information.” WVIA provides the region with shows that viewers and listeners love. They regularly report listening and viewing with such regularity that on air and on-screen hosts and characters are “like family” to them. *Sesame Street*, *PBS NewsHour*, *Morning Edition*, and *All Things Considered*, just to name a few, are educational and public service programs that our community genuinely relies upon. Recognizing the cost of such programming, the CAB applauds the work of on-air professionals, and development specialists, to raise the necessary funds to provide it.

Beyond the nationally produced programs, WVIA uses these funds locally to deliver educational content to all ages. Some delivery is through direct school partnership like WVIA’s Enhanced Scholar Program, which provides multiple vehicles (*Artist of the Week*, *Scholastic Scrimmage*, *Great Teachers Essay Contest*, *Poetry Out Loud*) for young persons to display their talent, and to help bring deserved recognition not just to themselves, but to their schools and their teachers. WVIA also delivers educational content directly to regional schools and teachers in the form of school supply kits, classroom engagement sessions, and children’s book distributions. These resources are enhanced through WVIA’s participation in *PBS Kids in the Classroom*, and by the generation of innovative local programming, including the exciting *Careers That Work*, a partnership with *The 1994 Charles B. Degenstein Foundation*. Now in its second season, the program features careers in growing industries in the region, with information about appropriate training, and how to get it. This initiative includes high school curriculum enhancements aiming

¹ U.S. Code Title 47 Telecommunications Act, §396. Corporation for Public Broadcasting (k)(8)(A), 1962; 1992. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2013-title47/pdf/USCODE-2013-title47-chap5-subchapIII-partIV-subpartd.pdf>

to enhance the personal fulfillment of job seekers, not to mention economic development, in the region. The CAB recognizes the achievements of the entire WVIA educational team and its staff supporters.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge WVIA's many particular contributions to educational programming more broadly conceived. In the past fiscal year, WVIA has produced an astonishing array of radio and television programs that serve to inform, educate, and inspire a large, diverse, and growing general audience. The public affairs series known as *Keystone Edition* continues to feature critical stories in our region. This series includes regular installments focused on business, arts, and health. WVIA's *Mind Over Matter* mental health initiative continued this fiscal year in partnership with Geisinger Medical Center, bringing awareness of mental health needs in our region, and provides outreach, plus access to resources across television, radio, and digital platforms. Outreach occurs also through other locally-produced shows, like the WVIA's February 2023 production of a *Mind Over Matter* segment, "Veterans: Wounded Within" on the mental health challenges facing veterans in our region. Another example was WVIA's virtual panel on grief, *Speaking Grief: Understanding and Advocacy*. The discussion by this panel considered defining, identifying, and responding to grief exhibited by persons of all ages. Making the program part of the growing WVIA archive that is available to parents, care-givers, educators, and the public at large insures long-term accessibility. Information-in-depth, fact-based analysis, and establishment of permanent online resources are characteristic of special initiatives like *Speaking Grief*, but also of many WVIA-produced series, among them *Call the Doctor*, *Keystone Edition*, and *Conversations for the Common Good*. All of these series generated multiple productions during the past fiscal year. WVIA has produced new documentary films, like the award-winning *Agnes 50: Life After the Flood*, examining the impact of Hurricane Agnes on northeast and central Pennsylvania. Special note should be made of WVIA's most recent original documentary, *ROAR: the Story of the Southern Columbia Football Tigers*, which aired for the first time on Thursday, May 11th. In presenting the film publicly before a most enthusiastic audience on the Southern Columbia campus, producer/director Alex Monelli put the significance of the project in context beautifully. "WVIA . . . supports local storytelling," he said, adding, "[the station] is really the leader in documentary filmmaking." The CAB couldn't agree more. Recall that the VIA Global Studios-produced series *VIA Short Takes*, under the leadership of Ben Payavis and his team, works toward the same end, providing content to expand the horizons of local viewers—not to mention patrons on the digital platform—on a truly diverse range of topics.

Meeting cultural needs in northeast and central Pennsylvania:

During the 2022-2023 fiscal year, the CAB finds that WVIA has continued its creative, powerful contribution serving the cultural needs of our communities. Simply put, WVIA is at the artistic and cultural heart of our region. To begin with, the station bears witness, literally day in and day out, to the significance of music in the human experience. WVIA, already known for its regionally one-of-a-kind commitment to classical and jazz music, has set a course to grow its radio broadcast and streaming services, creatively adapting in response to the ever-changing

landscape of recorded music. On-air hosts Lisa Mazzarella, Erica Funke, and George Graham carry on as Larry Voytko retires, and will maintain WVIA's record of excellence in delivering composers and musicians to the region from all over the world, enhancing the musical vocabulary of listeners. Such programming, however, represents the tip of WVIA's cultural iceberg, as musical specials are generated every year for events such as Black History Month, Women's History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, Jazz Appreciation Month, National Poetry Month, Hunger Action Month, and Mental Health Awareness Month, not to mention national holidays and special events like Memorial Day, Veteran's Day, and the 4th of July. In the program *ArtScene*, moreover, Erika Funke continually links regional arts and cultural events to broader national and international themes through interviews with hundreds of local artists and community cultural leaders. Her *ArtScene Calendar* keeps listeners, as well as users of the WVIA website, fully apprised of the array of cultural events and activities available in the region. WVIA radio hosts are out in the community present at—and sometimes hosting or emceeding—events like the Delaware Water Gap Celebration of the Arts, Luzerne County's Got Talent shows, the Wilkes-Barre Fine Arts Fiesta, and concerts of the Wyoming Seminary Civic Orchestra. *Keystone Edition: Radio* continues to present interviews and features that highlight regional cultural contributors and events.

All of the work done on the radio at WVIA to fuel and expand the cultural and artistic interests of our audience is matched on the station's television side. Not only does WVIA make PBS programming available in the broadcast format, but the station has engaged the community with this programming directly, through outreach events. Seven screenings of the Ken Burns documentary *Benjamin Franklin* were a noteworthy example of what is now a long-standing tradition of community engagement events. There were also seven community screenings of the WVIA-produced *Agnes 50: Life after the Flood*, and featured the director, Alex Monelli, plus other interesting panelists. Multiple screenings and virtual events brought *Ben and Joe* (on the relationship between Franklin and Joseph Priestly), *Songs and Stories of Coal Country*, and *Art Treasures of Europe* to our regional audience, also amplified through expert commentary and interactive discussions. These events have opened the door to significant community engagement at many, many venues. Among WVIA's partners in these events are the Dietrich Theatre in Tunkhannock, the Campus Theatre in Lewisburg, the Pocono Cinema and Cultural Center in East Stroudsburg, the Berwick Theatre and Center for Community Art, the Hazleton One Community Center, Commonwealth University of Pennsylvania, the Lewisburg Arts Council, and a host of public libraries across WVIA's service region. Thus, WVIA arts and cultural programming spills over into its educational and public affairs mission, under the direction of senior Vice-President for Community Outreach, Chris Norton. His work building partnerships further enhances connections between WVIA and the community it serves. Building partnerships and maintaining connections and relationships are themes the CAB sees running through the work of individuals throughout WVIA. Clearly, professionalism, collaboration, mentorship, and mutual respect are the expectations of senior managers at WVIA, beginning with the CEO, Carla McCabe. They lead in all these categories by example. WVIA staff, from the top down, build community relationships through their presence, and they do so constantly. They show up, they take part, and they sustain the work, year after year. Their dedication does not go unnoticed.

Bringing the news to northeast and central Pennsylvania:

The CAB notes the tremendous strides forward made by News Director Julie Sidoni, and her excellent news team. They are making an important, positive impact on the way news is reported in our region, and about our region. Listeners to *Morning Edition*, *All Things Considered*, and *Weekend Edition* have already experienced enhanced local news coverage by the WVIA team. But in the space of just one short year, this team of four individuals have had their work featured no less than seven times on NPR. They have covered breaking national news, like the December arrest of Bryan Kohberger for killings in Idaho, as well as significant local stories like union job actions, hospital mergers, and services provided by the local NAACP, from operations of the munitions plant in Scranton to local participation in the Fresh Air fund. Evidence that WVIA has changed the game in news reporting for the region can be found in the reactions of public leaders to the presence of Julie's team. At least one prominent local politician extended his presence at a news conference during the 2022 election campaign, indicating a desire to wait and answer the questions of WVIA reporters when he saw them at the event. The news department is also growing. The Director can now draw on a stable of free-lance writers and photographers in addition to the full-time team. That team will expand in the coming year, beginning this summer, when a journalist hired as the result of a "Report for America" grant joins the staff, reporting especially on rural government. The CAB notes all of these wonderful developments and expresses its admiration for the news team's accomplishments. News team members can take much pride in those accomplishments as they look forward to a bright future.

Radio Anniversary and Programming Shifts:

Surely one of the most noteworthy WVIA milestones is being passed this year, as WVIA Radio marks its fiftieth anniversary on the air. In broadcast after broadcast, announcement after announcement, WVIA Radio personalities and producers continually turned the attention off themselves and off the station, and onto its listeners, as the lifeblood that has made the golden anniversary possible. Their constant expressions of gratitude for community contributions, guidance, and participation in the life of the station truly illustrated the difference between public and commercial media. As a further demonstration of that difference, the CAB notes that no gala celebration is planned, but rather WVIA Radio will hit the road, venturing into the local communities it serves, being present at arts festivals and other local events throughout the spring and summer of 2023. They chose to do so in order to personally thank members of those same communities. In the process, WVIA Radio will demonstrate its ongoing commitment to enhancing art and culture across the region.

Of course, the phrase "on the air" carries some different connotations today than it did in 1973. Now, "on the air" means "on the Internet," too. WVIA has steadily enhanced its digital media platforms which permit an exciting set of programming enhancements for WVIA Radio as it begins its 51st year. WVIA Radio is adding new programs: an extended *Morning Edition* (5-10AM), *Here and Now* (2PM), *Marketplace/The Daily* (6PM), and *BBC World Service* (10PM-5AM). These news and information enhancements are met in the arts and culture area, too.

“WVIA Arts Radio,” an expansion of WVIA HD2, will add much enhanced classical offerings, running continuously from 4PM until 10AM, with simulcast classical music (with Lisa Mazzarella) and *ArtScene* (with Erica Funke) following at 10AM and 12 Noon, respectively, along with *Performance Today* at 2PM. This classical music and art news expansion, combined with the fabulous *Chiaroscuro Channel* that already features jazz, solidifies WVIA Radio’s cultural offerings, now boldly spanning multiple streaming platforms.

Conclusion:

It is no surprise to the CAB that in the past year WVIA has been repeatedly recognized through awards and nominations. These include Pennsylvania Broadcasters Excellence in Broadcasting Awards, Mid-Atlantic Emmy Award nominations, and National Educational Telecommunications Association awards and nominations. These recognitions were well-earned and richly deserved. Over the past fiscal year, 2022-2023, WVIA has continued to demonstrate commitment, creativity, and forward thinking while fulfilling its mission for the community of northeast and central Pennsylvania. The Community Advisory Board appreciates the energy, commitment, and professionalism of the entire WVIA team: its exceptional leaders set the agenda—but even more importantly, the tone—by example. The rest of the station staff members follow suit. We appreciate and applaud the fabulous team work. We look forward to another great year with WVIA bringing arts, news, and information to our region.

Respectfully submitted,

William V. Hudon, for the WVIA Community Advisory Board.