The past year has been tumultuous. No doubt 2021 comes close to rivaling 2020 in that regard, but I’m happy to report it was another successful year for your public radio station. Among the year’s highlights:

• In January, WGLT became the first public radio station in Illinois to work with the University of Illinois-Springfield’s Public Affairs Reporting Program to establish an internship at the capital, allowing us to have coverage in Springfield of Bloomington-Normal issues every spring semester.

• The pandemic bumped our annual Radio Faces fundraiser out of its usual fall time slot and prohibited us from doing it in person. Nevertheless, in February we hosted a successful virtual version featuring NPR’s Ayesha Rascoe and returning veteran favorite Don Gonyea. He was kind to step in for Scott Detrow at the last minute while Scott covered the impeachment. Two things that are never dull: live news coverage and events!

• In the spring, we launched a fully revamped WGLT.org. We also made some changes to our local hosting lineup, with Ariele Jones taking over duties as Morning Edition host and Jon Norton moving to All Things Considered. This past summer, we added two NPR shows to our weekend lineup: Throughline and Code Switch. Following feedback from our listener survey, we added an hour of Weekend Edition on both Saturdays and Sundays and a second airing of Wait, Wait, Don’t Tell Me.

• For the second straight year, the pandemic also kept us from hosting our annual Summer Concert. Thanks to CEFCU and numerous community partners, we pivoted to the Summer Concert Satellite Series—a set of smaller outdoor concerts that supported live and local music.

• As the COVID vaccine became more widely available, we were finally able to return staff to in-person work at the WGLT studios by late summer. This ended a period of roughly 15 months where the entire WGLT staff worked mostly from home.

• The newsroom was busy adapting to the times, adopting new or updated policies on corrections, unnamed sources, crime coverage, and more. More information on these is available on the transparency page at WGLT.org.

• We welcomed several new members to the WGLT team. Madeline Jean-Charles became corporate support director in July after serving in a similar role at the University’s student newspaper. Sarah Nardi joined the newsroom full-time in September, and Lyndsay Jones transitioned from The Pantagraph in November. Despite the pandemic—and in fact enhancing our ability to cover it, no matter where home base was—we continued to feature a large group of talented, part-time correspondents and more than a dozen paid student interns each semester.

• WGLT continues to experiment and innovate. The station was accepted for membership to the Institute for Nonprofit News (INN), and was selected to participate in three pilot projects: NPR/Apple News, which will allow WGLT’s news to be more easily discoverable in the Apple News app; the NPR Member Station Streamlined Donation Initiative designed to make it easier for visitors to NPR.org to financially support the local station of their choice; and the CPB/Poynter Institute Digital Transformation project, which is an extended professional development opportunity designed to help stations better serve their local communities on digital platforms.
• Other programming and community outreach initiatives included running a series of public service announcements featuring healthcare workers from OSF and Carle, another on the importance of voting prior to the spring municipal elections, and airing a series of “Black Facts” produced by the Normal West high school Black Student Union.

• We wrapped up our strategic planning process in September, polishing off revised mission and vision statements. The entire staff participated via Zoom, as did university and community stakeholders. Beyond being required by the Corporate for Public Broadcasting, a new strategic plan helps re-focus our day-to-day work and keeps us focused on being the first and most trusted destination for local news.

The pandemic has taken a tragic toll in many areas, and it’s also made things more difficult from a business perspective. Fortunately, WGLT’s individual giving has been strong throughout. We hit our spring and fall fund drive goals. THANK YOU! It’s only as of this writing in early 2022 that we’re beginning to see signs of corporate support returning to pre-pandemic levels. Thanks to both aggressive fiscal management and the procurement of emergency federal funding, WGLT was able to finish both FY20 and FY21 with only modest cash flow losses. Our complete audits are available on the Transparency page at WGLT.org.

This promises to be another busy year. As of July 2021, WGLT assumed management oversight of The Vidette, the University’s student newspaper. While no WGLT funds will be used for the newspaper, it does require some time from a business, operations, and management perspective. In exchange, however, WGLT will be able to expand our training ground for tomorrow’s journalists. WGLT will be moving into new studios in a newly remodeled Vidette building on Locust Street sometime this year. In addition to nice new and more modern digs, we’ll be able to work in closer proximity to students, some of whom work for both The Vidette and WGLT already, and have accessible surface parking. This makes it easier for us to welcome newsroom guests and others into the building. Much more to come on this exciting news.

Since I used the words “much more,” I’ll say that’s what WGLT hopes to provide in 2022 and beyond: more local journalism, more storytelling, more investigative reporting, and more voices on the air. But of course, that will require your support. We ask a lot, but we also know you and the community at large recognize the value WGLT provides in return for that investment: consistent and quality coverage of our community and beyond. I’m so very proud of what our team coupled with NPR has done covering the elections, the pandemic, the insurrection, ongoing demands for racial justice, and so much more. Thanks to your contributions, we can do that and make it available—for free—for anyone who wishes to access it.

Here’s to a new normal in 2022!

R.C. McBride
General Manager
Most-read stories of 2021

WGLT.org’s most-read stories of 2021 reflect a community still grappling with COVID-19 and the mysterious death of an Illinois State University graduate student, and excitement surrounding growth at electric automaker Rivian.

1. Coroner: Body Found In LaSalle County Is Jelani Day
2. Judy Markowitz, Bloomington’s Groundbreaking Mayor, Dies
3. State Farm Moving To Hybrid Workplace Model
4. How to Get A COVID Vaccine In McLean County
5. 1 Killed, 1 Injured In Downtown Bloomington Shooting
6. Rivian Fuels Home Buying, Building Surge In B-N
7. Central Illinois Can Resume Indoor Dining With Move To Tier 1 Mitigations
8. Bloomington Tent Dwellers Face ‘Eviction’ As Restaurant Prepares To Open
9. Inside The Rivian Plant: ‘It’s Like Google And Toyota Had a Baby’
10. IWU Alum Dave Kindred Pens Memoir After Losing A Grandson To Addiction

Election coverage

The WGLT Newsroom mobilized to cover local elections in Bloomington-Normal in April, when voters selected their mayors, council members, school board representatives, and more. Hundreds of people reviewed WGLT’s online Voter Guide before casting ballots.

WGLT hosted live forums for the candidates running for Bloomington and Normal mayor and Heartland Community College trustee. Our list of partners for these events grew to include the McLean County League of Women Voters, the Bloomington-Normal chapter of the NAACP, and Illinois State University’s Center for Civic Engagement.

New series

Several ongoing series debuted on WGLT’s Sound Ideas throughout 2021.

• Food Trek, covering new frontiers in food and farming in central Illinois twice per month. Made possible with support from the Illinois Farm Bureau and GROWMARK.

• Sound Health, offering practical healthcare insight twice per month. Made possible with support from Carle Health.

• Beyond Sports, an occasional series introducing you to the Bloomington-Normal athletes who do incredible things, even after the game is over.

Awards

The news team continued to be recognized for excellence by our peers.

• Two first-place awards from the Public Media Journalists Association, in the Audience Engagement category for the series Living Black in Bloomington-Normal and in Use of Sound for the story “911 Calls Show COVID Outbreak Unfolding In Real Time.”

• First place Illinois News Broadcasters Association Crystal Mic award for Best Newscast—Charlie Schlenker’s daily 5 p.m. newscast.
2021 Community Events

This year started to look a little more normal with the return of Radio Faces, albeit virtually, and a series of smaller summer concerts.

Thanks to our 2021 partners and hosts
Cultural Fest Presents Music in the Park
Front Street Music Festival
Mackinaw Valley Vineyard & Winery
McLean County Museum of History
Make Music Normal
Nightshop
Saturdays on the Square

Save the date for our 20th anniversary celebration
June 18 in historic Downtown Bloomington on the museum square

Photo courtesy of Nightshop
Thank you to the more than 100 contributors who supported WGLT at the Day Sponsor level, giving at least $365 this year. Celebrate the 2021 Day Sponsors and see their messages at WGLT.org.

Please contact WGLT Contributor Services with additions or corrections at (309) 438-3581 or contributorsservices@wglt.org.
Karen McCarey
Michael and Rita McCarthy
Amanda Weissgerber Mellett and Paul Mellett
William and Maryann Mellor
Joyce and Peter Millburg
Mari-Rose Minyo and John Bowen
David and Kimberly Moore
Robin and Kevin Moore
Michael Nash
Donna and Martin Nickels
Dale and Barbara Nunemaker
Alice and Roger Obert
James Ostell
Monica Pepple

Carolyne Pitts and Michael Pace
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James and Sally Turner
Cathy and Brad Wallace
Barry and Marjorie Weaver
Donald and Karen Wettstein
Kay Wilson
John and Laurie Wollrab
Angela and Daniel Yandel
Evelyn Young
Randall and Holly Zehr
*deceased

2021 WGLT Event
Sponsors and
Underwriters

AAA
Ameren Illinois
The Baby Fold
Bloomington Center for the Performing Arts
Bloomington Normal Audiology

Bloomington Normal Jaycees
Bloomington Public Library
Bradley University Theatre Department
Carle Health
CEFCU
Central Illinois Regional Airport
Chicago Blues Guide
Children's Discovery Museum
City of Bloomington
Community Players Theatre
Connect Transit
Constitution Place Self Storage
Crossroads Fair Trade Goods & Gifts
David Vaughan Investments
Ecology Action Center
Eastereals of Central Illinois
Epiphany Farms Hospitality Group
Evergreen FS
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Great Harvest Bread Company
Green Top Grocery
GROWMARK
Heartland Community College
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Humane Society of Central Illinois
Illinois Farm Bureau
Illinois Prairie Community Foundation
Illinois Secretary of State
Illinois Shakespeare Festival
Illinois Symphony Orchestra
Illinois State University Admissions
Illinois State University Athletics
Illinois State University Office of Sustainability
Illinois State University Wonsook Kim College of Fine Arts
Jay Goldberg Events
Jazz Upfront

Luther Oaks
Mackinaw Valley Vineyard & Winery
MCK CPAs & Advisors
McLean County Chamber of Commerce
McLean County Museum of History
Miller Park Zoological Society
Normal Public Library
Noodles and Company
The Normal Theater
Often Running
OSF Healthcare
Peoria Riverfront Museum
A Perfect Promotion
Red Raccoon Games
Ronda Glenn Law Office
Specs Around Town
Tarvin's Culligan
Town of Normal
Twin City Self Storage
Unit Five Education Association
VisionPoint Eye Center
Vitesse Cycle Shop
Waiting Room Records
Westminster Village

“We chose WGLT because its listeners are both loyal and interested in public health topics. Public radio audiences listen attentively to WGLT for extended periods of time, and that means they’re more likely to both hear and care about messages.”

Dr. Natalie McKee, owner of Bloomington Normal Audiology

All photos credited to WGLT student photographer Emily Bollinger except where noted.