The past year will be memorable, though maybe not always for good reasons. As we reflect on the year, however, there is plenty to put in the “good” column. I’m happy to report that WCBU continues to bolster its service to the Greater Peoria community. Specifically, we continue to add experienced journalists to our team and add local programming. Among the year’s highlights:

• In February, we hosted a candidate forum featuring all five candidates for Peoria mayor, including the eventual winner, Rita Ali. The news team produced a one-hour special broadcast on Black History in Peoria, and we hosted NPR’s Ayesha Rascoe and Don Gonyea for a virtual fundraiser.

• We made some changes to our local hosting lineup in April, with Ariele Jones taking over duties as Morning Edition host and Jon Norton moving to All Things Considered. Jody Holtz joined the team as morning news anchor after her May graduation from Bradley University.

• We successfully completed two fund drives, reaching our goal for both. Thank You!

• In the spring, we launched a fully revamped WCBU.org.

• As the COVID vaccine became more widely available, we were finally able to return our staff to work at the WCBU studios in Bradley’s Morgan Hall by late summer. The transition allowed us to welcome more Bradley University interns to the staff.

• 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 added a second airing of Wait, Wait, Don’t Tell Me.

• The WCBU 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 WCBU.org.

• Veteran journalist Hannah Alani started at WCBU full time in July. She joined the team of Tim Shelley, Daniel Musisi, Joe Deacon, Kristin McHugh, Jody Holtz, and Nate Martin. We’ve been able to add to our core of Peoria-based correspondents, which includes Tim Alexander, Tory Dahlhoff, Brady Johnson, Mike Rundle, and Steve Tarter. As of this writing, WCBU is employing five Bradley University students—the highest number in years. These students are getting hands-on broadcast and journalism experience and represent the next generation of journalists.
• We installed a new satellite dish at Morgan Hall in August, allowing WCBU to take its feeds directly from NPR and other providers.

• WCBU was awarded in September two first-place Crystal Microphone awards in the Small Market Radio category from the Illinois News Broadcasters Association, winning for Best Station and for Best Digital Presence. These are the first major awards WCBU has received since 2015. This kind of recognition speaks to how our colleagues view WCBU’s renaissance.

• And last but certainly not least, we launched All Things Peoria, WCBU’s weekday news magazine, on October 18. The show hosted by Daniel Musisi features newsmaker interviews, arts, culture, and music. It can be heard at 5 p.m. weekdays, or you can subscribe to the podcast. Hannah Alani is now at the helm of our weekday morning news podcast, On Deck.

What’s on tap for 2022? We hope a lot. We continue to hear overwhelmingly positive feedback from the community, especially for WCBU’s local news coverage, but we know we’re only scratching the surface of telling local stories. We’ll be undertaking some strategic planning with our staff, the WCBU Community Advisory Board, and Bradley University faculty and staff representatives. From there, we hope to get specific feedback on what WCBU needs to become over the next five years.

We’re already aware of some of the things we need to be and do. A big part of that is more local journalism, more storytelling, more investigative reporting, and more voices on the air. We believe we can not only maintain the progress we’ve made together but can build on it. That will require your support. I know we ask a lot, but I also know you and the community at large recognize the value WCBU provides in return. We aim to provide consistent and quality coverage of our community. Thanks to your contributions, we can do that and make it available—for free—for anyone who wishes to access it. I’m so very proud of what our team, coupled with NPR, has done covering elections, the pandemic, the insurrection, ongoing demands for racial justice, and so much more.

Here’s to a new normal in 2022!

R.C. McBride
General Manager

Hannah Alani
From the Newsroom

Most-read stories of 2021

1. Peoria’s Richard Pryor, Unlike You’ve Ever Seen Him Before
2. Family of 7 Fights For Better Living Conditions At Taft Homes
3. 50 Years After His Death, Mark Clark’s Sister Shares His Story With Peoria And the World
4. Peoria Boy Joins Western Avenue Construction Crew
5. 7 Peoria Mayoral Candidates Slated For February 2021 Ballot
6. New Full-Service Supermarket Planned For Peoria’s South Side
7. Why Illinois Car Dealers Are Suing Rivian, Secretary Of State To Stop Direct Sales
8. Three Teenagers Face Murder Charges In Rural Mackinaw Slaying
9. Sankoty Lakes Resort Personifies Hope For Spring Bay
10. Central Illinois Can Resume Indoor Dining With Move To Tier 1 Mitigations

New daily show

WCBU’s new newsmagazine program All Things Peoria debuted in October, airing weekdays at 5 p.m. Daniel Musisi hosts the half-hour program, which features newsmaker interviews, colorful features, and arts and culture stories.

Digging deep

The newsroom produced several 30-minute specials throughout 2021:

• Peoria mayoral debate in January featured the five candidates on the primary ballot to become the city’s first new mayor in 16 years. The event was moderated by News Director Tim Shelley in partnership with the League of Women Voters of Greater Peoria and Peoria Public Library.
• Black History Month in February highlighted some of our best reporting about the people who brought us to where we are, and what we can learn to better decide where we go next.
• Gun violence trauma in October spotlighted those who lost loved ones to shootings in Peoria and those who are trying to stop such pain from happening again to other families.

Awards

This recognition speaks to how our broadcast colleagues view WCBU’s renaissance.

Two first place Crystal Mic awards in the Small Market Radio category from the Illinois News Broadcasters Association for Best Station and for Best Digital Presence. These were the first major awards WCBU has received since 2015.
Community Advisory Board Update

The goal of this note is to fulfill the Community Advisory Board’s role to provide advice and recommendations to the governing body of WCBU 89.9 FM. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting requires this input on three subjects: the station’s programming; its service; and its significant policy decisions, with the goal of being reasonably representative of the diverse needs and interests of the communities served by the station.

On programming, the board’s advice and recommendation for 2022 is to maintain WCBU’s robust local news coverage. Described in greater detail within this annual report, the station's award-winning, local reporting produces Peoria-specific news every day. This sets WCBU apart as local journalism struggles in Illinois and across the country.

On service, which we define as the station's activities beyond its broadcast, we recommend leveraging the existing alignment of WCBU to Bradley University’s 2021 strategic plan. Student engagement with the station has a long-standing history at Bradley. Co-sponsoring events with student organizations, providing thought leadership, career development, and community service are strategic opportunities in 2022 and beyond.

On significant policy decisions, we can make no more fundamental recommendation than Bradley University continue to be home to WCBU. Bradley is the best and right place for the station. We support strategic partnerships such as the management agreement with ISU, as the current work of the station is enhancing both the Peoria brand and the Peoria experience. We know that the Peoria story told by a Peoria-based newsroom is part of the city’s sales pitch heard by future residents, students, and prospective employers of those students. We know from the WCBU audience how much it means to all of us that both Bradley and WCBU are thriving.

These recommendations represent the broad sentiment of the communities served by the station, as we have heard from others and have felt ourselves as Community Advisory Board members. To ensure our continued representation of local sentiment, the Community Advisory Board invites the public (you!) to attend our public meetings, contact us directly, and even apply to join the board at wcbu.org/wcbu-community-advisory-board.

I’ll close this annual letter with gratitude to station staff for your demonstrated commitment to quality, diversity/inclusion, and financial responsibility; to my fellow Community Advisory Board members for your time, wisdom, and support of the station; to the WCBU audience and contributors for your engagement, financial support and community; and to Bradley University, for your stewardship of this thriving Peoria voice.

John Lamb, Chair
Community Advisory Board

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Thank you to the nearly 100 contributors who supported WCBU at the Day Sponsor level, giving at least $365 this year. Celebrate the 2021 Day Sponsors and see their messages at WCBU.org.

Please contact WCBU Contributor Services with additions or corrections at (309) 438-3581 or contributorservices@illinoisstate.edu.

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Five Points Washington
The Frame Works
Levitt Amp Galva Music Series
Jay Goldberg Events

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IL Prairie District Public Library
Illinois Farm Bureau
Illinois Secretary of State’s Office
Illinois Symphony Orchestra
Kidder Music
Aaron Kilgor—State Farm Agent
Mackinaw Valley Vineyard
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Obed and Issacs
OSF Healthcare
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Peoria Area Civic Chorale
Peoria Art Guild
Peoria Ballet
Peoria City Council
Peoria City/County Health Department
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Peoria Riverfront Museum
Peoria Symphony Orchestra
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“Objective journalism is more important today than it has been for a very long time. It’s good business to support the people who are trying to keep our public educated and thinking about the big questions.”

COUNTRY Financial agent Laurie Adams, CFP®