

Mendocino County Public Broadcasting
State of the Station Report to Board of Directors and Public
Jeffrey Parker, General Manager
14 May 2018

March board meeting

Our scheduled board meeting of 5 March in Fort Bragg was cancelled due to three factors:

- The date coincided with the Board of Directors on-air candidates' forum at Mendocino College
- Board was somewhat depleted (due to resignations of Jenness Hartley, Stuart Campbell and Larry Minson)
- The board had no urgent business necessitating a meeting.

Telephone upgrade

KZYX was hit in October by a telephone rate increase of nearly 400 percent by our AT&T supplier Birch Communications, and scrambled to put an alternative service in place. Our telephone needs are complex, given our multiple studios and need to integrate phone services with our broadcasting systems, so there were not many choices. Mendocino Community Networks rose to the challenge and we switched over to a MCN "voice over internet protocol" system in December and January. This was a first for MCN, which had not designed a comparable system, nor were they offering services in Anderson Valley. It took several months to refine and debug the system, causing some on-air frustrations, but since about March our systems have been operating smoothly. Our phone services now cost less than what Birch was charging before the rate increase.

Broadband/Internet development

KZYX was born in the analog era, in 1989. Due to a chronic lack of fiberoptic and other high-speed digital services in Philo, we have struggled to keep up with growing demand for fast bandwidth. Although National Public Radio signals still arrive by satellite, most other programming arrives in digital form. Broadcasts from our studios in Willits and Fort Bragg are digital, and are delivered to Philo over what in the 1960s was state-of-the-art technology, the T1 line. Our two T1 lines are expensive, but carry only 3.2 megabits per second -- a tiny fraction of what can travel over fiber or microwave. That's hardly enough to carry our studio signals, our digital streamer traffic, our internet-based phone systems, and our internet data links. In recent weeks, we've been working with an innovative local wireless internet service provider to establish a truly high-speed data link over a series of repeaters originating in Manchester, where they tie into one a huge trans-Pacific fiberoptic cluster. We've zeroed in on a location high on the eastern flank of Anderson Valley that can direct the signal to our studios without the need for wire or fiberoptic cable. We'll be testing the system in coming weeks, and anticipate substantial improvement in bandwidth and substantially lower telecom costs to the station.

Mendocino College collaboration

Anyone who was listening to the live on-air candidates forum that we broadcast on 5 March will recall that the forum was aired not from Philo, but from the Center for Performing and Visual Arts at the Mendocino College main campus in Ukiah as part of a growing collaboration with faculty and students in the Recording Arts & Technology program. The broadcast was engineered entirely by students. Under the direction of the Recording Arts & Technology program, students have recorded numerous events and programs for airing on KZYX, including episodes of our broadcast series Rural Resilience about childhood services, several candidates forums for the ongoing supervisorial elections, the entire Ukiah Community Concerts 2017-2018 concert series and the daylong "Coming Home" Redwood Fire Rebuilding Expo held on 24 March at Mendocino College.

On 23 March, KZYX began planning parallel collaboration with the College's recently launched Digital Arts & Media program, which trains students in the skills of producing and engineering audiovisual, interactive and other content for the internet and social media. At KZYX, the term digital arts & media describes our expansion to multimedia broadcasting and archiving of our radio productions. We are building a platform on the KZYX.org platform where listeners can find archives of more and more of our public affairs and news programs, freeing listeners from the broadcast schedule and allowing our programming to be heard by anyone anywhere in the world. Digital Arts & Media students will be given rich opportunities to help in the development of our KZYX multimedia strategy, learning valuable careers skills in the process.

KQED and The California Report

In February, KZYX hosted John Sepulvado, the lead anchor of the KQED-produced California Report (which airs weekday mornings at 8:50 during our Morning Edition drive-time slot), for a weeklong production and training collaboration that had John broadcasting The California Report from our new Fort Bragg studio on 28 February and 1-2 March. During John's visit, KZYX organized a well-attended workshop on interviewing technique at Mendocino College that was attended by a wide range of participants. Only a handful of so-called rural, remote stations have hosted such collaborations with The California Report, and the benefits to the station have been substantial. Not only are more and more Mendocino county stories reaching a statewide audience, but our reporters are gaining valuable mentoring and experience with news reporting and production. Because KQED is being developed as one West Coast hub of National Public Radio's Regional Hub System, our KZYX news, production and operations teams are likely to play a growing role in production of news for NPR. A team from The California Report will be visiting KZYX again during the week of 21 May, working with our reporters on a range of stories from across the county.

Fort Bragg Studio launch

We could not be happier with the move of our coast studio from Mendocino High School, which needed the room for a growing academic schedule, to the Redwood Coast Senior Center in Fort Bragg. The senior center is a vibrant community hub that hosts far more than just senior activities, and having a studio there is opening up rich opportunities for collaboration and programming.

Membership and Finance

A highlight of our spring was a formal audit of our Community Service Grant, which comprises about one-fifth of our annual operating budget and is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The 19-23 March site visit by a senior accountant and a senior lawyer of the CPB's Inspector General's Office was cordial and deeply insightful for all involved. The CPB's main objective was to audit our Annual Financial Report, a document that identifies all "non-federal financial support" that the station receives. The NFFS includes listener membership donations, most underwriting revenues and most grants, and is used to determine the size of our annual Community Service Grant. The auditors also checked to ensure that KZYX was fully complying with regulations regarding open meetings and other requirements set by CPB for grant recipients. The audit, which aims as much to improve station operations as to ferret out irregularities, will take several more months to complete. The outcome, which we expect to be very positive, will be published as soon as we have it.

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