



“State of the Station” Annual Summary Fiscal Year 2021 (July 2020 – June 2021)

COVID Impact on Operations

- Facility, which was shut down in March 2020 due to COVID contact, stayed closed until July 2020, when it opened on a modified & restricted level, with only one staff person working at a time.
- In early December 2020, we closed the facility again, following the updated Emergency Order from Gov. Scott’s Office.
- We opened back up with a return to more normal hours in the Spring of 2021.
- I continued to be the only staff person regularly working on site for much of the year, with a significant amount of my time spent working remotely as well. Fred & Eric worked entirely remotely for much of the year, with Eric returning for some on site work in June 2021.
- We continued to use our two Zoom accounts to support the local Towns by running their government meetings and also hosting several events for other organizations.
- Along with our colleagues in the Vermont Access Network (the advocacy & membership organization representing the PEG Access / community TV stations in the State), we were identified by the State legislature as a recipient of COVID Relief Funds. We received \$18,600 last Fall, which helped address some of the increased expenses associated with the hard “pivot” to virtual / remote workflows, and offset the loss in revenue potential from our annual fundraising initiatives. It was extremely helpful and went to good use.

Production & Programming

- For most of the fiscal year (July 2020 – June 2021), the bulk of the production work was over remote platforms, primarily using Zoom video conferencing.
- Some of the government meetings that we cover began offering a “hybrid” platform, with some in-person participants and some remote. The workflow for hybrid meetings & events became a focus, and we began working with municipal officials and others to come up with solutions that would meet their needs. Early into FY2022, this is still a focus, and even more so, as an increasing amount of Boards have decided to offer hybrid meetings.
- We started doing more with live streaming & broadcasting as well, having made the capital investment in new equipment allowing for this.
- With the limited on site production needs, we had budgeted to keep our staffing lean during the year. This helped the bottom line, by helping to build up a larger net increase, but did also present a challenge. Even though our on site / in-person production work was limited, the overall amount of work increased. In a typical year, we’ve had at least one part-time Field Producer / Production Associate position, whose main tasks were to produce government meetings & community events, which take place mainly on nights & weekends. Not having such a staff person translated into more work and longer hours for Patrick, Eric, & Fred. In Winter, we did get a little bit of help (more on that below), but that was specifically to help address the increased workload with the GM basketball coverage.
- Our biggest new production project was the coverage of Green Mountain High School

basketball. We recorded & live streamed (and in many cases, live broadcast) all of the home games for the boys' & girls' teams, leading up to the boys' State semi-final game. GM won the DIV 3 championship but we were unable to provide coverage or show the game, sadly, due to a contract between the Principals' Association & their national contractor. We had a volunteer from the school, Norm Merrill, who ran the camera for all games. And then we had 1 or 2 staff at each game to set up & run the stream. We hired Sarah Devereux to help with this. Sarah graduated from GM in June. She stayed on to work for us after the season ended as well, which was helpful.

- We collaborated with SAPA-TV on the production (live stream & broadcast) of the GMUHS graduation. We had a 4-person crew.
- We also partnered with SAPA on the recording & live stream of the GM Senior Prom Grand March, and we provided coverage of the Senior Awards Night.
- We produced graduation coverage for Ludlow Elementary, Mount Holly School, and Expeditionary School at Black River (the new independent school).
- Picking up from earlier in the pandemic days, we helped to produce & present other virtual concerts from local musicians – Susan Haefner w/ Lisa Brigantino, John & Ida Specker, and Sammy Blanchette. We also produced some other programming featuring local & regional artists – a profile on potter Susan Leader & poetry from Jon Meyer.
- Community members also produced programming, by making creative uses of the available technology and virtual platforms. As such, we saw an increased amount in local programming (more on that below). Regular productions from producers such as Cavendish Librarian Kata Welch (for the Story Time series & promo videos she produces with support from our own Eric Chatterjee); Zachary McNaughton (VT Master Anglers fishing series); Liza Eaton (yoga instruction); Ludlow Rotary Club (guest speaker series) brought a dynamic range of new offerings. In addition, there were some “one-off” programs that were produced that were particular noteworthy – concert from Susan Haefner & Lisa Brigantino (where Susan herself did the production work, including the editing), & the Virtual Christmas Eve service, from the Experimental Covenantal Community Outreach (a collaborative production among several regional churches).
- In FY2021, despite reduced staffing and being in turbulent times, we saw an increase in not just programming volume overall, but, more importantly, we saw a significant increase in the volume of local programming. Increasing local & regional programming has been our number one programming goal, and we are seeing successes. In FY2021, we ran a total of 1,257 new, unique programs, up from 1,184 the previous year. The year before that, FY2019, we had 1,389. The biggest “take home” is that in FY2019, 516 of these programs were “local” (produced from within our service area); in FY2020 that dipped down to 465 local programs, but in FY2021, it was up to 620.
- Another “take home” from the programming data is that we have gotten away from the volume of “imported” programming (those coming from outside Vermont). To give a little bit of historical perspective, 5 years ago (FY2016), imported programming comprised nearly 1/3 of the total (32.6%). In FY2021, we had just 23 imported programs, or 1.8% of the total.
- Another way we measure programming data is the number of total runs (or “air time”). The above-mentioned data is for “first runs” – that is, new programs. But our channels play a lot of repeats as well. And even those new programs are repeated many times over throughout the course of a year. The underlying goal though, in terms of programming the channels, is that we prioritize the local programs, proportionate to the total screen time. We measure this by “Total Runs” (the number of programs) and “Total Hours” (the number of hours of programming).

- In FY2021, we had a combined 25,419 program runs across our 2 channels. 18,267 of these (71.8%) were “local” programs.
- In FY2021, these 25,419 program runs amounted to 14,450 program hours. Local programming accounted for 8,464 of these hours (or 58.5%). The reason for the difference in proportionate local program hours to total program runs is because, on average, the local programs tend to be shorter than those we get from our state partners. For example, we have many 5 minute or less shows produced locally, in our studio or in the field. By comparison, we do not have many short programs that we receive from our partners around the State, the bulk of which were long lectures / presentations, legislative meetings, State Board of Education meetings, & the many Governor Press Conferences. So, there are more “Local” than Statewide programs, but the Statewide ones tend to be much longer.

Improvements & Upgrades

- Live streaming & broadcasting: We are now doing more regular live remote productions, thanks to the capabilities provided with the new equipment purchased at the end of FY2020 and the internet upgrade during this past year. This has allowed us to live stream & broadcast events from anywhere with a high-speed internet connection.
- Streaming Community Channel 24/7: We began streaming one of our two TV channels live 24/7 over YouTube. There is a link to the YouTube stream, on the homepage of our website. We started with the Community Channel, since that has the more dynamic and more broadly-engaging programming. We will start streaming the second channel (the Education / Government channel) in the near future (during FY2022). Having our channels viewable online opens up more doors for engagement, and by association, funding opportunities.
- In addition to the streaming, we now also have an “OTT” (over the top) channel on Roku. It is available through our master control server vendor Tightrope – it is called “Cablecast Screenwave”. So anyone with Roku can download Cablecast Screenwave (for free) and, from anywhere, watch OVTV video-on-demand (the same local programs that are available for viewing on our website). This is just the first step we are making in the world of OTT. I believe the future will include a more robust involvement & presence on OTT platforms (Apple TV, Fire TV, etc.).
- Program Guide- Starting last year, our TV channel program information is available on the interactive program guides on both Comcast & VTel.
- Summer Camp – in June 2020 we started a project with the local Go Wild Summer Camp, through a partnership with the Two Rivers Supervisory Union. We received funding to purchase 5 new iPhones with gimbals, 4 Go Pros, & 2 drones, to be used throughout the camp. and then parlayed into after school programming as well. We also received funding to hire Wendy Reynolds to provide instruction on the drones (she is our marketing contractor & a licensed drone pilot).
- The internet upgrade is a huge improvement. We are now on the 1Gbps VTel fiber optic network. With fiber, the speeds are “symmetrical”, meaning we get the same speeds on the upload side as we do with download. The upload speeds, which have become increasingly critical to our work, have improved by approx. 50x. The improvement to our workflow is huge. VTel provided us with an in-kind discount for this service; in return, we have credited VTel as an underwriter.

Administrative / Personnel

- The Board met monthly; all meetings were held remotely, by video conference (using Zoom), which we started doing in March 2020 when the pandemic caused the Statewide emergency order to go into effect. This year’s Annual Meeting on June 23rd marked our first in person meeting since before the pandemic started 15 long months ago. We even managed to have a virtual holiday party

In December – we played trivia with local DJ, musician, & trivia night legend Rick Davis. President Noah even picked up pizzas and delivered them to Board members.

- Our Board of Directors during this past year have been: Noah Schmidt (President), Don Richardson (V.P.), John Cama (Treasurer), George Thomson (Secretary), Wil Harris, Sharon Huntley, & Pat Moore.
- In May, we lost Don Richardson, a valued Board member, longtime devoted community volunteer, and local business owner who passed away.
- Staffing: we maintained our 3 regular positions this past year: Executive Director- Patrick Cody (Full-time), Eric Chatterjee- Production & Digital Media Coordinator (Full-time), & Fred Marin- Programming Coordinator (.5 FTE).
 - In February, we hired Green Mountain HS Senior (and now alumnus) Sarah Devereux, to help with various production activities. She began by helping with the live streaming of basketball games and is now assisting with Summer Camp. We have her until mid-August, when she leaves to attend her first year at Emerson College in Boston. There's quite the history with Sarah- her mother Shannon was on our Board when she was born. Sarah was attending our Board meetings as an infant.
 - We have a need to increase our staffing further, particularly with more production-oriented support. This presents a challenge; as everyone else is learning, the labor market is extremely tight right now.

Community Engagement / Marketing & Outreach

- Marketing contractor – Wendy Reynolds was hired mid-way through the year to help out with the weekly e-news blasts featuring programming highlights. This has been successful and has increased engagement.
- Local Program Highlights in Newspapers- In the Spring of 2021, we started a new relationship with Vermont Journal, whereby they run a short bullet list of our program highlights each week. I have been in talks with The Mountain Times about doing the same.
- Okemo Valley Magazine: We were featured in the Fall / Winter 2020 edition, which was published in October 2020. A lot of work went into it, and perhaps the best part of the process was that we have the “bones” of a few very good stories (along with professional photographs, courtesy of Russ Hurlburt), that could be used in relation to our 20th anniversary (which is this year, 2021).
- Having a strong marketing committee is critical, if we look to continue to build on this work and be effective with community engagement.
- Despite not running a concentrated membership drive, we hit our projected membership goal (and even exceeded it by a small amount).
- We are pleased to announce this year's community producer & volunteer award recipients:
 - Outstanding Achievement Award: Wendy Regier, “The People Speak”
 - Community Service Award: Ludlow Rotary Club Guest Speaker Series
 - Producer of the Year: Norm Merrill, Green Mountain Union HS
 - Best Youth Programming: Kata Welch, Cavendish Fletcher Community Library

Financial Support

- COVID Relief Funds (CRF) – We are grateful for the funding, which was the work of the State of Vermont Legislature and our statewide advocacy organization, the Vermont Access Network. As mentioned above, we received \$18,600, which was not anticipated or factored into the budget when it was originally adopted. We later amended the budget to reflect this revenue.

- Since we received the CRF funds, we did not need to use the reserve funds that were from the 2019 Comcast v Vermont settlement. (We received two payments, as did all other Comcast-)
- Thank you to the Towns of Ludlow, Plymouth, Cavendish, and Mount Holly and the taxpayers for continued support through municipal budget appropriations. The amounts each Town gives was increased this year, in support of the increased services we have provided. During the past year, we have hosted virtual municipal meetings, as well as provided coverage of other meetings in a "hybrid" format (part in-person / part remote). We continue to work with the Towns as they phase back in-person meetings. In total, \$4250 in revenue was generated through this support over the past year; and the taxpayers of each Town have voted in favor of modest increases to these appropriations.
- Thank you to the Mount Holly Selectboard for allocating an additional \$500 to help with some of the additional equipment costs associated with the production of hybrid meetings. We used those towards a web camera and a new portable video switcher, both of which are used for multi-camera meetings, including hybrids.
- Thank you to all of our supporting members, of which there are too many to list here.
- Thank you to our underwriters this past year- Marylou Scofield, Esquire; William Raevs / Vermont Properties; VTel.

Regulatory / Advocacy

- For the last few years, I have worked on the advocacy working group for our statewide organization, Vermont Access Network (VAN). The goal has been to build more awareness of PEG Access / community media, as well as to establish a new viable funding stream to offset the projected long-term and permanent decline of cable TV funding. VAN contracts with a consultant / lobbyist, Amy Schoellenberger of Action Circles. and each member, including us, pays into this. It has been worth every penny. My involvement on this group pales in comparison to others, but it has been an eye-opening experience to be close to the front lines and witness the sausage-making.
- The biggest noticeable result of the advocacy work so far was the CRF Funding. Had it not been for that awareness-building, we would not have been on the radar of legislators when they allocated those funds. The legislature also earmarked funds for the PEG Funding Study to be produced, by the Agency of Commerce & Community Development. That study is here: <https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Legislative-Reports/Report-2021-02-07.docx.pdf>
- The PEG Funding Report also paved the way for us to have a seat at the table in the development of the new 10-Year Telecommunications Plan, which was produced in response to the impact of COVID. The plan, completed in June is here: https://publicservice.vermont.gov/sites/dps/files/documents/Pubs_Plans_Reports/State_Plans/Telecom_Plan/Final%20Draft_10%20Year%20Telecom%20Plan%206%2010%2021.pdf
- This past year I was appointed to a vacated seat on the Vermont Access Board of Directors. Our monthly meetings have been held remotely. My goal is to use my position to help find ways to improve collaboration and partnerships regionally and statewide. I think there are efficiencies to be gained if we get creative
- Along those lines, I have continued to explore opportunities for collaboration and pooling of resources with our regional colleagues, primarily with the others in Windsor County: SAPA-TV, Woodstock Community TV, CATV (White River Jct. / Upper Valley), and Windsor-on-Air. COVID and turnover in leadership at 3 of those 4 slowed some of that progress, but if anything, the technological improvements and impacts of COVID have created even more need for adapting, and getting more efficient wherever we can.