



Fiber: Important To Your City's Economic Health

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Sharing Our Community Culture with the World

By Sally Koenecke

The impact or value of local programming is not always easy to evaluate. However, in the March 10, 2008 edition of *Broadcasting & Cable* in the article, “Local Stations Multiply,” author Allison Romano writes about the advent of digital channels and a move to local programming. One identified executive of a broadcast station group is quoted in the article as saying, “These channels need to be unique offerings that people see as a destination television they can’t get anywhere else.” Sound familiar? Community television has been providing destination television for over twenty-five years as those of us who have worked in this field can attest.

We may ask the question, are emergent technologies becoming catalysts for programming value? Is it allowing programming to move in directions that have greater perceived cultural (and economic) value, in this case defined as “unique local offerings?” There are many directions this argument could take.

With digital technology we see broadcasters move to localism, but at

the same time traditional community programming is utilizing IP technology to move towards globalism. In community television we understand that value in local unique offerings is not a new perception. With the advent of IP technology we are beginning to export our local content globally and countries around the world are gaining an insight into our American culture.

“The success of local television is that it can change attitudes by promoting people who know each other. It can get people out and doing things and talking with one another. Having community locations that people know, local recognition. This is huge.”

We now have the opportunity to share with the world our city government representation, non-profit organizations, senior citizen centers, chambers of commerce, public schools and all those unsung heroes (not the ugly American) who shape our American culture. The building blocks of our United States democracy are making their way into the homes of many countries around the world.

To illustrate this evolution, Mario Cortolezzis began producing local programming in 2007. He became a reservist with the Minnetrista Public Safety Department and got involved in a public safety cable program called “Roll Call TV” produced by a group of reservists. Mario grew up and lived in many places in the world including Canada and Italy and has experienced cultures other than American, but no where did he have direct access to the media.

Thus far the international impact is that members of his family can watch his productions in a remote area of Canada 300 miles from civilization. His parents in Italy get up at 1:00 AM to watch “Roll Call TV” and his cousins in Italy watched “Teen Talk Live!” another of Mario’s productions, as it was streamed live on LMCC Channel 12 (Lake Minnetonka Communications Commission). Some of these programs are now offered “on demand” on the LMCC website so they can be watched at the viewers convenience. The reaction of these viewers to the idea that programming is being produced in hundreds of American communities has been one of fascination.

As a community television producer, his own multi-cultural background including family and community values and a desire to have



Mario Cortolezzis

an impact on other people motivated Mario Cortolezzis.

He said in Europe, families are often more closely associated. In an interview, Mario shared, “The success of local television is that it can change attitudes by promoting people who know each other. It can get people out and doing things and talking with one another. Having community locations that people know, local recognition. This is huge.” Mario is now branching out from “Roll Call TV” and producing other programs because he says, “The police show is very important to me, but I also want to do shows that reach out to other families about subjects close to their hearts.” He believes his personal culture might be considered more “European American” and would like to bring a “different way” of producing that allows for a cultural mix and diversity of ideas.

Among the programs that Mario has produced are three “Roll Call TV” episodes, four “On the Reds,” a spin-off of “Roll Call TV,” and a live call-in show titled “Lawline,” for residents to phone in questions to police officers. Mario feels that this type of show is pushing the envelope because

of its interactivity and potential for wider participation (global with the internet). Another recent endeavor was a live program, “Teen Talk Live!” in which a studio audience of teenagers directed questions to a panel of police officers with questions such as, “If a bully is picking on me and I defend myself, can I get in trouble?” and “If I was in a car or house where people were drinking or using drugs and I had not, would I be accused of anything?” Mario also collaborated with LMCC Production Manager, Chris Vogt, on a program called “National Night Out” for the Minnetrista Public Safety Department. Mario credits Chris for teaching him much of his production acumen.

Mario’s most current program is receiving national attention. Produced in conjunction with Sergeant Mike Kokesh of the Minnetrista Public Safety Department, this program on autism is titled, “Autism Special, Where is the Justice?” This program was inspired by a situation in which police officers were not certain how to work with a child with autism in an emergency. Mario’s son has autism and he knows that autism can often affect a person’s ability to communicate. The hour-long program interviews parents of children with autism, schools and law enforcement and provides ideas on effective ways to communicate with children with autism. This program is being distributed nationally to other police departments. “Autism Special, Where is the Justice?” has received media attention with articles in several newspapers and with requests to Mario for interviews with numerous broadcast television stations in the Twin Cities including KARE 11’s “Showcase Minnesota.” April is

National Autism Awareness Month and when the national organization Autism Speaks heard of Mario's program on autism, the word spread to NBC and on April 25 Mario's story and the program were featured on the NBC "Today Show." Mario is excited that an awareness of autism can be generated in many other countries via the synergism of cable access and internet streaming. The ultimate desired goal is to expand awareness to improve the lives of people with autism and other disabilities.

Mario's story illustrates how

acting locally can have an impact nationally and globally with the advent of IP technology. All of these public safety programs have been carried on the Lake Minnetonka Communications Commission PEG Channel 12 of the incumbent cable provider, Mediacom. This channel is also streamed as it airs on the LMCC website, lmcc-tv.org. The LMCC began streaming and utilizing IP technology in 2006 as a vehicle to promote and enhance our communities' and producers' programming goals. It seems to be

working! ■

Sally Koenecke is Executive Director of the Lake Minnetonka Communications Commission a joint powers commission of 17 cities in the Twin Cities area and the President of MACTA, the Minnesota Chapter of NATOA. Sally has worked in community television for 24 years. She holds an M.Ed. in Education and produced a program on disability topics called "Diverseability" for 4 of those years.

REEL TIPS

Fresh Ideas for Programmers

The internet is a great place to find production resources, tips and story ideas. Here are a few of CCM's favorites:

Do you produce a search about the rich history in your community? In addition to searching your local library and historical society consider the following websites:

- www.archives.gov/research/larc (This is a search page for the Archives both photo and video library. Some of the photos are digital and can be downloaded)
- www.loc.gov/library/libarch-digital.html (similar to National Archives: great data base and some of it is downloadable online)
- www.usgs.gov/newsroom/multimedia.asp (public domain photos)

- <http://images.fws.gov> (photos US Fish & Wildlife Service)
- www.nps.gov/pub_aff/imagebase.html National Park Service (photos)
- www.public-domain-photos.com
- <http://ourmedia.org/learning-center/images/free-photo-sites>

As budgets get tighter, training sometimes goes out the door—along with those who do not keep up with industry. So think about joining an on-line creative group or taking on-line tutorials:

- www.fcptips.com
- www.support.apple.com
- www.macalert.com
- www.forums.creativecow.net This site has forums on Adobe After Effects, Adobe Final Cut Pro, Adobe Final Cut Server, DVD authoring, web streaming – audio/video, SANetworks and Podcasting – just to name a few. The site also offers tutorials, newsletter, news and blogs.

Another way to keep abreast of the rapid changes in our industry is to read articles on the internet.

- www.videomaker.com
- www.televisionbroadcast.com (two minute drill)
- www.pcmag.com

Funding for music can also present a challenge financially. While there are many sites, here are a few CCM favorites:

- www.modernbeats.com
- www.stockmusic.net
- www.neosounds.com
- www.cssmusic.com
- www.musicbakery.com

Don't forget to visit these sites for story ideas and additional resources:

- www.natoa.org
- Your local and state government
- K-12 and higher education
- Chambers of Commerce
- County and state fairs
- Local and state convention and visitor centers
- Consumer protection
- Cultural sites

Happy surfing!

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